CHAPTER-IV

RUSKIN BOND :
SHORT STORIES
4.1 THEMATIC PATTERNS:

Analyzing the 66 short-stories listed in Penguins Omnibus "Ruskin Bond; Collected Fiction" published in 1999, we can see a steady pattern emerging. They have certain things in common. The element of childhood and innocence juxtaposed with adolescent themes of love, infatuation and adventure which runs throughout his fiction. Several threads connect one story to another and Bond weaves a beautiful and colorful quilt. His stories could be called as chapters in a novel. For Bond life is not fiction as it has no plot. In this sense his fiction is so very life-like. His fiction has very little or no plot. The people, the characters in his story are important. Things happen, people meet and depart. Some people stay and have a relationship, some just pass by and they are like ships in the night.

Family and Relationships:

When Bond talks about relationship, it has a wider meaning than what meets the eye. It is a relationship between one man with another, a man and a woman, boy and girl, child and mother, Father and son etc. It may be the relationship of man with nature, trees, rivers, mountains and valleys, the forest and the animals! We can see all of them intertwined with fine thread of emotional attachment. The most important factor that can be noticed is that there is very little if not nil negative or dark side of these relationships. They are, most of the time positive, loving and caring. His men and women are like two logs of woods brought together in a flowing current of water and as
naturally they part without any regret or ill-feeling. This is something which can be described as child-like. Ruskin Bond’s characters are like their creator. They live their life for that moment. They love life and their life is full of love. “Yesterday, I was sad and tomorrow, I may be sad again but today I know that I am happy, I want to live on and on, delighting like a pagan in all that is physical; and I know that this one life time, however long, cannot satisfy my heart.” (pp.822)

Ruskin Bond reaches the state of a person who lives in this world like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. He lives in the middle of all the noise and medley of bazaar life, yet withdraws into his room on the roof to sit alone and contemplate. This detachment gives him an ability to laugh at the eccentricities and follies of life. Sometimes he laughs at himself, the frivolous and carefree youth. There is very little negative depiction of human life and relationship. As a child who forgets and forgives the ill-treatment and goes on with life, Bond does not highlight the pain and the agony that is destructive. There is sorrow and pathos. There is a lot of injustice. But these things do not over power the life. Life’s little pleasures and joys have a larger space in the canvas that he paints on.

There are broken marriages, death, separation. But at the same time there is coming together, caring and sharing. There is friendship, love and fun.
**Journey as a metaphor:**

Bond's characters are constantly moving from one place to another. The journey as a metaphor is used in the youth's traveling from the security of his home to the independence of his room. Movement is life and symbol of growth. The characters grow as they move ahead leaving their past behind. Rusty leaves home and moves ahead with the help of his friends in *The Room on the Roof*, and *Vagrants in the Valley*. In *Delhi is Not Far* every character wants to go to Delhi. The protagonist succeeds in reaching Delhi. *A Flight of Pigeons* is nothing but a narrative about the journey of the characters from place to place, finally to reach the safety of the home. During the journey the little girl goes through many emotions and witnesses many scenes which make her grow up as a mature woman. Her observations at the end of the novel about Javed Khan, her captor reveal her maturity.

"Looking back on those months when we were prisoners, I cannot help feeling a sneaking, admiration for him. He was very wild and muddle-headed and often cruel, but he was also very handsome and gallant and there was in him a streak of nobility which he did his best to conceal". ²

**Theme of Nature:**

Nature is present in every bit of his writing. He makes nature a part of his narration. It is an inseparable part of him and when he
nature. It forms a backdrop to his novels and short stories. It is the trees, mountains, valleys, flowers, rivers that are ever present. They are like characters in the story. It is this theme of nature that binds all his works together. It provides a unifying force to the writings. Like Wordsworth, being close to nature gives him the inspiration and insight to write. What Lake District is for Wordsworth, Mussoorie is for Ruskin Bond. Reading Ruskin Bond's short stories is literally like inhaling a lungful of fresh mountain air. Like Rudyard Kipling, he is fascinated by the mountains. It is the 'smell of the Himalayas that has crept into his blood and he returns to the hills again and again'. The wanderer has found a destination and has settled down in Mussoorie.

References:

2. Ibid.
4.2. CHILDHOOD AND INNOCENCE:

The *Collected Fiction* of Ruskin Bond, published by Penguin India, contains sixty six engaging short and long stories. The stories are semi-autobiographical in nature. They cover a period in the life of Ruskin Bond, spanning from childhood to the present day. They are like beautifully imagined and well-crafted canoes. He introduces the reader to his family, friends and many other people who enter his life and leave as easily as they enter, leaving behind a lasting impression on him. He takes his reader to his beloved Garhwal hills, small towns and villages, places close to his heart.

His stories are remarkable for their charm and quiet wisdom. Ruskin Bond has created a unique and colorful literary landscape which he has mapped out and peopled. The reader has a feast with vintage Bond, gloriously funny and unexpectedly tender at times. What we notice in Bond’s writings is his transparent honesty. He is writing about something “brimming with life and joy and truth, my own truth, for to be true to oneself is to be true to others”

*The Coral Tree*, *The Photograph*, *The Window* are three delightful short-stories about 3 little girls. The girl child also finds a place in his short-stories. She is a delicate little being, soft and colorful like butterflies. In *The Coral Tree*, narrator has a brief encounter with a little girl with pigtails
tied up in a bright red ribbon, and she was fresh and clean like the rain and the red earth."

The little girl makes him climb the coral tree and pluck flowers for her. She makes him nostalgic about his own childhood. She has a mind of her own and gracefully agrees to make him her second best friend! The little girl has big dreams. She wants to go everywhere – London America or Japan. She has not the slightest doubt about her going all over the world! That is youth, that is innocence and that is the essence of childhood! Bond has caught it in the right angle.

"The Photograph" is a peep into his grandmother's childhood. The little girl in the picture with a mischievous smile is the narrator's grandmother. He recognizes her by the way she smiles. But both pretend not to know it. The mystery of the two hands peeping out from the small wall behind the little girl in the picture tell more tales. It is left to the reader's imagination.

"The Window", has the magic for the young narrator and the little girl in the story. It brings them together and they become good friends. He describes the girl as follows;

"She had long black hair that fell to her waist, tied with a single red ribbon. Her eyes were black like her hair and just as shiny. She must have been about ten or eleven years old."

Compare this description with that of the little girl in the photograph. "The girl had long loose hair and she wore a long dress
that nearly covered her ankles and sleeves that reached her wrists and there were a lot of bangles in her hands. But despite all this drapery the girl appeared to be full of freedom and movement. She stood with her legs apart and her hands on her hips and had a wide devilish smile on her face."

The girls in his stories are smiling, laughing and free. They are adventurous and energetic.

In "Chachi's Funeral", ten year old Sunil and his 12 year old cousin Madhu find a vent to their anger and finally realize their folly. Little girls and boys at that age have feelings that are intense. Bond exposes the child's mind in a delightful manner. Sunil wants to avenge Chachi's beatings by killing her. Madhu suggests that they should stab Chachi's portrait and cremate also. In the process, the little boy gets the satisfaction and his anger cools down. He realizes how much he wants his chachi to be alive and runs to her to hug her and tell this to her. Ruskin Bond understands the working of a child's mind like a psychologist. Small children are intensely emotional. They get hurt easily. At the same time they forget and forgive with equal ease.

