CHAPTER –V

Adolescence Appeal in the select works of Ruskin

Bond
India is the country of plenty of religions, hundreds of castes, traditions, different cultures of wide territories. This verity provides a flourishing raw material for literary practice especially for fiction writers. Many leading novelists of Indian writing in English like Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Rabindranath Tagore and many other have depicted Indian diverse life style in their fiction. They have voiced certain burning problems of our nation regarding political issues, social evils, modernization communal harmony, poverty, liberation of women etc. Ruskin Bond is one of very few writers who have focused more on the life of children and teenagers. His novels about the growing ups invite readers to peep into a different and interesting world. His novels at initial stage of his career developed upon the world of adolescents. Bond’s growing ups are depicted with so many features of this sensitive phase of life. They have a great liking for wandering, mostly found with friends; increasing attraction for opposite sex, sense of rebellion, financial independence, thinking about career and many more characteristics can be observed in Bond’s initial novels.

Bond’s literary career is ceaselessly going on even today. His many short stories and novels depict the life of children as well as adolescents. However, as per the design of this research work, the present chapter focuses on the study of two novels and five short stories of Ruskin Bond in detail to study adolescent phase. They are: The Room on the Roof, and Vegrants of the Valley and five short fictions Chachi’s Funeral, Thief, Night Train at Deoli, Panther's Moon and Love is a Sad Song. They throw more light on the life of the youngsters. There is a larger autobiographical element in these stories which make them more interesting and some of them were written when Bond was himself an adolescent.
The Room on the Roof

The Room on the Roof is the first novel by Bond. It is a novel by an adolescent about adolescents. There are so many fictions in which the depiction of the youngsters is found but in limited sphere. In fact, these stories are about the adults and the adolescents have little role in them. But, on the other hand, The Room on the Roof is a novel fully dealing with the life of the young people. Rusty is a sixteen years orphan English boy who lives with his guardian Mr.Harrison in Dehradun when the novel opens. This novel is set in the post independent India. Most of the Britishers had left India at that time; while some English population preferred to settle in India. This novel brings out in initial part the difference between the English colony and Indian society. Some Britishers like Mr.Harrison hold the opinion that the Britishers are superior to the Indians. He strictly orders Rusty not to cross the boundry of the English colony. When the boy violets the rules, he handles the boy very strictly. Their relationship does not remain harmonious. The initial part of the novel gives idea how he treats the boy:

Mr. Harrison did not reply. He seldom answered the boy’s questions, and his own were stated, not asked; he probed and suggested, sharply, quickly, without ever encouraging loose conversation. He never talked about himself; he never argued: he would tolerate no argument. (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

When the pressure is removed, the strict guardian goes to Delhi; Rusty makes the most of his guardian’s absence. The boy finds himself in the most pleasant world for few days. He enjoys all the freedom. He wanders everywhere he likes, explores new places. His coming to clock tower, the bussiest area of Dehradun which is forbidden by his guardian, indicates an important feature of human being, particularly the youngsters, to do what is forbidden. The boy dreams to visit the vibrant bazaar which Mr. Harrison always forbids. The adolescents sometimes enjoy breaking rules, ignoring advices of elders. The more his guardian stops the boy going to Indian colonies, the more curiosity the boy develops to go there. Ultimately, the boy gets opportunity to move freely anywhere he likes when Mr. Harrison goes to Delhi. Bond
points out the inner struggle of a boy to take decision. When the boy reaches Indian bazaar, he hesitates for a while. He can’t decide to go further or return his colony and obey his guardian. As in the most of the cases, the boys don’t care for elders’ strict order and punishment, Rusty violets instructions. He advances and reaches the Clock Tower. Bond narrates his mental condition:

Rusty’s heart was beating fast as he reached the Clock Tower. He was about to defy the law of his guardian and of his community. He stood at the clock Tower, nervous, hesitant, beating his nails. He was afraid of discovery and punishment, but hungering curiosity impelled him forward. (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

This kind of hesitation is found in Rusty when he breaks rules for the first time; later on it becomes habit. The boy becomes tough and careless with physical punishments. A stage arrives when the boy openly challenges the authority of the elders. He doesn’t care for punishment and squizes for pleasant world.

Adolescence is the phase when boys and girls are found more aware towards their physical development. They go through tremendous physical changes. They observe their as well as other adolescents’ physical development. If their growth is not normal or natural, they feel confused. For adults it may be a common or unnoticeable matter, but the youngsters consider it more seriously. They study themselves in front of mirror. Bond shows this regular and natural habit of juveniles through Rusty:

Rusty spent much of his time studying himself in the dressing table mirror; he was able to ignore his pimples and see a grown man, worldly and attractive. Though only sixteen, he felt much older. He was white. His guardian was pink, and the missionary’s wife a bright red, but Rusty was white. With his thick lower lip and prominent cheekbones,
he looked slightly Mongolian, especially in a half-light. He often wondered why no one else in the community had the same features. (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

The adolescents remove shyness before friends. They share every feeling freely, frankly with their companions. They generally avoid disclosing personal matters before adults because of shyness, fear or generation gap. Rusty in the absence of Mr. Harrison develops friendship with Ranbir and Somi. He tells them his life story. He extends friendship and does not hesitate to share his personal matters with them. He also takes spicy food at bazaar which may be harmful to his stomach. He becomes a rogue like his friends and begins to live a carefree life forgetting every difference. Bond describes:

They ate chaat, a spicy salad of potato, guava and orange; and then gol-guppas, baked flour-cups filled with burning syrup. Rusty felt at ease and began to talk, telling his companions about his school in the hills, the house of his guardian, Mr. Harrison himself, and the supple Malacca cane. The story was listened to with some amusement: apparently Rusty’s life had been very dull to date, and Somi and Ranbir pitied for it. (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

Rusty knows about the risk of mixing with Indians as Mr. Harrison has strictly ordered not to develop contacts with local people. Neglecting his instructions, the boy advances to join the wonderful world in the company of Ranbir and Somi. It also happens that his guardian returns from Delhi earlier than his schedule, or perhaps Rusty did not expect him back so soon. The boy soon forgets all jolly friends and fully pays attention on his guardian. The boy respects him not because of admiration but fear. It is often noticed that the adolescents if frightened exceedingly, suppressed intensely, may rebel. They may be controlled by fear or force but in limit. If the limit is crossed and overpower is used, they particularly boys may rebel and make counter attack too in their defense. Mr. Harrison in Rusty’s case, makes use of overpower,
and faces unexpected reaction of the boy. He hits the boy with a cane. The boy is ordered to bend over sofa and receives unbearable strokes on his back. Bond narrates this scene realistically which indicates how a boy can turn to be violent against his elder:

The look of alarm on Mr. Harrison’s face gave Rusty greater courage. Before the man could recover his feet and his balance, Rusty gripped him by the collar and pushed him backwards, until they both fell over on to the floor. With one hand still twisting the collar, the boy slapped his guardian’s face. Mad with the pain in his own face, Rusty hit the man again and again, wildly and awkwardly, with the giddy thrill of knowing he could do it: he was a child no longer, he was nearly seventeen, he was a man. He could inflict pain, that was a wonderful discovery; there was power in his body— a devil or a god – and he gained confidence in his power; and he was a man! (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

Rusty’s encounter with his guardian fills him with new confidence about his physical power. He realizes that he is no longer a child. He makes friendship with sturdy boys like Ranbir and Somi and becomes more social because of his confident self.

Adolescents have strange ideas about sex. Some are very curious about it and inquire their friends. Some are confused and do not talk freely about it. Some even consider sex bad or mean to talk about it while some fear for adverse consequences of it. Their attitude towards sex depends mainly upon their environment, family background, type of friends they have. Their approach towards sex is mainly affected by parents. However, today’s adolescents differ from the earlier generations. They are more advanced today. It can be observed that they are bolder and more mature about sex. Rusty after fighting with his guardian, runs away from home. He
wanders in the deserted bazaar at night. No shop or stall is open. In the loneliness, Rusty finds a beckoning hand in a window. She is a prostitute. Rusty’s condition is pitiable. He is still mad with anger and rebellion. He follows the sign of the woman at the window. The adolescent boy can’t make out the situation. He reaches the woman’s room in order to get some help. Instead, the woman expects a customer in the form of this boy. She touches the boy to excite him. Rusty’s mental condition is disturbed after hand to hand fight with Mr. Harrison. He doesn’t feel any excitement. 

For an adult sex may be a source of refreshing and upto some extent a remedy in bad mood. But for a growing up boy, it doesn’t have any effect. Bond depicts the condition of an inexperienced boy in the matter of sex:

Reverently, and as respectfully as he could, Rusty sat down. The woman ran little fair fingers over his body, and drew his head to hers; their lips were very close, almost touching, and their breathing sounded terribly loud to Rusty, but he only said, ‘I am Hungry.’

A poet, thought the woman, and kissed him full on the lips; but the boy drew away in embarrassment, unsure of himself, liking the woman on the bed and yet afraid of her….

‘What is wrong?’ she asked. ‘I’m tired’, he said. The woman’s friendly smile turned to a look of scorn; but she saw that the he was only a boy whose eyes were full of unhappiness, and she could not help pitying him. (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

However, the same boy takes initial step in love making with Mrs. Meena Kapoor in whose house he is sheltered on a room on the roof. In a picnic at jungle, he and Meena get an opportunity in the loneliness of the jungle. A different Rusty can be found here. He avoids his involment in sex with the prostitute that is safe; and he takes risk to express his passion for Meena who is mother of his student Kishan.
Besides, her husband and other boys are at just a little distance. Now he seems aggressive:

It was shattered by a piercing shriek, a cry that rose on all sides, echoing against the vibrating air; and, instinctively, Rusty put his arm round Meena—whether to protect her or to protect himself, he did not really know—and held her tight.

‘It is only a bird,’ she said, ‘of what are you afraid?’

But he was unable to release his hold, and she made no effort to free herself. She laughed into his face, and her eyes danced in the shadows. But he stifled her laugh with his lips.

It was a clumsy, awkward kiss, but fiercely passionate, and Meena responded, tightening the embrace, returning the fervor of the kiss. They stood together in the shadows, Rusty intoxicated with beauty and sweetness, Meena with freedom and the comfort of being loved. (Ruskin, The Room on the Roof)

It may be a part of Bond’s technique to create exciting atmosphere to give way to suppressed emotion during the loneliness of the picnic. In the short story Love is a Sad Song, he makes use of the same technique of going to natural and silent spots close to or in the forest where his characters get opportunity to let out their passion by kissing, embracing their beloved. He is far more advanced Indian writer in depicting the element of sex in his fiction.

After violent encounter Rusty leaves his house and European community for ever. He struggles for shelter and bread and butter. But with the help of Indian friends Ranbir and Somi he gets this problem solved up to some extent. He is introduced to
the Kapoors, Mr.Kapoor, his beautiful wife Meena and their only son Kishan. They offer him a room on their roof and work of teaching English to Kishan. He is appointed as a tutor for Kishan. The young boys Rusty, Ranbir, Somi, Suri and Kishan spend most of the time together. They enjoy every light moment of life in the company of one another. It helps Rusty to forget his past life of restrictions and torturing at Mr.Harrison. Bond throws light on other adolescent boys like Ranbir, Somi, Suri and particularly Kishan. Kishan gets more freedom after Rusty’s appointment as his teacher. He is very naughty boy. His father Mr.Kapoor is found most of the time under the influence of wine. The boy makes use of his drunkard father by loafing every time, eating outside food at bazaar and spending money freely with his friends.

Life is like the pully; ups and downs are inseparable parts of life. An important turn takes place in Rusty and Kishan’s happy going life when Mrs.Meena Kapoor passes away in a car accident. In addition to that Mr.Kapoor gets remarried after short period of time of his first wife’s death. He does not prove to a good husband and a responsible father. It worsens Kishan’s condition. He becomes orphan in spite of his father’s being alive. Any step parent can never take the place of the real parent. David in the novel David Copperfield after losing his father, is found in pitiable condition. Ruskin Bond himself had gone through the same circumstances. After his father’s death, his mother got married with an Indian, Mr.Hari Bond. He always missed his father and lost his mother’s love even if she was alive. Kishan’s becoming orphan makes him more carefree. Rusty’s role becomes more important now. The growing up boy, Rusty has to perform the role of a guardian for Kishan. He himself is also shocked to hear the sad news of Meena’s death. A seventeen year boy becomes mature all of a sudden. He begins to comment on life like a philosopher. Bond brings out his inner grief and thought process:

Rusty was overcome by a feeling of impotence and futility, and of the unimportance of life. Every moment, he told himself, every moment someone is born and someone dies, you can count them one, two, three, a birth and a death for every moment… what is this one life in the whole pattern of life,
what is this one death but a passing of time… and if
I were to die now, suddenly and without cause,
what would happen, would it matter… We live
without knowing why or to what purpose. (Ruskin,
The Room on the Roof)

Kishan’s aunt takes him to Lucknow. Soon Rusty feels extreme loneliness as
his other fast friend Somi also leaves Dehra Doon. Once he felt like the emperor of
the kingdom in his room on the roof, but now it appears deserted and lonely. The
grief of his beloved Meena’s death becomes more painful in the absence of his
friends. He thinks to go to England. But before he decides, he wishes to see Kishan.
He reaches Haridwar at Mr.Kapoor to see Kishan. He comes to know there that
Kishan has become a professional thief who robs people for some gang of pick
pocketers. He is wanted by the police. An adolescent always requires shelter, love and
direction of parents. Otherwise, there is strong possibility of his spoiling life in bad
habbits and sometimes criminal acts. Rusty moves from the house in order to search
Kishan. He ultimately finds out Kishan who has changed a lot. His body looks very
thin. But his mind works quicker. He succeeds to hide himself from the police. The
society makes this homeless boy clever and practical. Rusty observes that before only
one month he had clung to Rusty for protection; now Rusty looks to him for
guidance. They plan to return to Dehra and start some work. Kishan suggests him to
have students to teach and he himself will start a chaat shope.

At the end of the novel, Rusty like a wise senior friend brings Kishan back to
normal life from the world of crime. Both friends come back to the paradise, the room
on the roof to bathe at the water-tank and listen to the morning gossip, to sit in the
fruit trees and eat in the chaat shop and make a garden on the roof. Of course, time
has changed. They have separated from the owner of the house Mr. and Mrs.Kapoor
and some friends like Somi. They have many challenges and bread and butter is the
first one. The great sign of relief is that they are together now, much experienced.
There are struggles, setbacks, failures, but hope and optimism.

The Room on the Roof has earned fame for Ruskin Bond. In comparison to
regular or traditional novels, this novel seems short in size with one hundred and
fourteen pages. Yet it presents an interesting world of the growing ups. Here, readers come across so many leading features of the adolescents like their physical growth, curiosity towards sex, making friendship, carefree life with friends, planning and struggling for earning, feeling of insecurity in the absence of parents and elders, developing bad habits, sense of rebellion, cherishing dreams for better future and many other. Bond himself is present in many of the scenes of the story. A larger autobiographical element can be observed here. Some names of the boys have not been changed in the story like Ranbir and Somi who in real life had helped Ruskin Bond remarkably in his struggling days. The essence of entire novel can be felt in the following piece of verse by Sarah Doudney that Bond quotes about the youth period:

    The pure, the bright, the beautiful,
    That stirred our hearts in youth,
    The impulse to a wordless prayer,
    The dreams of love and truth;
    The longings after something lost,
    The spirit’s yearning cry,
    The striving after better hopes…
    These things can never die! (Sarah)
**Vagrants in the Valley**

*The Room on the Roof*, ‘Vagrants in the Valley’ and ‘Delhi is not Far’ are three novels written in sequence. The second novel starts where the first one ends and the third novel extends the story of Rusty of earlier two novels. The first two novels explore life of the growing ups. The names of the characters remain the same. It is a story of struggle of the coming to the age of two boys Rusty and Kishan to settle in life. Besides, it also depicts Rusty’s effort to search what his father had left for him at the time of his death. Through this search, Bond makes the readers familiar with carefree wandering, the most amusing activity for the adolescents. The growing ups always enjoy wandering with friends in any area and with any season. In R.K.Narayan’s *Swami and Friends*, Swami and his friends eagerly wait for the vacation in order to wander carelessly. Even during school days, they manage time to run away from home, away from parental authority. *Vagrants in the Valley* takes the readers in the beautiful hills of the Himalaya through the roaming of Rusty and his friends.