"The Untouchable" is a beautiful story about two children, the narrator and the sweeper boy. Both are of the same age, about 10 years old. But sweeper boy because of his low caste is treated by the grown ups, with contempt as he is an untouchable. They warn the narrator about this sweeper boy's status and tell him not to play
with him. But the dark night with lightning and thunder frightens both the boys. The narrator runs to the untouchable for comfort and both of them sit huddled together to ward off the fear. They provide comfort to one another.

"The Room of Many Colours" is one of those nostalgic stories about his childhood with his father. In his Memoir, *Scenes from Writers Life* he writes about life with his father. In Jamnagar his father had set up a school for palace children.

"Sometimes I attended my father's classes more as an observer than a scholar. One day I set off on my own to explore the deserted palace and ascended some wandering steps to the top, where I found myself in a little room full of tiny stained glass windows. I took turns at each windowpane, looking out at a green or red or yellow world. It was a magical room.

Many years later, almost forty years later, in fact – I wrote a story with this room as it's setting. It was called 'The Room of Many Colours' and it had in it a mad princess, a gardener and a snake." 3

Like his other stories, this one has a real background. Bond weaves his fiction with threads of reality. That's why these stories are like autobiographies. Above all, this technique of his story telling has a charm of its own.

The little boy's happy life with his father contains little fiction, but as he weaves a story of a possible love affair of the princess with
affair is very discreetly depicted and the snake is a symbolic figure. The many coloured glasses are the colourful vision of the young boy. At that age everything looks bright and colourful. The Gardner's present to the princess on her birthday in the form of flowers and the Princess's reaction to the rose at the end of the story confirm the little boy's suspicion.

"The Thief" and "The Boy who broke the Bank" are about two teenaged boys. The thief who is the narrator in the story comes from a poor background and intends to rob Arun, his master. But gradually he likes his master and returns to him with the stolen money. The author uses first person narrative to go into the depth of the thief's mind. The boy who broke the bank also comes from the lowest strata of society. He is an uneducated sweeper boy. His casual complaint to the washer man about the bank not paying his salary on time, gets conveyed to a lady. The lady's gossip creates a big problem for the bank as their men take their words seriously. A delightful light hearted story about how a gossip can cause great damage to the bank.

Reference:
4.3. HUMAN NATURE AND RELATIONSHIPS.

"The Neighbor's Wife" and "The Night Train at Deoli" are about the youthful adolescent's passionate attraction towards the young girls. There is more of fantasizing and romantic feelings. Arun's attraction and mild flirtation with the married woman finally results in their marriage. In the "Night Train at Deoli" the narrator is a teenager who meets a flower girl on the platform. He sees her for a few minutes and true to his age he starts dreaming about her. It is an age of dreams and boys and girls dream about romantic infatuation. It is a beautiful example of an adolescent's mind. It fancies and also it forgets easily.

"The Garlands on his Brow" is about the transformation of a healthy wrestler into a beggar within a period of 3 – 4 years. The story is unlike Ruskin Bond. It is sad and tragic. Hasan was once admired and adored, like a young God. His wrestling matches were pleasure to watch. He was a hero for the ten year old narrator who was a boy full of health and optimism, when his "wonder at the great name of living had yet to give way to disillusionment at its shabbiness"

The last phrase summarizes the theme of the story. The irony is that the Godlike athletic body attracts the attention of a Rani and the wrestler joins her service. After her death he is left in the dark, with nothing to do and having lost his vigor. Bond's reflections on the shabbiness of life are remarkable.
"And for Hassan to have been reduced to begging was indeed a sad reflection of both the passing of time and the changing times. Fifty years ago a popular local wrestler would never have been allowed to fall into a state of poverty and neglect. But life has since become fast and cruel and unreflective, and people are too busy counting their gains to bother about the idols of their youth."

The narrator, who used to be his favorite and whom Hasan used to carry on his shoulder, doesn’t even recognize him and drops a coin in his bowl. This act must have caused great humiliation and distress to the wrestler. It might be the last blow on the man’s self respect and dignity which might have driven him to kill himself. This deduction is subtle and is left to the reader. Bond avoids sermonizing.

"A Guardian Angel" is a touching story of a woman’s tender love for the orphan child, whom nobody wants to keep with after his mother’s death. Mariam, his mother’s sister is a woman of doubtful character. People cast her into a very low mould, because of morals. But this woman has the heart of an angel. She gives unrestrained love, affection and care to the little boy. It makes her rise morally above all the so-called righteous relatives, who abandon him initially and claim him when they come to know about his financial inheritance.

The slightly long story "Death of a Familiar" once again deals with a character who is not a good person as per standards of civilized society. The narrator’s friend Sunil is an adolescent with
confused ideologies or no ideology at all. "He had not been born to fit in with the conventions. And as for character, he had the stability of a grasshopper. He was forever in search of new adventures and sensations, and this appetite of his for every novelty led him into some awkward situation." This is an apt description of an adolescent. At the same time he is a product of his age that was full of insecurity.

"He was a product of partition of the frontier provinces, of Anglo-Indian Public Schools, of films, Indian and American of Medieval India, Knights in Armour, hippies, drugs, sex magazines and the sub-tropical Terai. Had he lived in the time of the Mughals, he might have governed a province. Being born into the 20th century, he was but a juvenile delinquent."

Adolescence being a period of infatuation, young Sunil falls in love with Maureen, a woman much older to him. For Maureen it is just a distraction whereas, true to his age Sunil takes her seriously. Added to that the narrator introduces him to alcohol. Heady mixture of romance and alcohol take the youngster down the steep hill. Finally when disillusionment comes he is totally broken hearted. Maureen's betrayal has a deep impact on him.

"There is no such thing as love, is there Uncle?"

"You are a lucky beggar" he said "You are a philosopher. You find a reason for every stupid thing and so you are able to ignore all stupidity"
Love makes even a shallow person like Sunil think deep like a philosopher. This is the magic touch of love that every adolescent dreams of. It makes him mature and develop into an adult. But in Sunil's case it is unreciprocated love. Maureen's love is not true. She is just playing with the boy's emotion. Instead of fulfillment and joy this love brings destruction and finally death.

"The Kite Maker" is one of the best among the short stories of Ruskin Bond in this volume. It is engrossing in its story content and his prose reads like a poem. Its narrative style reminds one of Tagore's short stories.

It is delightfully different from his other stories as the narration is not in the first person. The story moves backwards in time and space. The nostalgia of good old days and the contrast with the bleak modern day world is dealt with for the second time in the volume. In the 'Garlands On His Brow' he touched upon it and in "The Kite Maker" he has reached the heights of great story teller. The old man who made kites was a great craftsman. He was encouraged and appreciated. But the modern day world with scientific advancement of knowledge has no place for the craftsmanship. There is the comparison between the old man and the banyan tree.