The novel begins with the return journey of Rusty and Kishan from Haridwar to Dehradoon by foot through forest. As discussed earlier, after losing the parents’ shelter Kishan begins pick-pocketing in Haridwar. He begins to live life as a thief and goes out of treck. Rusty proves himself as real teacher by bringing him back to the right treck. They, on the way, plan to make sincere effort to find some work to live smoothly. Rusty earlier planned to go to England with a view to making his career as a writer. In fact, he has completed some chapters of his first novel. But for the sake of his student and friend Kishan, he changes his most important decision of his life. He wants to settle Kishan first and then himself. Adolescents demonstrate more maturity and sense of responsibility in some cases. Rusty has not any blood relation with Kishan and yet he thinks about his life and gives first priority to his settlement. At only seventeen years age, Rusty has suffered a great loss. He lost his own parents at very young stage; he left his cruel guardian Mr.Harrison; he also departed from Somi, his very close friend who had shifted to Amritsar and above all he lost Meena, Kishan’s mother whom he loved whole-heartedly. On the way to Dehra, they plan to catch a train to avoid long and constant walk. In the railway-station at Raiwala, they come in contact with an American who offers Rusty Brandy. After some drink the
liquor finds its effect on the boy. He opens his heart before a stranger, an American gentleman and says:

But then they went away. Somi went away, everyone went away. What could I do, but go away too? What could I do when Kishan’s mother died, but go away? And if it wasn’t for Kishan, I would never have come back. I tell you that straight, sir- I would never have come back. I wouldn’t be here now, talking to you, if it wasn’t for Kishan.

(Ruskin, Vagrants in the Valley)

Rusty’s care for Kishan shows the dedication of an adolescent boy for his friend. He is not a selfish person like majority of the people who think about their own self. He delays his trip to England for the sake of Kishan. Even at such young stage, he performs the role of a parent for Kishan. He himself is without any shelter or support but he provides security to another orphan and helpless boy. Bond describes the bond between these two true friends and some personal detail of Rusty:

Rusty felt more at ease with Kishan than he did with anyone else; probably because Kishan had been one of his first friends, because they had grown swiftly together from childhood into adolescence. Rusty had never been at ease with anyone until he had met Somi and Kishan. His mother had died when he was very young, and his father had not lived much longer. His mother was a shadowy figure, and though he remembered her, she seemed in his mind, to have less substance than his father. He had hated his guardian, who had looked after him when his father died. (Ruskin, Vagrants in the Valley)

This is an interesting story of growing up boys who look after one another. All of them are orphan except Somi and Hathi. Rusty has lost his parents, Kishan’s mother died and his father doesn’t care for him; Devinder is homeless and orphan too; Sudheer, the Lafunga is a perfect wanderer having no home and Goonga, a dumb boy
who speaks only one word ‘Goo’ is also without family. Bond forms a caring family of the young homeless boys who prove to be a support for one another. They do not make false promises of friendship, but stand by their friends in every difficulty. When Rusty needs money to go to the hills, he is financially helped by Devinder and Sudheer. Rusty provides accommodation to Devinder in the church where Rusty and Kishan secretly make a temporary home. They struggle a lot to find a cheap room but fail. They spend some nights in maidan. While roaming in the town in search of job from school to school, Rusty reaches an abandoned church St. Paul’s church. It is dirty and dark but Rusty and Kishan can live here together as it is possessed by no one.

Bond also removes the prejudice of the English people towards Indians through Rusty’s friendship with the local community. Rusty’s guardian, Mr.Harrison feels the sense of superiority and constantly refuses him to mix with the local people. Perhaps, the orphan Anglo-Indian boy, Rusty might have not been so cared and loved in England as he is by Indian friends. In real life too, Ruskin Bond was well cared and loved by Indian well-wishers.

When Mrs. Bhushan, an old friend of Kishan’s mother meets him in the bazaar, she is surprised to see him in such a pitiable condition. He is wearing torn clothes and looking like a beggar. She takes him her home with her so that she can make him a good and healthy boy again. She tells him that that is the end of his wandering. The boy has to surrender before the commanding personality of Mrs. Bhushan. This makes his friend Rusty waiting at the Clock Tower. After a long waiting, Rusty moves to from there. An important turn takes place in his life when he accidently comes across Mr.Pettigrew, an elderly English gentalman. He informs Rusty that he knew his father well. He also suggests the boy to visit his aunt living somewhere in the hills near Lansdowne to collect whatever fortune his father had left from her. The boy shows interest in the suggestion and soon moves towards the hills with his friend Sudheer. He visits Hathi at Manjari on the way. Bond describes the boys’ adventurous journey through beautiful forest. They face certain troubles in the form of hunger, cold, wild animals like bear and ultimately reach their destination, at the fair English lady’s house amid the hills. After some conversation, she recognizes Rusty as her nephew. She offers the boys meal and shelter. She informs Rusty that his father had left nothing for him except few books especially Alice in Wonderland,
Treasure Island, and Mister Midshipman Essay which had been Rusty’s grand father’s, then his father’s and finally his own now. What more precious treasure for a boy can be whose ambition is to become a writer than books as heritage from his ancestors. He decides to keep the books, because they they had once been part of his life. They are the only link between him and his father- they are his only legacy. The boys take leave from the lady for Rishikesh. At Rishikesh Rusty informs Sudheer his plan to become a writer and can not continue wandering longer. He wishes to return to Dehra. He says to Sudheer:

‘I don’t know, Sudheer. What’s the use of anything, for that matter? What would be the use of staying with you? I want to give some direction to my life. I want to work, I want to be free, I want to be able to write. I can’t wander about the hills and plains with you forever.’ (Ruskin, Vagrants in the Valley)

Rusty’s words are meaningful that indicate the reality of the growing ups. Every adolescent desires to be something. He/She wishes to create his/her own identity. This is the crucial stage to give some direction to life. In other words, this stage determines the path of life. In addition to that, Rusty no longer can stay with Sudheer as he is a thief. He is wanted by police for stealing one thousand rupees form a sheth in Dehra. He is elder to Rusty for three of four years and has already decided his career. Kishan is already in safer condition with his relatives. Rusty has to think seriously about his goal. He returns Dehra alone with an affectionate departure from Sudheer. He pays a visit at Mr.Pettigrew who informs him that the books he has collected from his aunt as the legacy from his father are extraordinary particularly Alice in Wonderland which is the first edition, a rare copy to be found. It may approximately cost more than five or six hundred pounds, a big amount at that time. He discusses about his future with Mr.Pettigrew who advises him to go to England where he may become a successful writer rather than in India. Rusty leaves the oldman’s house with assurance of help whenever he needs. He is eager to see Kishan. He rushes to Mrs.Bhushan’s house. Silently he creeps up to the window and peeps into the room where Kishan and Aruna are listening music. Finding Kishan in a happier condition, he moves from there secretly without meeting his dearest friend. This is real friendship of Rusty that he feels happy to his friend in a better condition.
The next person he meets before he leaves Dehra is Devinder. He can not go away without seeing him. He informs him about his plan to go to England.

Like Narayan’s *Swami and Friends*, Bond ends this novel with Rusty’s departure (may be for ever) from his fast friends Kishan and Devinder at railway station. Narayns narrates Rajam’s farewell from Malgudi and his classmates Mani and Swami when Rajam gets in a train in the last scene of the novel. Kishan and Devinder show maturity by not being sad but pleased and hopeful at the time of Rusty’s farewell as he is going to materialize his dream. Bond describes this emotional scene of parting friends at the railway station:

He waved to them from the window, and they waved back, smiling and wishing him luck. They were not dismayed at this departure. Rather, they were pleased that Rusty’s life had taken a new direction; they were impressed by his good fortune, and they took it for granted that he would come back some day, with money and honours. Such is the optimism of youth. (Ruskin, Vagrants in the Valley)

There is a closer connection between Bond’s fiction and the facts of his life, means autobiographical elements. His autobiography *Scenes From a Writer’s Life* witnesses this connection. In real life, when Bond departed from his friends and relatives to go to England, the same situation took mplace:

I stroked Haripal’s nose. ‘Everything is lovely tonight, Hoppa. Your nose, it is the most beautiful nose in the world. I shall miss it.’ The nose registered Haripal’s disapproval, for he is not sentimental. ‘I’m glad you are going. When I see you again, you’ll be a big, important man.’ Chhotu clung to me excitedly. ‘Send me stamps. Send me pictures. And ribbons for Prickly Heat!’
Somewhere a whistle blew and a gong sounded. The noise and rushed increased. Haripal and Kishan shook me by the hand and Dul flung his arms around my neck and embraced me. I stepped on to the moving train. I stood at the door. The little group of four stood together, waving desperately; receding, falling from my reach...Haripal’s loping gait, Chhotu’s brawling affection, Dul’s wink...drifting away with the wave of a hand. Tearing along the platform, helter-skelter, shouting at the top of his voice, came Somi. He drew level with the carriage before the engine gathered speed. ‘Goodbye, Somi!’ I shouted. ‘Goodbye, Ruskin!’ he laughed as he ran, panting with the tears running down his cheeks; and in his voice I recognized the familiar love of fun and life. ‘And don’t forget how to laugh!’ (Ruskin, Scenes From a Writer's Life)

Only few names of boys are changed in Vagrants in the Valley otherwise the feelings remain the same in both scenes in fact and in fiction.

The novel Vagrants in the Valley peeps into the life of the growing up vagrant boys. The novel shows how the adolescent boys turn to be wanderers. Every human being desires for two fundamental elements: freedom and love. This is also applicable to the adolescents. Most of the boys in the novel have been deprived of freedom and love. Rusty’s guardian fails to provide him affection and liberty. As a result, he seeks them somewhere else and runs away from home. Kishan too has the same fate. His mother’s death and his father’s failure in looking after him make him a vagrant. Devinder is also homeless. These homeless and deprived boys make a group like family for one another. They have only one relationship in the world that is friendship which provides them both freedom and love. Kishan’s distant relative Mrs.Bhushan tries to shelter him and takes him her home. But the boy constantly misses the jolly company of his friends and every time longs to be with them. He feels that he has been kidnapped. However, he has some future under Mrs.Bhushan’s guardianship. She manages to restart his studies.
The boys in the novel are close to adulthood. They plan to be independent financially. Rusty makes sincere efforts to get work at school; Kishan talks about starting a chaat shop and Devinder has started making money by selling combs and buttons. He succeeds to continue his studies with his small business. He is a hard working Sikh boy who gives some practical advices to Rusty to make a successful career in the field of creative writing. The desire to be something in life can be found at its peak at the late-adolescence stage.

The novel introduces a realistic world of the adolescents. The life story of struggling boys inspires other growing ups to cherish dreams like Rusty and make sincere efforts to fulfil them. Devinder’s hard work inspires to continue studies in spite of adverse conditions. Bond conveys a good message through Rusty, Kishan, Devinder and Sudheer that if one is alone, homeless and helpless, one can be the support for other homeless and helpless.
**Ruskin Bond’s Short stories**

Ruskin Bond is considered as a master of short story writing technique. His stories reflect the same world as we live in. He does not romanticize the stories or characters. Rather his scenes are from the day-to-day life. His narrative style creates a verbal picture of human relationships. He is most probably present in most of the scenes. His stories seem mixture of fact and fiction. Anuradha Basu observes:

Ruskin Bond’s short stories are like photographs. They give us a picture of an instant, almost like the flash of a camera. With Bond, each story is also an experience. There are two ways in which these experiences have been unfolded; firstly through the experiences of Bond as and secondly through his experiences as an adult. The experiences could be of some passing incident of life uniquely remembered though; or it could be just a vision, a glimpse, a happening or a passing relationship. (Anuradha)

Bond’s short fiction introduces a variety of themes and human sketches. Undoubtedly, like R.K. Narayan, in his writing the locale most probably remains the same, the foothill of the Himalayan especially surrounding Dehradun. However, he does not restrict himself to this territory only. As per the pattern of the story, setting in his stories extends up to many other places far from Dehradun. He reflects the life of various places of North Indian region. On the other hand, Narayan’s characters hardly step out from Malgudi. The researcher aims here to analyse five short fictions of Ruskin Bond reflecting different aspects of the growing ups like innocence, bravery, feeling of love, romance, honesty, physical attraction for opposite sex and many other.
Chachi’s Funeral

Ruskin Bond’s stories highlight the life of the valleys of Uttrakhand, the Himalayan foothills. They show life as it is without romanticizing or exaggerating it. *Chachi’s Funeral* is one of the best specimens which indicate Bond’s understanding of the child and growing up’s psychology in effective manner. His child and growing up characters behave in the same way as everywhere. Anger is temporary and love is permanent, is the central idea of this story. It deals with three main characters, Sunil, a boy of ten, his cousin Madhu, a dark slim girl of twelve and their relative Chachi who is chachi for Sunil and ‘Mammi’ for Madhu. The story begins with a very interesting declaration that Chachi died at 6 pm on 5th April and came to life again exactly twenty minutes later. The entire story narrates how it happens. This statement invites the readers to go through the story and see how adolescents react in particular situation.

A ten year boy Sunil is a mischievous boy like most of the boys of his age. His parents do job in office and the boy is left with his chachi. She is a fairly tolerant, easy going person. She manages the house-hold responsibilities well including bringing up her own small sons, daughters, nephews and nieces. She is a simple woman and can not understand the growing boy Sunil. He is an additional burden for her. She has also to cook for him while his parents go to office.

Moreover, Sunil troubles her more. He does mischievous things to annoy her. An incident creates strong sense of hatred in Sunil’s heart for his chachi. One day, he feels intensely hungry. He fails to have anything in the kitchen to satisfy his hunger. He ultimately traces honey on the top of the shelf. He tries his best to reach the honey bottle. But, by chance the bottle falls on the ground with a crash. His chachi appears to the scene of accident before the boy can sleep away. The angry woman deals him three or four blows of her sliper across his head and shoulders. She begins to weep after this incident while the boy’s proud is hurt.

This is a kind of routin incident. But the reaction of young boy Sunil is astonishing. He steps to the roof and goes to his secret place where he hides his treasure in the form of marbles, kites, kite-string, tops and a clasp-knife. He collects
the knife and whispers fiercely: ‘I will kill her! I will kill her!, I will kill her!’
(Ruskin, Chachi's Funeral)

As soon as he whispers, his cousin Madhu appears to the scene and listens to this remark. Madhu is just two years elder than Sunil but she is very mature. She inquires everything behind his hostile feeling for his chachi. She handles the situation as if she were an adult and experienced human being. Bond presents this conversation between these two youngsters which proves the girl’s mental and intellectual growth:

‘Who are you going to kill, Sunil?’ ‘Chachi’, said Sunil, ‘She hates me, I know. Well I hate her too. This time I’ll kill her.’ ‘How are you going to do it?’ ‘I’ll stab with this’, he shows her the knife. ‘Three times, in the heart.’ ‘But you’ll be caught. The C.I.D. are very clever. Do you want to go to jail?’ ‘Won’t they hang me?’ ‘They don’t hang small boys. They send them to boarding-schools.’ ‘I don’t want to go to a boarding-school.’ (Ruskin, Chachi’s Funeral)

The above conversation indicates certain unexpected reaction of the young. Sunil has decided to kill his chachi on not a very serious reason. She, as a reaction of crashing the jar of honey in her kitchen beats the mischievous boy. But the boy’s determination to kill her with his clasp-knife is unpredictable. Moreover, Madhu’s knowledge about law at the age of twelve is also surprising. She informs the boy that he will not be hanged but sent to boarding-school because he is a young boy. Bond astonishes the readers here by such knowledge about law of a mere twelve year girl. Bond also satirizes here on the institute of the boarding-school when the boy is ready to be hanged but fears to go to the boarding-school for killing his Chichi. The last part of their conversation shows this ill-feeling of the boy: ‘I don’t want to go to a boarding-school.’

As it is noted above, Madhu is a wise girl who finds out an excellent idea to calm the boy’s fury. She makes a rough drawing of Chachi with the help of pencil
and paper. She sketches a big heart in the region of Chachi’s stomach on the paper. Then, she asks the boy to stab the Chachi to death. The boy’s eyes shines with excitement. He finds a great new game. He plunges his knife three times into Chachi’s pastel breast. Madhu declares that he has killed her. The next action shows how youngsters imitate the adult’s world minutely. They decide to cremate her dead body. They set fire to the paper. In a few minutes all that remains of Chachi are a few ashes. The girl here lets out the rage from the boy’s heart using her fruitful mind. She says that poor Chachi is dead now. The story doesn’t end here. They talk to put her sacred ashes in the river, but decide to put it in the drain. Madhu collects the ashes and throws the ashes downward from the balcony. Some the ashes settle on the tree and a few reach the drain and are carried away by a sudden rush of the kitchen-water.