"Both were taken for granted – permanent fixtures that were of no concern to the raucous, sweating mass of humanity that surrounded them".
But there is always hope in Bond’s writings. The optimism is evident “Mehmood was like the banyan, his hands quailed and twisted like the roots of the ancient tree. Ali was like a young mimosa planted at the end of the courtyard. In two years both he and the tree would acquire the strength and confidence of their early youth”.

Like the description of the beautiful and fascinating dragon kite which almost came alive and broke itself free into the blue sky, the description of the grand old man’s end is also equally magnificent. Bond’s craftsmanship is evident in these pages

“The sunlight was slanting across the old man’s head, and a small white butterfly rested on his flowing beard. Mehmood was silent; and when Ali put his small brown hand on the old man’s shoulder he met with no response ..... The butterfly left the old man’s beard and flew to the mimosa tree, and a sudden gust of wind caught the torn kite and lifted it in the air, carrying it far above the struggling city into the blind blue sky.” The master story-teller is at his best in these lines which are poetic with their symbolism and the effect they produce on the reader!

Miss Fairchild and Miss Mackenzie are both Anglo-Indian spinsters who live alone with their dogs and cats. But each has a different story. In the story “The Prospect of Flowers” is a touching story of a lonely but graceful Miss. Mackenzie who finds solace in the friendship and companionship of a young school boy. There is an emotional attachment that develops between the little
and the lady. Living in a boarding school, away from home, the little boy feels homesick as he remembers his grandmother on meeting Miss Mackenzie.

".... She smelt of freshly baked bread and that was a smell his own grandmother had possessed. And partly because she was lonely and sometimes a boy of twelve can sense loneliness better than an adult."

The theme of loneliness runs throughout the story. The boy was lonely. So was the old woman. They could understand each other.

"Her home was in these hills among the oaks and maples and deodars. It was lonely, but at her age it would be lonely anywhere." Bond touches upon delicate issue of the old age and the loneliness that the aged people suffer from.

Reference:

4.4. INFATUATION, NATURE AND WILD LIFE:

"The Story of Madhu"¹ is about the middle aged narrator's fondness for a little girl of nine and their beautiful relationship. In this story Bond touches upon the delicate working of the little girl's mind and how a little girl in India becomes a little mother! Throughout the story the narrator is thinking of protecting the girl. He has a paternal attitude towards her. Like Bonds other stories, this touching short story also throws up a surprise in the end. Madhu has given her heart to the narrator and the thought of going away from him, even to a boarding school is so unbearable for her that she dies in the end. The narrator realizes all this when it is too late. Once again it is the teenaged 13 year old girl's passionate and intense feelings which the adult narrator fails to understand or recognize.

"A Job Well Done" has an element of suspense. It begins with a casual description of an old, skinny, bent and spindly legged gardener Dhuki, working for the narrator's mother. He is her faithful gardener. He shares the little boy's hatred for the step father, who takes the place of his father. The little boy, hidden behind the thick foliage of the banyan tree is an eye witness to the most discrete murder. The stepfather who is a Major in the army has ordered the closing of the well, which the gardener doesn't like to do. It is associated with the memory of his deceased master and the boy's father. The Major leans over the well a little too much, being prodded by the gardener. Within the fraction of a second, he disappears into the well. The little boy sees
the Major's shoes disappearing. "Dhuki's hands moved swiftly like a conjurer making a pass. He did not actually push the Major. He appeared nearly to tap him once on the bottom. I caught a glimpse of my step father's shoes as he disappeared into the well. I couldn't help thinking of Alice disappearing down the rabbit hole." It also reminds the reader of the story of the rabbit and the lion.

The story has an undercurrent of Bondsian humour and irony. The well is quickly covered with wooden planks before mother returns from her shopping. As the Major is expected to be home for his vacation in the evening, the lady appreciates the closing of the well.

"The Major will be pleased" said my mother when she came home.

As time passed, his mother resigns herself to the mysterious disappearance of the Major. A Colonel starts visiting the lady. The gardener thinks that

"He will be alright".

"And if he isn't" I said "we can always open up the well again".

Dhuki further decorates the closed well with pots of flower and "everybody congratulated him for the fine job he had done."

"The Cherry Tree" and "My Father's Trees in Dehra" have a similar theme of nostalgia. For Bond trees are essential part of his growing up and play a vital role in shaping his personality. Even the prospect of going to the moon is not attractive for him because there
are no trees there. The cherry tree grows with the little boy who plants it and it becomes a part of his life. He loves these trees because his grandfather and his father loved them and they passed it on to Ruskin Bond. In a way, his love of animals and trees is an inheritance, a gift passed on to him by his father and grandparents. His love for trees is his sub-conscious expression of his love for them. It helps him to dispel his inner sense of loneliness as the trees always remind him of his father. Their presence assures him of the presence of his father's love.

The imagery of the trees and their comparison to the human life keeps recurring in his short stories. For example, the old banyan tree and mimosa sapling in 'The Kite Maker' symbolize the old man and his grandson. The cherry tree symbolizes the young boy. The sapling faces all adversities and still survives and grows into a fine tree with beautiful blossoms. The young protagonists in his stories resemble the Cherry Tree. They survive all adversities and grow into fine young men and women.

"There is a great affinity between trees and men. We grow at much the same pace if we are not hurt or starved or cut down. In our youth we are resplendent creatures, and in our declining years we stoop a little, we remember, we stretch our brittle limbs in the sun, and then with a sigh we shed our last leaves."

"My Father's Trees in Dehra" is a journey down the memory lane. The grandfather's house with the garden brings back the rush of
childhood memory and he goes to the river bed just to see whether the sapling planted by his father had survived. As he sees the small island full of greenery he is re-assured of his father's presence. He meets his father in this garden.

"As I look across the dry water course, my eye is caught by the spectacular red plumes of the coral blossom. In contrast with the dry rocky river bed, the little island is a green oasis. I walk across to the trees and notice that a number of parrots have come to live in them. A Koel challenges me with a rising 'who are you who are you'. But the trees seem to know me. They whisper among themselves and beckon me nearer. And looking around I find that... they have multiplied. They are moving. In this small forgotten corner of the world, my father's dreams are coming true, and the trees are moving again."

"Panther's Moon" like "Sita and the River" is about the survival struggle and the protagonist's fight against the fury of nature. Both the teenaged protagonists survive in their battle against the forces beyond their control. They display tremendous courage and presence of mind. They are not helpless little children. They are strong and brave. They are the heroes and heroines.

"Panther's Moon" has something more than a survival story. Here the protagonist is not fighting a natural calamity or disaster as in "Sita and the River". He is faced with another living being, an animal from the jungle. Bisnu is faced with the danger of being killed by a man-eater panther. His village and his people are in danger. But
this danger is not caused by the animal itself. Bisnu is sympathetic 
and understands this. It is the hunters who left a bullet in the leg of 
the panther. It makes him incapable of hunting for food. That's why 
he turns to humans as they are responsible for his plight. The story 
“The Leopard” is at best be called an epilogue to the “Panther's 
Moon”.