For most of the readers the story is over here. But, Bond produces a moving scene at the climax of the story. When the ashes are thrown, Madhu turns to Sunil. What she finds is like the anti-climax of the story. She sees big tears on the boy’s cheeks. Bond narrates very touching picture in words:

‘What are you crying for?’ ‘Chachi. I didn’t hate her so much.’ ‘Then why did you want to kill her?’ ‘Oh, that was different.’ ‘Come on, let’s go down. I have to do my home work.’ (Ruskin, Chachi’s Funeral)

As they come down the steps from the roof, Chachi emerges from the kitchen. Sunil rushes to her and tries to get her arms around her waist. He tells her that he loves her so much and requests her not to leave them. She observes a genuine affection in his eyes. She kindly takes him back to the kitchen.

The story presents the innocent world of the growing ups. Bond indicates how temporary the young boy’s anger may be. Sunil stabs his Chachi but soon repents for his act. This sense of guilt is the strength of the adolescents. Sunil is too sensitive here while Madhu’s presence of mind wins readers’ admiration. She tackles the situation like a wise person and controls it. Their decision to cremate the deadbody after murder of Chachi and to put the sacred ashes in to river demonstrates how the
adolescents observe the adult world, traditions, customs, rituals and many more things and their wish to behave like the elders. This story highlights how the twelve year boy, Sunil feels so sorry and sad after his temporary anger for his aunt subsides.
Thief

Ruskin Bond’s creative writing exhibits endless variety. He introduces an interesting world of innocent children, confused growing ups and retired, aged folk. He also takes readers to the lovely forest of the foothills of the Himalaya and the same writer completes a story within the four walls of the same room. His themes also vary from story to story. He talks realistically about human affairs of day to day life. In contrast, certain things remain as integral part of Bond’s writing like the beauty of flora and fauna, streams, rivers, trees, hills, mountains, certain animals such as monkey, dog, tiger, panther, bear etc., many Himalayan birds, railway station, train and a lot more.

The present story The Thief as the title suggests, peeps into the life of a thief. It is based on the recollection of a thief. Like many of Bond’s stories, this is also told by first person singular. The narrator is an adolescent boy of fifteen. In the very first sentence of the story, he informs that he is a thief. Even at the age of fifteen, he is an experienced and fairly successful hand. Another character of the story is Arun, about twenty year boy. The narrator meets Arun for the first time in a wrestling match. He finds a prospective client in Arun. To materialize his plan to rob Arun, the narrator introduces himself as Deepak by a pseudonym. In fact, Deepak is his fifth name. Like a professional thief, the narrator changes or he has to change his name time to time. He expresses his desire to work for Arun. But Arun refuses to engage him as he is not able to pay money as salary. The narrator ultimately requests to give him only meal and he would cook for his master, Arun. The agreement is done at last and Arun takes him his home.

Kind and generous Arun treats Deepak, the narrator well. Deepak does not know how to cook. But Arun does not mind it. He promises Deepak to teach him reading and write his name. Arun shows trust in Deepak and makes him buy his daily supplies. Deepak is smart enough to make good profit out of it daily. Although Arun has some hint about this theft he prefers to ignore it. Instead he completely relies on Deepak and hands over him the keys of his room in order to make it easy for Deepak to get into his room in his absence. Though Deepak gets some fair chances to rob
Arun, it is altogether quite difficult for him to workout his plan to rob Arun. In addition, Arun is very careless and kind and that is why he hesitates to break his trust.

One evening the narrator finds a wad of notes in his master’s hand. He also observes his master putting the bundle under his mattress. It creates a temptation in the narrator’s mind to rob his master. It seems quiet astounding when Bond makes an adolescent thief, Deepak philosophic:

> It’s easy to rob a greedy man, because he deserves to be robbed; it’s easy to rob a rich man, because he can afford to be robbed; but it’s difficult to rob a poor man, even one who really doesn’t care if he’s robbed. (Ruskin, The Thief)

This philosophic growing up thief becomes realistic. He thinks that if he does not work, he will get out of practice. He is determined now to steal the money lying under his master’s matteress on the ground of his losing practice, his master’s extravagant nature and his not paying to the employee, the narrator. It is child’s play for him to collect the money and melt into the darkness outside. His master is asleep, when the theft is made. He proves that a thief is always thief; no matter how much he is treated sympathetically. This act takes palce without incident. He rushes to the station to catch The Amritsar Express.

The story takes unbelievable turn. After succeeding in theft, Deepak runs to the railway station, but some how he can’t get into the train. It is the situation like ‘To be or not to be’. His mind instructs him to run away in the train while his heart says something else. He hesitates to go away. This hesitation is a sign of enhancement. He has the stolen money but he feels isolated and loneliness. He begins to repent for breaking his master’s trust. Bond expresses the inner struggle of this boy in the following way:

> Perhaps it was also concern for Arun that drew me back; a sense of sympathy is one of my weaknesses, and through hesitation over a theft I had often been
caught. A successful thief must be pitiless. I was fond of Arun. My affection for him, my sense of sympathy, but most of all my desire to write whole sentences, drew me back to the room. (Ruskin, The Thief)

Ultimately having a prick in his conscience Deepak comes back to Arun’s house and disproving the saying that ‘a thief is always a thief’. He cautiously slipp back the money under the mattress and goes to sleep with a hope that Arun does’t know anything about the whole episode. Next morning, Arun gets up earlier than him and hands him a cup of tea with a wet five rupee note and promises him that now onward he would pay Deepak regularly and soon he would teach him to write full sentences. Although aware of everything Arun’s countenance doesn’t display any emotion and he behaves absolutely normal.

The story highlights the moral dilemma of the thief as well as his potentiality for goodness. As there is a saying: ‘Every sinner has future, and every saint has past.’ When a person truly repents for any sin or crime, he is pardoned. The story also appeals to believe that kindness enlightens kindness. The adolescent thief fortunately comes across Arun, a noble elder boy at a very crucial stage of life. Arun changes the path of the narrator’s life. This virtuous attitude reminds the great novel Le Miserable by Victor Hugo. Bishop transforms Jin Valjeen into a kind hearted person through extreme kindness in this celebrated novel. The story The Thief also presents the same message that a through criminal can be transformed into a virtous soul through love, compassion, kindness, sympathetic approach and kindness.

Adolescent phase is the time of enormous change. It is the process of converting a pre-mature one into mature stage. At this duration, a juvenile begins to differentiate what is right and what is not. In the entire universe, only human being possesses the sense of morality. This sense has its foundation in a man at adolescent days. Deepak in the present story becomes an ambitious boy from a professional thief because he listens to his inner voice.

The study of the story reveals on paradoxical fact that neither Arun nor Deepak has any parent to bring up them and yet the former shows intense kindness
while the letter follows a wrong path. If the society is to be blamed for Deepak to make him a thief, credit should be also given to it for molding Arun as a pure hearted human being. However, Deepak’s becoming a professional thief at just fifteen is a red signal for society.
**Night Train at Deoli**

Love at adolescent phase is very natural. It makes a growing up feel some strange feelings that has not been felt before. Love is a sad song may be the opinion of experienced people but for the juvelines it is heavenly joy. An adolescent falls in love very easily. The desire to love and to be loved is the strongest feeling at this stage. The story *Night Train at Deoli* is a dream of love. Dipan Kulsi remarks in this regard:

Romanticism is defined by S.T. Coleridge. “as an addition of strangeness to beauty” and Ruskin Bond has wonderfully analysed the term of illusive romanticism in *The Night Train at Deoli*. The story begins from infatuations but finally it leads to an ardent love of the narrator towards the basket seller. It cannot be denied that adolescence is a period of storm, turbulence and finally it leads to conclusion.

A period of psychological and physical transit. (Kulsi)

Trains have remained intrigal part in Bond’s in life and fiction. *The Night Train at Deoli* deals with a love affair that initiates and develops within the premises of insignificant railway station of Deoli village. Here, Ruskin Bond narrates his experience during one of his train journeys to Dehra as an eighteen-year-old boy. He tells us that he used to spend his vacation every summer in his granny’s place in Dehradun and had to pass a small lonely station, Deoli amidst the forest on the way. This station appears strange to him as no one got on or off the train there and nothing seemed to happen there. He wonders why the train stopped there for ten minutes regularly without reason and feels sorry for the lonely platform.