The concluding lines in the story “The Leopard”, a quotation 
from D.H. Lawrence There was room in the world for a mountain lion 
and me”. summarizes the theme of both these stories. The villagers 
live in harmony with nature and believe in peaceful co-existence with 
the jungle, its trees and animals. They do not interfere with each 
other's life. But only when the man crosses this boundary and tries to 
kill the Leopard, the trouble starts. The wounded Leopard starts 
attacking the animals and the people in the village, for its survival. It 
doesn't kill for pleasure, like man! Bisnu the young boy is in full 
sympathy with the animal but he has to defend himself and his 
family. He bravely faces the Leopard three times. First time he climbs 
the tree with a lamb, and second time he chases it off with a sharp 
spear and third time he actually kills it. Every time he is protecting 
someone. But it is the man who betrays the faith the jungle and the 
animals have placed in him.

There is also a beautiful depiction of village life and how people 
come together to help each other. Unlike the sophisticated and 
educated people in the cities, they rush to help the others. They are
not afraid. When they hear a cry for help all of them rush out with axes in their hands.

The poetic description of the jungle and the trees in both the stories is touching. Ruskin Bond becomes emotional, almost sentimental when he talks of the flora and fauna.

"Downstream I found a small pool where I could bathe and a cave with water dripping from the roof. The water spangled gold and silver on the shafts of sunlight that pushed through the slits in the cave roof. 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the hill waters.' Perhaps David had discovered a similar paradise when he wrote those words; perhaps I too would write good words."

"Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright" is another story about the magnificent creature tiger. Along with 'Panther's Moon' this novel can be termed as Bond's strongest plea for preservation of wildlife. Both illustrate how these royal animals turn into man-eaters because of man's greed and selfishness. Man is violating the trust placed in him, and the delicate natural balance is disturbed due to thoughtless deforestation and shameless upsetting of ecology by the humans. It is man's infidelity towards nature.

"Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright" is a story of the majestic old tiger which likes to live peacefully in the jungle. The village boy strikes a sort friendship with this tiger. Due to some careless picnickers the
forest fire breaks out and the tiger's natural habitat is destroyed overnight. Eventually the hungry tiger is forced to attack the village cattle. The struggle begins and the wounded tiger falls in the Ganges and is swept away to a new habitat in the opposite bank. Unlike the other two tragic stories, this one has a happy ending. But the villagers and the forest miss the magnificent presence of the tiger. The tragedy is that man is the loser.

"At first the villagers were glad because they felt their buffaloes were safe. Then the men began to feel that something had gone out of their lives, out of the life of the forest; they began to feel that the forest was no longer a forest. It has been shrinking year by year but as long as the tiger had been there and the villagers had heard it roar at night, they had known that they were still secure from the intruders and newcomers who come to fell the trees and eat up the land and let the flood waters into the village. But now that the tiger had gone, it was as though a protector had gone, leaving the forest open and vulnerable, easily destroyable. And once the forest was destroyed they too would be in danger. There was another thing that had gone with tiger Something called nobility .... His grandfather had once said. The tiger is the very soul of India and when the last tiger goes, so will the soul of the country."

"A Tiger in the House" and "The Tunnel" are also about the big cat and the author's concern for the animal. Bond never preaches. He does not make statements about the wild life and conservation. He
creates a world in his fiction and makes his characters act and react in a certain way towards these issues. It makes his teenaged readers think and arrive at the right decision. That is the right method to be used for adolescents. They do not take any order, instructions or moral science lessons. They have to be convinced Bond does exactly the same thing. He looks at these issues from the child’s point of view. His protagonists are almost always children. They speak for themselves.

Timothy a six months old lion cub brought up by Grandfather is sent to the zoo when he starts developing his natural aggressive tendencies. When grandfather visits the zoo after another six months, he goes to the cage where Timothy was first kept. He starts touching him fondly and talking to him. only to find out from the caretaker that his Timothy had died a few months ago and that the tiger licking his arm is a new one which is very dangerous! Grandfather slowly withdraws his hand and mumbles “Goodnight Timothy”. Giving a scornful look to the keeper he walks away. Grandfather does not find the new cub any different from his Timothy. It also responds in the same way as his Timothy did to his affectionate and loving advances! The supposed to be cruel beast understands and responds to love!

In the story “The Tunnel” the little boy Ranji, the watchman of the tunnel, the leopard with the backdrop of the jungle, create a world less known to the city dwellers. Ranji’s attraction to the train that rushes through the jungle is a natural fascination of a young boy
for things modern. The train poses as a symbol of advancement. The jungle is serene. The serenity of the jungle is disturbed by the roaring train. The leopard which enters the tunnel is in danger of being run over by the train. The watchman and Ranji save its life by driving it out of the tunnel. The simple folk in Bond's stories do the magnificent jobs. They save the animals. They are concerned about the jungles, trees etc.

"Sita and the River" is the delightful long story, where nature plays an important role as the River. Sita a little girl in an island, living with her aged grand parents is a child of nature in the true sense. Her companions are goats, hens, large trees and the river. It is an island surrounded by the river. It plays the role of a destroyer as well as the protector. It is a well crafted story in eleven parts with subtitles.

The Island in the River: The author describes in his lucid style the island and the Peepul tree which is as old as the island. "In the middle of the island stood a Peepul Tree. It was the only tree on this tongue of land. But Peepul trees will grow anywhere - through the walls of old temples, through gravestones, even from rooftops. It is usually the buildings and not trees that give way." Even during the great flood, which had occurred twenty year back, the Peepul tree had stood firm.

The Girl and the Tree – The girls is young, fresh and a child of the Nature. Tree is 300 years old firm rooted and the only Peepul
tree on the island. It takes the girl in its arms and saves her life.

Ruskin Bond the master story-teller describes the Peepul tree and the little girl in the first part. The formation of the island, the family of the little girl, and how Sita was trained by both her grandfather and the grandmother. Sita did not go to school but was educated in the art of survival, which no school teaches.

"There was a school in one of the villages across the river but Sita had never seen it... She had never seen a city. The river cut her off from many things but she could not miss what she had never known and besides, she was much too busy."

The girl has to be left behind all alone in the island with the river menacingly rising. The girl is not afraid, says the author. She queries, "Grandfather, if the river rises higher, what will I do?"

"You must keep to the high ground"

"And if the water reaches the high grounds?"

"Then go into the hut and take the hens with you"

"And if the water comes into the hut?"

"Then climb onto the Peepul Tree. It is a strong tree. It will not fall. And the water cannot rise higher than the tree." Reassures her grandfather.

The next four chapters, "The Sound of the River", "The Water Rises", "The Tree", "Taken with the Flood" are gripping with vivid
description of the little girl and the old tree in the middle of the flooded river.

“The branches swung Sita about, but she did not lose her grip. The tree was her friend. It had known her all these years and now it held her in its old and dying arms as through it were determined to keep her from the river”.

It does keep her from drowning. It uproots itself and carries the girl across the river and hands her over to the boy who comes there in a small boat. It is delightfully optimistic, despite the flood and the devastation it causes. Bond’s underlying compassion and keen observation makes the story delightful.

Ruskin Bond’s eye for minute details and the description of the boy remind the reader of Kipling’s characters. The boy wore only a loincloth. He was a slim wiry boy with a hard flat belly,. He had high cheek bones and strong white teeth. He was a little darker than Sita” like Mougley in the Jungle Book

In “A Crow for all Seasons” the narrator is a crow. The incident of the crow being shot, has its background in Bond’s childhood. He mentions in his memoir an incident of wherein his uncle, a Station Superintendent, shot dead a crow, and they were held captive in their house by the angry crows for two days. Crows are known for their affinity for their fellow creatures. If a crow is found in distress all of them come together and try to save it. Depicting the incident from the
crow’s point of view, makes it humorous and enjoyable reading. Here we can say, Bond has an insight into the Crow’s mind too, or we can say he understands a crow’s language or a crow-feeling! Bond leads the young reader through a gamut of emotions. Bond’s sense of humour bubbles over where Speedy the crow, after a long struggle with Junior wins hands down. Anecdotal in nature the hilarious story ends with St Corvus alias Speedy concretizing his philosophy “From persecution to protection: from beastliness to saintliness and sometimes it can be the other way around: you never know with humans”.

“All Creatures Great and Small” reminds one of the bed time prayer, thanking God for all things great and small, all things bright and beautiful. We also have to thank God for making Mr. Ruskin Bond write such beautiful stories about magnificent animals great and small- the tiger and the leopard stalking their prey against the timeless backdrop of nature, till man the predator appears on the scene to gather trophies of triumph in the form of hunters- so that our children born and brought up in the dry and drab cities grow to love and like the animals great and small.

Grandfather stands for old values and the grandeur of the good old days. Those were the days when people lived close to nature. The days were of peaceful co-existence with nature and the animals. The description of Toto the little monkey’s pranks are enjoyable. One day he almost boils himself in a tea kettle. The ticket collector’s trauma on
Toto's sudden appearance and Grandfather's reaction to the charges he collects for Toto are delightful comedy. When Grandfather brings home a python the reaction of Grandmother are light hearted and humorous. Grandfather and grandson join hands in having fun at the expense of Aunt Mabel. The python falls in love with its own reflection, so to say having a narcissus complex. This might be termed as Bond's unique sense of humour which makes his writings so delightful to read. The delicate Bondsian humour bubbles over in this delightful short story.

The village boy, who is uneducated, shares the views of Grandfather. He is well-versed in folklore and about the flora and fauna of the jungle. He tells the narrator that many birds are sacred. Blue jay is compared to Shiva with a blue throat Nilakantha. Squirrels are Lord Krishna's favorite animals. By assigning divinity to birds and animals our ancestors taught their children to respect them. This prevented them from killing and destroying animals and trees. Even some trees are worshipped in India. The Westerners who laugh at such practices in India have now realized the importance of installing such faith, to preserve ecological balance.

"Both Ramu and grandfather were of the opinion that we should be more gentle with birds and animals and should not kill so many of them.

"It is also important that we respect them" said grandfather "we must acknowledge their rights. Everywhere birds and animals
are finding it more difficult to survive, because we are trying to destroy both them and their forests. They have to keep moving as the trees disappear.

The same theme is highlighted in the beautiful story. "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright", "...the tiger, with an angry snort, would get up and pad north, pad silently north along the narrowing strip of jungle.... Ten years back he would have had the jungle on his right in which to hide, but the trees had been felled long ago to make way for humans and houses, and now he could only move to the left, towards the river" The story "The Leopard" in s an elegiac strain laments the violation of trust that the birds and beasts had placed on man.

"Coming Home to Dehra", "The Last Tonga Ride" and "The Last Time I saw Delhi" are the stories which are intensely touching and contain personal account of his relationship with his parents and about his childhood.

In Preamble to Scenes From Writer's Life : A Memoir Published by Penguin Books India, 1997, he admits "The reader may be surprised to know that this is the first time I am attempting a straight autobiography. True the autobiographical element is present in much of my work, but there is really more fiction in my fiction than the reader may realize. The dramatic escape from Java, those supernatural experiences and the close encounters with bears, leopards and amorous pythons have a certain verisimilitude because I have used the first person and taken the trouble to make the
backgrounds and episodes convincing. I have given rein to my imagination although in a perfectly credible way."

**Dust on the Mountains** is another long short-story about the denuding of the mountains. Bond does not preach. He does not lecture on conservation. He simply paints a picture in which the ill effects of the thoughtless acts are beautifully depicted. These stories of nature as well as the stories of human relationship are intensely personal and at times sentimental. He feels for the trees as he feels for his friends and relatives. Trees are almost human in that they grow like small children.

While describing Bisnu the teenaged boy and his journey to the city and back, Bond is describing the plight of villagers who are forced to leave their home in search of work. The dangers that lurk in the city for these innocent village boys are also touched upon.

Once the tourist season gets over Bisnu has no work. He goes to the limestone quarries to work with his friend. It is ironical that the development and civilized life deprive men of the most precious trees.

"The road helps you and me to get about but it also makes it easier for others to do mischief. Rich men from the cities come here and buy what they want – land, trees, people".

The jovial. Sikh driver Pritam Singh, offers Bisnu the job of a cleaner. He keeps him good company and also earns some money. While traveling on the truck to and from the quarries Bisnu notices
the dry mountains filled with dust. There is constant blasting taking place.

"Bisnu watched in awe as shrubs and small trees were flung into the air. It always frightened him... not so much the sight of the rocks bursting as the trees being flung aside and destroyed. He thought of the trees at home, the walnut, the chestnuts, the pines and wondered if one day they would suffer the same fate, and whether the mountain would all become a desert like this particular range. No trees, no grass, no water – only the choking dust of mines and quarries" 

The truck meets with an accident and turns turtle on the mountain road and just before plunging several hundred feet down to the bottom of the gorge, it is stopped by the trunk of a scraggy old oak tree. Pritam Singh's life is saved. In the hospital he tells Bisnu that he is going home to stay with his sons and offers to arrange for a job for Bisnu.

"No', said Bisnu,' I will be going home soon"

"And what will you do at home?"

"I will work on my land. It is better to grow things on the land then blast things out of it."

They were silent for some time.

"There is something to be said for growing things" said Pritam. "but for that tree the truck would have finished up at the foot of the mountain and I wouldn't be here all bandaged up and talking to you.
mountain and I wouldn't be here all bandaged up and talking to you. It was the tree that saved me. Remember that boy.

All the stories of Ruskin Bond have a message to convey and the message has never been so direct. They are always discrete. The stories end with optimism. However bleak the plot may be there is always hope and a chance to grow.

In the delightful short-story "The Fight" Ruskin Bond depicts the adolescent's behavior. A boy in his early teens wants to show his authority and establish his superiority. He is very possessive about his things and territory. When faced with another teenager he challenges him to prove himself. This behavior is visible in both Ranji and Suraj. Both try to defy the other. They fight each other. Both are equally strong. Finally when they realize each other's strength they decide to come to a settlement. They become good friend and decide to share the pool. Ruskin Bond has a dig at the Punjabi, and his inborn nature of bargaining or making a profit, a business out of everything.