During a journey towards Dehra, as usual, the train haults for ten minutes at Deoli in the early morning at five. It is a cold morning. A young girl comes down the platform, selling baskets. The narrator looks at her with the feeling of admiration. Bond describes the first meeting of the narrator with the girl:

When she came to my window, she stopped. She saw that I was looking at her intently, but at first she
pretended not to notice. She had a pale skin, set off
by shiny black hair, and dark, troubled eyes. And
then those eyes, searching and eloquent, met me.
(Ruskin, The Night Train at Deoli)

The narrator gets down on the platform and goes to a tea stall. The girl follows
him there. She asks him to buy a basket. The narrator initially refuses to buy it, but
when she insists, he buys one basket from her. Both look at each other for quiet some
time. This is the world of love where eyes speak more. Just as it strikes a bond of
affection between them, the train begins to move again. Any extent of time duration
always seems short in love-meeting. The train leaves the station filling his heart with
strange feelings. He longs to see her, her searching and eloquent eyes, again on his
return journey. The meeting helps to break the monotony of his journey and brings in a
sense of attachment and responsibility towards the girl.

The protagonist while the return journey after two months recalls the girl he
had met at the Deoli station. It is not oneside affection from the writer only. The
following passage indicates the girl’s affection for the narrator:

I was looking out for her as the train drew into the
station, and I felt an unexpected thrill when I saw
her walking up the platform. I sprang off the foot-
board and waved to her. When she saw me, she
smiled. She was pleased that I remembered her. I
was pleased the she remembered me. We were both
pleased, and it was almost like a meeting of old
friends. (Ruskin, The Night Train at Deoli)

The second meeting makes both of them delighted to see each other, a smile
on their faces reinforcing it, and it seems like a meeting of old friends. Silence reigns
and speaks more than words. He desires to talk to her but does not do so. He tells her
that he needs to go to Delhi and she replies saying that she goes nowhere, perhaps she
expresses her helplessness. Both of them separate unwillingly as the train leaves the
station, with the hope of meeting again. The narrator spends the remaining journey
and a long time later thinking about her. The next summer, soon after his college term finishes, he rushes to go to Dehra, eager to meet the girl. This time he does not find her at the Deoli station though he waits for a long time. He feels deeply disappointed. On his way back to Delhi, he again waits anxiously to see her, but it ends in vain. On enquiry, he comes to know that the girl has stopped coming, and nobody knows about her whereabouts. Once again, he has to run for the train and invariably leave the station. He decides that once he would break the journey there, spend a day in the town, make enquiries and find the girl who has become an integral part of his life. The following year in summer, he again walks up and down the platform hoping to see her, but somehow, cannot bring himself to break the journey to look for her. He seems to be afraid of discovering about her, dreading about anything unfortunate that could have befallen her and wants to retain his sweet memories of her. As Bond’s stories are more realistic than romantic, this story also ends with the realistic situation of life. His protagonists are not like Bolywood heros who can achieve their beloved removing every obstacle at the end of movie. All the same, the narrator also suggests to his readers that he did not want to project himself like a hero of a movie where the hero would meet his sweetheart going through all hardships and win her over. He prefers to keep hoping and dreaming, waiting for the girl. The author brings the readers to a realistic world rather than a fictitious, imaginary, unreal world, driving home the fact that life is not like a fiction novel or a movie. Life is a constant process, which cannot be stopped. Human being can only carry memories forward while life goes on.

It is the case of the love at first sight for the narrator. He is fascinated towards the simple but beautiful basket selling girl. The first meeting makes him desire the next meeting. It fills his heart with sweet memories. But their love story develops in a different direction. Such cases are rarely found where the lovers have annual meeting. Perhaps, Bond conveys a message here that every love affair does not reach the destination of marriage in real life. There is a vast difference between real life and reel life. Moreover, Bond does not show the stage of madness of a lover here. The narrator seems to know that every thing that we dream and desire may not be achieved and we have to compromise. He is not a passionate lover to get his beloved by hook or crook. He is satisfied with her sweet memories. He wants to continue this teenage dream. He fears that his dream will be shattered by reality. Life seems more charming in
searching the dearest one rather than getting him/her. There is possibility that if you get, you may lose the charm. Sometimes, the way looks lovelier than the destination itself. Besides, the story indicates a fact that it is not necessary to know the person you love and it is also not necessary to love the person you know very well.
There is a proverb: ‘Education is chief defense of a nation.’ Government tries to provide this fundamental right of every child of our nation to get education. Today education spreads by leaps and bound. It is available to most of children of our country especially in developed states and to urban population. Still a lot more is to be done to facilitate the remote villages in forests, mountain area, islands, desert area and such isolated places. Bond presents the struggle of a young boy for education in his thrilling short story *Panther’s Moon*. Bisnu, an adolescent boy of twelve is the protagonist, proves to be a real hero of this breathtaking tale. He takes pain of walking ten miles per day to attend school that is five miles away from his isolated village. Even his life is in danger because of a man-eater panther in and surrounding his village, Manjari, he wishes to go to school. Bond creates here the thrill of the encounter of a man-eater panther with Bisnu and other villagers. The panther endangers the life of the surrounding hilly area of Manjari. The story also depicts a twelve year boy’s struggle to handle the family responsibility. In the absence of his dead father, he has to head the family of a widow mother and an elder sister Puja. Bisnu’s story conveys an inspiring message for the students who do not study sincerely inspite of every facility that is easily available and incredible bravery by protecting his family from the dreadful panther at the risk of his own life.

The first sentence of the story indicates Bisnu’s extent of struggle. ‘In the entire village, he was the first to get up.’ He has to get up before five in the early morning every day except Sunday. At this early hour his dog Sheroo is asleep too. In half-an-hour he has to get ready and leave. His soft tread of bare feet wakes Sheroo, and the big black dog rises silently and pads behinds the boy. He takes bath in a stream near his village. When he returns to the house, he finds his mother making tea and *chapattis*. His sister Puja is still asleep. His mother serves break-fast to him and his pat dog. She also packs his simple lunch in some big green leave. And with the blessing of lord Ganesha he is ready for a long walk to his school. His sister Puja reminds him to buy a pair of bangles form Kemptee while returning from there. He moves towards school with usual insructins from his sister and mother. Bond narrates this venturesome daily journey of this enthusiastic school boy:
Bisnu shouldered his school-bag, kissed his mother, pinched his sister’s cheeks, and left the house. He started climbing the steep path up the mountain-side. Sheroo bounded ahead; for he, too, always went with Bisnu to school.…

Five miles to school. Everyday, except Sunday, he walked five miles to school; and in the evening, he walked home again. There was no school in his own small village of Manjari, for the village consisted of only five families. The nearest school was at Kemptee, a small township on the bus-route through the district of Garhwal. A number of boys walked to school, from distances of two or three miles; their villages were not quite as remote as Manjari. But Bisnu’s village lay right at the bottom of mountain, a drop of over two thousand feet from Kemptee. There was no proper road between the village and the town. (Ruskin, Panther's Moon)

This description shows Bisnu’s struggle for schooling. This is a story of pre-independent India. There are more facilities available now in the remote areas with the advancement of technology in India. But Bisnu’s zeal for study is inspiring. There are other boys in Manajri village, but Bisnu is the only one who goes to school. His mother would not mind, if he stays home and work in their field like other boys of his village. But Bisnu goes to school because he wants to study. No one can force him to go; and no one can stop him from going. He dreams to cross the bounbdry of his limited world of his small valley and be something in the big world. He firmly believes that education will enable him to fulfill his dream. Bond points out the desire of adolescent to learn reading and writing. In pre-independent India, schooling was not easily available to the children as it is today. Hence, to be educated was a great ambition for lower class children. In the story, The Thief Deepak succeeds to steal money from his master, Arun’s mattress. But the drastic change in his attitude towards his profession of theft is due to his affection, sense of sympathy for his master and most of all his desire to write whole sentences. This longing for literacy proves to be a turning point in his life.
Bond makes use of every opportunity to draw the verbal picture of the surroundings in the story. Here, he describes Bisnu’s walking through the Himalayan forest and his harmony with the creatures there like monkeys, and other birds. The boy enjoys the company of trees, mountains, rivers, springs. Bond shows the bond between a human being, Bisnu and a big black dog, Sheroo. Naturally, children and growing ups have special fascination for pat animals like cat, dog, cow, horse and birds. They come across them within the home or streets and other places outside their home. They may give special name to animals especially cats and dogs as it is here Sheroo, Bisnu’s pet dog. Adults may be interested in such matters but they may not pay attention to them on account of their busy schedule and worries of worldly responsibilities.