References:

1. Ruskin Bond; Collected Fiction. Penguin Books India. New Delhi, 1999
(The titles of the stories in this text refer to this book.)
4.5. **FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP**

"Love is a Sad Song"¹ is a long story which has its second part in "Time Stops at Shamli". The story "Love is a Sad Song" is about an adult's infatuation for a young girl half his age. This infatuation is typical of youth and adolescence. The middle aged narrator has 'delayed adolescence', as his friend describes it. Sushila, whom the narrator has watched growing up from a nine years old to thirteen years, attracts him. He gets fascinated by her youth and falls madly in love with her. But he also wonders whether it is the girl who manipulates him.

"Love is a Sad Song is a typical novella or long short story depicting the ups and downs of uneven love between the protagonist and a young girl called Sushila. The unevenness of their emotional relation lies in the wide age gap between the two".²

Bond is depicting the blindness that such infatuation causes in a man. He believes that Sushila loves him. He proposes to marry her. The story is told as a flash back. The narrator remembers his affair with Sushila and how serious he was, about it all. He seems to be so obsessed and deeply engrossed in his feelings for the girl that he does not even try to find out about her feelings. When the girl who is a teenager finds some other person more attractive, it is but natural for her. Finally she chooses a bank officer who has a car. For the adolescent girl, it is the luxury and comforts of life which are more attractive. He writes in the Introduction to "Strangers in
the Night” (Penguin India 1997).

“As I grow older, life seems to grow more comical and I find myself better suited to playing the clown than the romantic hero”.

He took himself seriously in his youth. But the narrator who is approaching 30 taking fancy to a girl of 15 is bound to meet with a sad ending. Ruskin Bond depicts the adolescent mind as well as the behavior of an immature teenager. The youngsters live for the day and life is full of opportunities for them. They refuse to be tied down as in the case of Sushila. She is unable to take a decision and is too young to understand the depth of love.

In the short story “Time Stops at Shamli” Sushila is a young woman who handles the narrator’s feelings for her with maturity. She is Mrs Dayal, married to the owner of the Guest House where the narrator spends the night. Apart from Sushila he meets Kiran the little girl, Daya Ram, Miss Deeds, Mr. Dayal. ‘Binya Passes By’ is another story of the narrator's infatuation for a little girl in the mountains. She is, like her surrounding, beautiful, simple and unaffected. Like a mountain river gurgling and rushing down the mountain, she laughs and runs around. Her song is sweet and pure like the mountain air. She could be just a personification of all that the hills of Himalayas stand for! How can the author help it but fall in love with her! The protagonist’s love for Binya is different from his attraction towards other girls.
"Binya represented something else – something wild, dreamlike, fairylike. She moved close to the spirit haunted rocks, the old trees, the young grass. She had absorbed something from them – a primeval innocence an unconcern with the passing of time and events, an affinity with the forest and the mountains and this made her special and magical".

Bond recreates parallel images in his stories. Sushila of "Love is a Sad Song" is a young girl and the middle-aged protagonist falls madly in love with. In "Binya Passes By" also he is of the same age – 30 or 35. He falls in love with Binya. But the two girls are different. Binya is child of nature, a mountain lass, innocent and pure. Sushila is a Punjabi girl from Delhi. She is clever and not as simple as the uneducated mountain girl.

In "Time Stops at Shamli" the little girl Kiran in pig tails has her counterpart in "Coral Tree". Both girls are very young and fond of flowers. They make the narrator climb trees and pluck flowers for them.

"Can I do anything for you?' I asked "Do you stay here with your parents?" With great assurance she said. "Yes. But I can stay on my own".

"May be you will’ I said – But what is it you want?.."

"I want some flowers, but I cannot reach them,' she waved her hand towards the garden. "That tree see?’ The trees were easy to
climb, and I made myself comfortable on one of the lower branches, smiling down at the serious upturned face of the girl “I will throw them down to you” I said.

I bent a branch but the wood was young and green. I had to twist it several times before it snapped.

‘I am not sure that I ought to do this’ I said...

“Don’t worry” she said...

I felt a sudden nostalgic longing for childhood and an urge to remain behind in my grand mother’s house.

“Have you many friends?” I asked

“Oh yes”

“Who is the best?”

“The cook ...”

“And who is your second best friend?” She inclined her head to one side and thought very hard.

“I will make you the second best,’ she said.

I sprinkled coral blossoms over her head.’ That is very kind of you. I am happy to be your second best.’ A tonga bell sounded at the gate..

“ I will see you in London” she said “Or America or Japan. I want to go everywhere”.

The encounter with Kiran in Time Stops at Shamli is a replica
‘Can I come with you to the end of the world?’

‘What about your parents?’

“I can stay on my own. I can go anywhere”

“Now is there anything else I can do for you?”

“I want some flowers ...”

“Alright’ I said and pulled myself up on the wall. I smiled down into Kiran’s serious upturned face.

‘I hope nobody minds” I said ...

“Its nobody’s tree” she said.

She nodded is vigorously “Sure, Don’t worry”

- Talking and being with Kiran I felt a nostalgic longing for childhood, emotions that had been beautiful because they were never completely understood.

“Who is you best friend?” I said

“Daya Ram” she replied (the Gardner).

“And who is the second best?”

She put her finger in her mouth to consider the question, and her head dropped sideways.

“I will make you the second best” she said.

I dropped the flowers over her head. “That is so kind of you, I am proud to be your second best”. 
I heard the tonga bell "That's for me" I said, "I must go".

"I will see you in Iceland or Japan.

She said, "I am going everywhere"

We can see the recurring themes in his short stories. Innocent childhood, early adolescence and the young adulthood are the underlying themes in his fiction. This is what makes them charming and full of life and hope. Coupled with theme of nature – an abode of love and peace, his fiction is a sugarcoated pill where the sadness and separation, vagaries and frailty, loneliness and exploitation get hidden.

"The Woman on Platform No. 8" is a touching tale of a lady who strikes a bond with an unknown child on a platform. The story is of a boy's need for a mother and that of a mother's need for a child. They meet for a short-time and spend valuable time with each other. It has an element of suspense as the woman on the platform is a stranger and tries to befriend the young boy. The innocence that goes with the age makes the boy accept the hospitality of the stranger. The flow of narration and the element of simple and natural sequence of events make the story interesting. Externally nothing happens in the story. The young boy waiting alone in the platform 8 to change train has a chance meeting with an elderly lady who takes interest in the boy and keep him company till he boards the train. The boy doesn't even know the woman's name and finally he calls her mother.
“Good Bye” I said to the other woman “Good bye, Mother”.

Ruskin Bond is trying to establish that there is no need for even so much as a name when two people understand each other. Feelings flow form heart to heart and when they are genuine there is no necessity of any man-made relationship.

**The Eyes Have It**, is another story which reflects the author's faith that the external factors like eyes have little to do with a person's feelings. A delightful story of two passengers traveling in a train, hiding their blindness from each other.

“*Calipso Christmas*” and “*The Girl from Copenhagen*” have the same setting. The story takes place in London. Unlike his other stories set in the colorful natural beauty of Indian hill towns and villages, these two stories are about human relationship. Christmas is celebrated in cold and gray London with the people from different parts of the world. They come together to celebrate and forget their loneliness and alienation.

“*Miss Bun and Others*, *My First Love*, *Tribute to a Dead Friend*, *From Small Beginnings*” and “*As Time Goes by*” are stories about his childhood and friendships.

Miss Bun is a baker’s daughter, a young girl who is like “a ship that passes by night”. Her relationship with the narrator is described with underlying humour and irony.

“My First Love” is about the little boy’s attachment to his
Ayah. Deprived of his mother's love and affection, the boy gets attached emotionally to the Ayah. Even the Ayah loves the child giving her attention and care. The huge, dark lady is beautiful for the boy because of her love and attachment. This character is later developed in his novella “The Sensualist”. The Ayah evokes sensual feelings in the boy.

“Tribute to a Dead Friend” is about an adolescent who is full of dreams and enthusiasm. Ruskin Bond believes that nobody is evil and he has found good qualities in those who are wicked. This is Ruskin Bond’s optimism. “I know that there is evil in the world... but I have never known anyone completely evil and I've always found better qualities of goodness and truth dominating. I do try to bring out the best in people, in human being because it is there in almost each one of us. There are exceptions... It is just due to circumstances or lack of sensitivity or mental development. (I.G. Taqui’s Interview with Ruskin Bond in November. 1989).

Thanh, the Vietnamese boy whom the narrator met in London had many vices. He was vain and selfish. He did not like Indians. The narrator and Thanh fell in love with the same girl Vu. In the end the girl rejected both of them and went with an Indian friend.

“From Small Beginnings” is about Prem and his long lasting relationship with the author.

“As Time Goes By” is in ‘diary format’ which formed the nucleus of his first novel. The Room on the Roof. It is all about his childhood friends Daljit Somi and himself, and about the little pool in which they splashed and played. The author is looking back at his
childhood days, as an old man feeling nostalgic about his good old days. The friends have gone away. The pool is no more. It is a dried up piece of land. But at a little distance there is a new pool and number of children are playing and splashing in the mud.

'A Girl from Copenhagen' where the narrator comes in contact with a girl from Copenhagen and spends a day and night with her. The author says, "It is not a love story, but a story about love". It is a simple story narrated in the first person. There is not much happening. Ulla spends one day and night with the narrator and they make love. It is this love, that has no strings attached to it, that the author celebrates in this story. Two strangers come together, love each other and part without any regrets. They do not even exchange their address nor do they expect to meet each other in future. They just walk in into the other's life for a brief moment and walk out. This is Bond's philosophy of life "Live life for that moment". People cross each other's path.

He speaks of his short stories - "Life is not a novel; it does not have the organization of a novel. People are not characters in a play. They refuse to the exigencies of a plot or a set of scenes. Some people become an integral part of our lives; others are ships that pass in the night."

The "Escape from Java" may not be a true story, but set in the backdrop of the Second World War, it is replete with his memories of his father and the warmth and companionship he shared with him. It may, at best, be called symbolic. We can see the rough sea as the difficult times they faced. The presence of his father and his
affectionate strong hand which he always held, provided him with a sense of security. The wreck may be the tragic event of his mother breaking away and pushing them into trauma. They had to struggle alone and were on their own in the rough sea of life. Like the rough sea, the situation Ruskin Bond found himself in was none of his creations. Like a helpless human in the hands of destiny he accepted it. But the father's presence was re-assuring.

The dare devil and irrepressible youthful energy makes the narrator and his friend Sono to go for a picnic in the middle of the air-raid. They go cycling to a pond, spend sometime and on their way back get hit by flying glasses of a bomb explosion.

Finally they decide to leave Java. "How will we go? There is no room for us on those ships" wonders the little boy.

"There certainly isn't. But we will find a way, lad, don't worry" assures father "I didn't worry. I had complete confidence in my father's ability to find a way out of difficulties. He used to say 'Every problem has a solution hidden away somewhere, and if only you look hard enough you will find it".

This faith in his father, gives the boy confidence. Even when the plane crashes and they have to spend three days and nights in a dingy sailing aimlessly in the vast sea, the boy has the affectionate hand of his father to hold on to. His father covers his face with a scarf to protect him from the hot sun, saves his ration of chocolate and water for his son and keeps talking to him about the pleasant thing like Sono and the sea-horse, to keep his morale up. It is this giving all, selfless love of his father that Ruskin Bond keeps searching all
his life. A father’s love for his child is celebrated in the epics like *Mahabharata*. During the period of exile the Pandava King Yudhisthir finds his younger brothers fallen unconscious on the banks of a river. The *Yaksha* asks him few questions, which he answers satisfactorily and his brothers are brought back to life. One of the questions being “What is higher than the sky?” and Yudhisthira answers promptly “The heart of a father.”

His father teaches him to love just by being an example of love himself. He tells his son to keep Sono’s gift of sea-horse carefully as it might bring luck.

“Are sea-horses lucky?”

“Who knows? But he gave it to you with love, and love is like a prayer. So keep it carefully.”

*“The Funeral”* is also fiction but it is based on the intensity of a sense of loss that Ruskin Bond, as a young boy, felt on losing his father. He must have imagined the funeral of his father and dreamt about it. When his father died he was left with tremendous sense of insecurity.

“He did his best for me, dear man. He gave me his time, his companionship, his complete attention.”

This story is a product of his imagination. Ruskin Bond was unable to relate himself to the reality of his father’s death. He had seen him alive and smiling. He was not able to accept the death of his father as he had not seen him dead and buried. In one of his memoirs he mentions that it was difficult for him to accept this truth as he
received it as a news. He depicts his pain and agony through fiction.

"The account of my mother's final illness in the story "The Last Time I Saw Delhi" says more than any factual account that I can give; sometimes it is easier to tell the truth by disguising it as a 'fiction' --- especially when the subject is a painful one.... And perhaps my feelings for my father are best expressed in the short story. 'The Funeral'. Although the funeral is a purely imaginary one; I was in Boarding School in Simla when my father died in Calcutta"

It is his love for his father that he is still holding on to. He could never forgive his mother for making his father unhappy. In the story "The Last Time I Saw Delhi" he expresses his feelings to his mother who tries to justify her actions. Even though he loved his mother, he could never forgive her.

"You have always blamed me for leaving him. Haven't you?"

"I was very small at the time you left us suddenly. My father had to look after me, and it wasn't easy for him. He was very sick. Naturally I blamed you"

He also admits that it may be one of the reasons why he remained a bachelor. It was his disillusionment about marriage. He also writes that may be it was not his mother's fault. She was too young. They did not have common interests.

But at the same time his father taught him to love. It is a unifying force in his life. In his letter to his father in the "Envoi" he writes

"Love is undying; of that I feel certain. I mean deep abiding,
cherishing love. The love that gives protection, even as you, my guardian angel, gave me protection long after you had gone – and continue to give this very day.... A love beyond Death – a love that makes life alive!"