When Bisnu walks three miles through woods with Sheroo, he reaches a junction of two paths. Here Surru, another school-boy is waiting for him. He comes from a small village about three miles from Bisnu’s and closer to the town. He also faces hardship like Bisnu for study. He has to walk few miles to reach his school with two large milk cans slung over his shoulders. Every morning he carries this milk to town, selling one can to the school and the other to Mrs.Taylor, the lady doctor at the small mission hospital. He is a little older than Bisnu but not as well-built. He helps his family in this way. Many youngsters help earning for the family while learning. It is also a kind of training for them. In cities, students do part time jobs in order to be financially independent and to be trained for future responsibilities. Bisnu and Surru often meet at this junction to keep each other’s company for the remaining two miles to Kemptee.

Bond creates thrill and sense of danger in the story through these two friends’ conversation about panther. The title Panther’s Moon of this story is derived from this animal. Surru informs Bisnu that there was a panther in their village the previous night. Panthers are common in the hills and do not create a problem except during the winter months, when their natural prey is scare; then they may haunt the outskirts of a village, seizing a dog, or a stray goat. But if the panther is man-eater, it can endanger many lives. Bisnu rejects the idea of the panther’s being man-eater with a laugh. But the panther will prove fatal with the advancement of the story. They meet MalaRam, the postman of their area on the way and reach to their school at eight o’clock.
Bisnu respects his teacher, Mr. Nautiyal. He observes at school that his teacher is in bad mood. Bond peeps into the working of young students’ psychology in such situation. Bond depicts the observation of the young boy about his teacher’s spoiled mood:

‘Poor Mr. Nautiyal,’ thought Bisnu. ‘I wonder why he’s so upset. It must be because of his pay. He doesn’t get much money. But he’s a good teacher. I hope he doesn’t take another job. (Ruskin, Panther's Moon)

Tension increases with the advancement of the story. The first casualty can be noticed in the form of Sheroo’s hunt by the panther during the return journey. Bisnu realizes the tense situation when he is not responded by his dog. He finds dog’s collar, stained with blood. He does not search further. He feels insense pain on losing his dear dog. The adolescents are highly sensitive. Their affection is always true and pure. They love intensely and hate intensely too, as the story of I Want to know Why shows the young narrator’s hatred towards his ideal person at the end of the story. Here, Bisnu returns home with heavy heart on the great loss, Sheroo. He reaches home with tears in his eyes and bloodstained collar of the dog. Bond seems very powerful in pointing out the psychology of the growing ups. He shows how an adolescent boy and his little elder sister react in such tragic situation. Puja, Bisnu’s elder sister tries to comfort him on the loss of the beloved dog:

Bisnu was not a very sentimental boy, but he sorrowed for his dog, who had been his companion on many hike into the hills and forests. He did not sleep that night, but turned restlessly from side to side, moaning softly. After some time he felt Puja’s hand on his head. She began stroking his brow. He took her hand in his own, and the clasp of her rough, warm familiar hand gave him a feeling of comfort and security. (Ruskin, Panther's Moon)

Bisnu’s mother is worried now about his going to school. But there is no question of staying away from school for the boy. She advises him to be more careful
and to hurry at evening. The boy is still enthusiastic enough to attend his school. He has to set off earlier now than usual. He reaches to his school without Sheroo. He informs his teacher and other students about the tragic incident of the previous day. Sheroo is the beginning to be the victim of the most-feared man-eater panther. The next is nine-year-old Sanjay, son of Kalam Singh. He is attacked silently at night by the panther and dragges him out of the door. Fortunately, the boy cries loudly and his father approaches there to fight with the beast. The boy is freed but in terrible condition. He is badly wounded and his head bleeds constantly. He is shifted to the hospital and rescued after a lot of struggle. Bisnu has to stop going to school, because there is no one to accompany him and it is dangerous to go alone. He is worried as his final exam is only a few weeks off. He remains home helping his mother in the work and doing homework of the school.

After few days Bisnu gets opportunity to attend his class when Sanjay and his father go to the hospital for Sanjay’s dressing. His teacher and class-mates give him a warm welcome. His teacher advises him not to take any risk and do his best at home. He returns home with Sanjay and his father that day. Few days later, he starts going school as usual. One day, on his way home from school, he is caught in the rain. He is not in hurry as there is time to be dark. He finds a little goat on the way. He collects the kid and walks homeward. He has not gone very far when he hears the sawing grunt of a panther. The boy thinks every step to be secure. At last, he decides and climbs up a spruce tree. People living in forest or remoted regions most probably know swimming, climbing and many other skills that are required in critical conditions. The beast roars loudly beneath the tree. The boy is trembling with fright but clings firmly to the base of the tree. The panther is very cunning animal. It applies every trick to frighten the boy. But the boy is brave enough to face it.

On the Bisnu’s delay from school, his mother and sister stand doorway gazing anxiously. Sanjay’s father appears to enquire about the boy’s return. He and two other armed men go in search of the boy. Puja also joins them. She appears as a courageous girl. They move towards the jungle. They hear Bisnu’s shouting for help. The panther leaves the spot hearing the human sound coming towards the spot. Bisnu is rescued with the little goat. The frustrated panther does not wait long before attacking another human being. This time it is the postman, Mela Ram. The panther does not make mistake this time. Then an old woman is attacked out side her home at night. When
many people become the victim of the man-eater panther in the entire region, they seek help from the magistrate. But the magistrate is out of station and no one else has a gun in Kemptee. The fear spreads widely among the people.

The climax of the story takes place when the panther makes an attempt to attacks Puja. Bisnu and his sister are working in their field when Bisnu finds the sight of the panther on the rock. He fears lest the beast attacks his sister. He is ready and alert now to finish the man-eater animal. He alerts his sister from the approaching beast. The panther fails in his aim and falls into a ditch. Bisnu calls other men for help. They finish the panther after some attempts of the beast to run away from the danger. The killing of the man-eater panther gives relief to the people of this area. Bisnu emerges as the hero and finishes the panther. Readers hardly believe that a twelve year boy can be so brave that he can kill the most vicious cat, the panther and which has become man-eater. Bond also is found concerned about environment and the hunting of wild animals. He indicates the possible danger of the man-eater beasts through the conversation between Bisnu and Surru on the way:

We should be safe as long as a shikari doesn’t wound another panther. There was an old bullet in the man-eater’s thigh. That’s why it couldn’t hunt in the forest.

The deer were too fast for it. (Ruskin, Panther’s Moon)

Through this short conversation of the school boys, Bond gives the reason, why the panthers or tigers become man-eater. Ultimately, man is responsible for their turning so wild for human race. Bisnu turns up here as a mature boy who understands that hostile activities of human beings for the wild animals make them so dangerous. This story highlights two brave adolescents Bisnu and his sister Puja who too shows extra-ordinary courage to join Kalam Singh and his assistant to find out missing Bisnu in the dark amid the forest. She helps them in critical condition and rescues her brother.
Love is a Sad Song

Love is always fascinating for the adolescents. They always like to love and to be loved. Ruskin Bond makes a fantastic use of this strong impulse among the growing ups in many of his short stories. *Love is a Sad Song* is a different kind of story as it presents an unusual bond between a thirty year adult the narrator and a teen-age girl of sixteen, Sushila. From structural point of view, this is a different kind of short story that is long and consists of twenty eight pages. Here, Bond resembles D.H.Lawrence, Thomas Hardy and such other short fiction writers whose some short stories are not short. For example, Hardy’s *Three Strengers* is a very long short story consisting more than forty pages.

*Love is a Sad Song* presents a love affair between unusual pair of lovers. The protagonist is thirty and the girl with whom he develops relation is sixteen. This story reminds the affair of Rusty and Mrs.Meena Kapoor in the novel *The Room on the Roof*. But the prime difference in the story is the narrator is almost double in the age in comparison to his beloved girl, Sushila; while Mrs.Meena Kapoor in the novel is double in the age of Rusty.

From the very beginning of the story, it is clear that this is a story told by the first person singular and the story of the recalling the past. The first three paragraphs seem poetic and full of emotion. They remind Oscar Wild’s *The Nightingle and the Rose*, a romantic short story written in poetic expression:

I sit against this grey rock, beneath a sky of pristine blueness, and think of you, Sushila. It is November, and the grass is turning brown and yellow. Crushed, it still smells sweet. The afternoon sun shimmers on the oak leaves and turns them a glittering silver. A cricket sizzles its way through the long grass. The stream murmurs at the bottom of the hill- that stream where you and I lingered on a golden afternoon in May.

I sit here and think of you, and try to see your slim brown hand resting against this rock, feeling its warmth. I am aware again of the texture of your skin,
the coolness of your feet, the sharp tingle of your finger-tips. And the pastures of my quivering mouth, and crush your tender breasts. Remembered passion grows sweeter with the passing of time. (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)

The whole descriptin of the autumnal beauty is of the foot-hills of the Himalaya. The grey rock, blue skies, brown any yellow grass, the golden afternoon mesmerize the readers. The narrator is in the sweet memory of his beloved Sushila belonging to Delhi who used to visit the narrator and her uncle’s rented house in vacation. He thinks of her being at her home far in the city. The protagonist unfolds the bundles of past memories. He recalls the days, hours and moments he had spent with her. When he met Sushila for the first time, she was only ten year innocent girl and he had fatherly affection for her. He had seen her playing naked in the rain but never thought of loving her. But once, she reaches sixteen, his feelings change:

A year ago my feelings about you were almost parental! Or so I thought… But you are no longer a child; and I am a little older too. For when, the night after the picnic, you took my hand and held it against your soft warm cheek, it was for the first time that a girl had responded to me so readily, so tenderly. Perhaps it was just innocence; but that one action of yours, that acceptance of me, immediately devasted my heart. (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)

The mention of picnic reminds the picnic in The Room on the Roof in which Rusty kisses Meena Kapoor and she responds with the same passion. Here the same scene of love making is found but with a slight difference, the sixteen years old girl Sushila is not responding and remains almost passive:

Gently, fervently, I kissed your eyes and forehead, your small round mouth, and the lobes of your ears, and your long smooth throat; and I whispered, ‘Sushila, I love you, I love you, I love you,’ in the same way that millions and millions of love smitten young men have
whispered since time immemorial. What else can one say? I love you, I love you. There is nothing simpler; nothing that can be made to mean anymore than that. And what else did I say? That I would look after you and work for you and make you happy; and that too had been said before, and I was in no different from anyone. I was a man, and I was a boy again. (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)

Love making scenes increase with the advancement of the story. The protagonist and Sushila kiss each other in the loneliness of the jungle and mountains. He enjoys more freedom with her body. She too responds more passionately. It is also clear that the narrator is serious and alert in the physical relation with a teenage girl. He has no intension of exploiting her. He sincerely wishes to marry her. But he has to wait as Sushila is of sixteen and he can marry her after her eighteen years age. The way their relation develops in Indian society surprises the readers. It also astonishes the readers when Dinesh, Sushila’s uncle reveals that he knows about their love affair for two years. He and the narrator share the same house on rent in a town near rocks. Once, he enters unexpectedly in the room when the narrator and Sushila are lying in the bed. He does not speak anything and leaves the room. Moreover, the narrator sleeps with Sushila and her brother, Sunil in the same room. It too seems quite incredible that an adult man who is outsider sleeps with a growing up girl and her uncle does not mind it in spite of his knowledge about their love making. The narrator makes a proposal of marrying Sushila before her uncle. He tells that the girl is too young for marriage and he has to wait for two or three years. His conversation with the narrator throws light on his stand in the affair of his niece with the narrator when the narrator puts forward his marriage proposal before him:

‘It has happened too soon,’ he said. ‘She is too young for all this. Have you told her that you love her?’ ‘Of course, many times.’ ‘You are fool, then. Have you told her that you want to marry her?’ ‘Yes’ ‘Fool again. That’s not the way it is done. Haven’t you lived in India long enough to know that?’ ‘But I love her.’ ‘Does she love you?’ ‘I think
so.’ ‘You think so. Desire isn’t love, you must know that. Still, I suppose she does love you, otherwise she would not be holding hands with you all day. But you are quite mad, falling in love with a girl half of your age.’ (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)

Dinesh appears as more mature man than the narrator here, though the narrator is seven years older than him. He seems to know female’s feeling more than the narrator. He speaks a general and suggestive statement, ‘Desire isn’t love.’ And at the end of the story, this statement proves true. Sushila enjoys the narrator’s company more for her fulfillment of physical desire. Had her love been genuine, she would not have neglected the narrator’s true affection and not have an attraction for a bank officer. She is a typical girl. In her sixteen years life, she had third choice of lover or male. Earlier, a man of twenty three, named Promod expressed his feelings for her and she replied sympathetically. Then, the narrator whole-heartedly loves her and she responded passionately. Towards the end of the story, readers learn that she is interested in a bank officer with a car. May be, when she will find out more handsome and richer man, she may leave the bank officer too. She seems a whimsical girl who fails to identify true love.

Sex before marriage in Indian society is restricted. It astonishes the readers the way Dinesh handles his niece’s physical relation with a man of double age than hers. He takes the entire affair very easily. It shows that he does not have any objection with such a serious matter. He rather advises the narrator to be careful and not to give her baby at very young age. Here, Bond does not consider conservative Indian society about sex before marriage. If there had been any other elder, he might have attacked the narrator for such mischief. Sushila’s changing companion of opposite sex especially supporting the narrator’s sexual love for her shows her bold. Her age is too young to comment about her character. Age of sixteen is not a stage to know what character is. She only knows that she enjoys making love and does not think the possible consequences. At one night when she becomes very excited, she demands more and more sex from the narrator by saying: “Love me! Love me! I want you to love me.” (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)
She does not find any difference between love and sex. On the other hand, the narrator is not only interested in her body but also in her soul. He knows his limits. That’s why he controls himself and does not cross the limit. This is the difference between an adolescent and an adult. The narrator does not get more opportunity of loving her in Delhi where she stays with her family. She studies in a school there. The distance between them increases with the passing of time. He longs for her being eighteen so that he can ask her family for marriage. But her passion for him subsides slowly.

The end of the story is exactly like the title of it. The narrator is shocked when he is informed by Sunil that Sushila is nowadays attracted towards a bank officer who owns a car. He leaves Delhi with heavy heart. The title of the story is poetic. Love proves to be a sad song for the protagonist. His last comment at the end of the story:

‘I may stop loving you, Sushila; but I will never stop loving the days I loved you.’ (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)

It freshens the sweet memory of every one regarding their young days. Like many of Bond stories, here, too love does not reach marriage. Bond differs from most of Bollywood movies where love reaches its ultimate destination marriage. His stories reflect hard reality of life and not romantic dream. As this is a story of unusual pair of lovers, the end is expected. In Indian society such relationship is now hardly acceptable. Of course, the narrator does not fail because of social barriers only; his beloved proves unfaithful to him too. Besides, Bond artistically weaves the process of an adolescent girl’s physical growth when the narrator talks about Sushila’s physical development:

I did not notice you growing. Your face did not change very much. You must have been thirteen when you gave up skirts and started wearing the salwar-kameez. You had few clothes; but the plainness of your dress only seemed to bring out your own radiance. And as you grew older, your eyes became more expressive, your hair longer and glossier, your gestures more
graceful; and then, when you came to me in the hills, I found that you had been transformed into a fairy princess of devasting charm. (Ruskin, Love is a Sad Song)

Bond effectively presents some significant features of the growing up and the grown up in this story. From the research point of view about the adolescents, this story proves very fruitful.

This chapter analyzes Bond’s the portrayal of growing up characters. His of adolescent characters range from Sunil in Chachi’s Funeral to the narrato of the story Night Train at Deoli. Bond introduces young charactrs of all sages of adolescence like pre-adolescence, middle-adolescence and late adolescence in form of Sunil, a ten year boy, Madhu and Puja girls of twelve years, Bisnu, a twelve year boy, Dipak, a fifteen year boy. Sushila, a sixteen year girl. Rusty, a seventeen year boy, the narrato of the story The Night Train at Deoli is eighteen year old. There are other middle or late adolescents like Kishan, Somi, Ranbir, Hathi, Devinder, the girl at Deoli station found in Ruskin Bond’s fiction concerned here. Many of them are homeless and the world is home for them.
Works cited