In the story "Coming Home to Dehra" we see more of autobiography than fiction. After he gets the news of his father's death, the Head Master takes away his father's letters. Though he might have done it with a good intention of making the boy forget, it is another act of cruel hands snatching away what is left of his father with him! The little boy has nothing but hatred for this Headmaster. At the Dehra station the boy is disappointed to see that nobody came to pick him up. He goes to his grandmother for warmth and comfort. The practical lady takes him to his mother's house and leaves him there.

The rather cold reception he receives from his step father and his mother leaves him yearning for his father's warmth and affection. He had always looked forward to home coming, and home for him was his father.

"Going home was something that I had looked forward to. But going home had meant my father, and now he had vanished and I was left quite desolate....

I suppose if one is present when a loved one dies, or sees him dead and laid out and later buried, one is convinced of the finality of the thing and finds it easier to adapt to the changed circumstances. But when you hear of a death, a father's death and have only the faintest idea of the manner of his dying, it is rather a lot for the
imagination to cope with – especially when the imagination is a small boy's. There being no tangible evidence of my father's death, it was for me, not a death but vanishing. And although this enabled me to remember him as a living, smiling, breathing person, it meant that I was not wholly reconciled to his death, and sub-consciously expected him to turn up (as he often did when I most needed him) and deliver me from an unpleasant situation.

The short story, "The Last Tonga Ride" is about the boy's departure from Dehra with Grandmother. It also narrates the bond of friendship between the boy and the young tonga driver Bansi. The trees in the old house of his grandmother's beautiful garden provide company to the lonely boy. His affinity with the old Banyan tree and the way it accepts him and provides a place to sit on its branches, almost like an affectionate parent lifting a child and holding him close to his bosom, reveals his love for the tree.

"The tree made the first move, the first overture of friendship. It allowed a leaf to fall. Then I put out my hand and touched the rough bark of the tree and this felt good to me. As I climbed, it seemed as through someone was helping me. Invisible hands, the hands of the spirit in the tree, touched me and helped me to climb"

Ruskin Bond has two major obsessions which have made his writing intense and deep-- the theme of search for love lost, and the theme of nature where his search ends. His yearning for love and security finds an answer in his love for nature. The trees make him feel at home and secure. In the short story "Death of the Trees", he laments the death of trees due to human activities. It might be
appropriate to call it "murder of the trees". He detested this thoughtless felling of the trees in the name of development and convenience.

"Masterji" and "Big Business" are about the human tendency to make money out of everything. A school teacher with forged certificates from Pakistan joins as Hindi teacher and teaches Punjabi instead of Hindi to students.

References:

1. *Raskin Bond Collected Fiction*. Penguin Books India. New Delhi, 1999 (The titles of the stories in this text refer to this book.)

4.6. MURDER, MYSTERY AND THE SUPERNATURAL:

In the short story, The Monkeys,¹ the ghosts visit the narrator in the middle of the night. They are the ghosts of monkeys whom Mrs. Fairchild had shot down and her dogs who tried to save her when she got torn apart by other monkeys. “Never shoot a monkey. They are rather human you know” ... the Colonel’s words and the mood of the story echo the lines from Coleridge. The story is told in the manner of a sailor narrating his story to the curious listeners.

In the story, “The Man who was Kipling” perhaps the young author is visualizing himself after his death. He agrees with the great writer and especially with his statement about the Himalayas.

“He was talking to himself, repeating a passage from one of his stories. And the last puff of the day wind brought from the unseen villages the scent of damp wood, smoke, hot cakes, dripping undergrowth, and rotting pine cones. That is the true smell of the Himalayas and if once it creeps into the blood of a man that man will, at the last, forgetting all else, return to the hills to die”.

“A Case for Inspector Lal” was first published as his second novel “An Axe for the Rani” in the year 1972. Inspector Keemat Lal is a Police Inspector, investigating the case of murder of Rani. He is a middle-aged man. The main character who is the prime suspect is Kusum, a teenaged girl. However, the emotional core of the story is the friendship between Inspector Lal and the girl.

165
Ruskin Bond's world is a child's world. But that is not all. There is something more to it. The novels trace the course of children – whether aged 13 or 30, growing up surmounting adversity and experiencing life's little pleasures. Kusum is faced with a sordid incident but her courage and presence of mind, coupled with her hatred for Rani prompt her to punish the evil doer. The Rani acting as a procuress for the wealthy business man Mr. Kapoor, introduces the unsuspecting girl to him. Terrified by his advances the girl resists and escapes. When the Rani tries to stop her the girl, in panic, brings the axe down on her. When the unsuspecting Inspector Lal finds a piece of Kusum's broken bangle he goes in search of her, curious to know the connection between the glass bangle and murder. The girl once again tries to attack Lal, in panic. But this time she doesn't succeed and gives herself away. Keemat Lal has a narrow escape. But strangely enough he doesn't get angry. He holds the sobbing girl in his arms and tries to console her. He closes the case and loses his promotion.

"A Face in the Dark" is a fantasy, a story about ghosts. The technique is that of a mystery thriller. The Anglo-Indian School teacher is taken by surprise when he encounters a ghost in the form of a faceless school boy and when he rushes for help the guard also turns out to be a ghost.

"He said it with Arsenic" is a murder mystery. The narrator's presence of mind and his awareness of the murderer's plan
helps him to turn the table on him, when his uncle tries to poison him with arsenic in coffee. As a little boy he had heard of his uncle’s exploits of murdering his wife and his beloved, despite the elder’s effort to hide it from him. This information saves his life. Bond may be hinting here that elders should not try to be over protective by hiding things from their children.

In the stories “The Most Potent Medicine of All” and “Hanging at the Mango Tope” we see the glimpse folklore. In the former, the wife kills herself to save her husband’s life and in the latter the subordinate officer while trying to save his senior’s life gets carried away by his selfishness and greed and lets him die so that he could get the next promotion.

‘Listen to the Wind’ is the story of star-crossed lovers who got struck by lightening and “The Haunted Bicycle” is a fantasy. “Whispering in the Dark”, “Listen to the Wind” and “the trouble with Jins”, “Would Ashly Return?” are stories dealing with supernatural. Fantasy is an element in fiction, which attracts the young reader. The young mind is curious and trusting. These stories about ghosts are handed down to them in oral tradition. In the hills people narrate them to each other. As for Mr. Ruskin Bond, his neighbour, Mrs. Singh was a storehouse of such stories. He picks them up and puts them in his mould of humor and simple story telling technique. He makes them sound real—“probable impossibilities, preferred to improbable possibilities.” as Aristotle puts it.
"The Daffodil Case" is a fantasy where the narrator meets 'Sherlock Holmes' in Regents Park in London. He helps Sherlock Holmes in solving the mystery of the 'Daffodil Case', but the detective disappears mysteriously. When he meets the caretaker he mentions about Sherlock Holmes and the bewildered man asks his name. He replies – 'My name is Bond.' A delightful combination of Sherlock Holmes and James Bond, makes it light-hearted and enjoyable to read.

In the short story "Eyes of the Cat" Bond uses the "fantasy" theme wherein the little girl turns into a leopard in the night and kills her teacher who insults her. "Whispering in the Dark" is another fantasy story about a haunted house.

References:

   (The titles of the stories in this text refer to this book.).

168