


Ruskin Bond's *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy*: An account of Adventures and Misadventures in the Life of Ruskin Bond

Shaleen Kumar Singh*
Associate Professor
Department of English
Swami Shukdevanand College
Shahjahanpur, U.P.

ABSTRACT

One of India's most adored authors, Ruskin Bond is well known for his touching prose and heartfelt tales. His autobiography, *Searching for the Rainbow: My Years with Daddy*, details his life's journey from early childhood through adolescence and his triumphs and setbacks. Ruskin Bond gives readers a look into his lovely upbringing in the little Indian town of Dehradun towards the beginning of the book. He talks about his father's time in the Indian Air Force and the effects his absence during World War II had on the family. Yet at this point, Ruskin Bond fell in love with reading and writing. Ruskin Bond was an inquisitive, daring child who frequently got himself into trouble. Throughout the book, he describes a number of instances where he was busted for stealing mangoes, engaged in altercations with other boys, and even got lost in the woods. Despite his naughty personality, his father constantly supported him and urged him to be loyal to himself.

Keywords: *Ruskin Bond, Adventures and Misadventures, World War II, Dehradun, Padma Bhushan.*

Ruskin Bond is a renowned Indian author, poet, and literary critic who has written for over six decades. Bond's writing career began in the 1950s, and he has since written over 500 short stories, essays, novels, and more. His work has been translated into many languages and has been adapted into several films and television series.

Bond's work is frequently distinguished by its clarity, subtle humour, and capacity to conjure a powerful sense of location. He has won numerous awards for his contributions to Indian literature, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Shri, and the Padma Bhushan. In his autobiography,

* Author: Shaleen Kumar Singh

E-mail: shaleen@sscollegespn.ac.in

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6558-9667>

Received 14 March, 2023; Accepted 19 March, 2023. Available online: 25 March, 2023.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy, he shares the story of his life, from his early childhood to his teenage years, and the adventures and misadventures he experienced along the way. The book opens with a glimpse into Ruskin Bond's childhood, where he describes his idyllic life in Dehradun, a small town in northern India. He talks about his father, who was in the Indian Air Force, and how his absence during World War II affected the family. However, during this time, Ruskin Bond discovered his love for books and writing.

As a young boy, Ruskin Bond was curious and adventurous and often got into trouble. He recounts several incidents in the book where he was caught stealing mangoes, fighting with other boys, and even getting lost in the forest. Despite his mischievous nature, his father always stood by him and encouraged him to be true to himself. He says:

Not many fathers are capable of tenderness towards their children. They are usually too busy 'earning a living for the family'- or that's the excuse! So I was lucky to have a father who gave me nearly all his spare time, who brought me books, took me for walks, shared his interests with me and held my hand in the dark. (Bond ix)

Little Ruskin arrives in Delhi at the beginning of the book after a troubled year spent in a hostel; the tale takes place during World War II. Here, Ruskin develops a strong relationship with his father while learning how to manage his life. In this book, Ruskin Bond vividly describes the years he lived in Delhi with his father.

They share interests in eating, travel, movies, and stamp collecting. However, the happy times are fleeting, and Ruskin's father contracts malaria. Aubrey Bond enrolls Ruskin at a reputable boarding school in Shimla because the world war is in full force. Ruskin enjoys his time in this boarding school and fits right in with the ambiance. Little Ruskin spends the day with Aubrey in Shimla, and they decide to move to London once the war is over.

One of the most memorable moments in the book is when Ruskin Bond and his father decide to build a treehouse in the forest behind their house. The construction of the treehouse was fraught with challenges, from finding the right tree to climb to gathering the necessary materials. However, Ruskin Bond and his father persevered, and the treehouse became a source of joy and adventure for him. Missing his father, he speaks:

Remember all the days I'd spent with my father during that year and a half in Delhi: helping him with his wonderful stamp collection; going to the pictures with him, to the bookshops and cafes in Connaught Place; holding his hand as he led me through the portals of old monuments- tombs and forts and palaces – and told me the stories that were buried beneath those ruins, and even when I'd been on my own- when

he was away all day on duty, or ill in hospital I had always known he would soon be home, walking in at the front door, tired but smiling, always smiling... (Bond 99)

The adventure that Ruskin Bond recounts in the book is his love for pets. He talks about the various animals he kept as pets, including a monkey, a squirrel, and a parrot. Ruskin Bond's father was very supportive of his son's love for animals, and even helped him build a cage for his parrot. However, Ruskin Bond's love for animals sometimes got him into trouble, such as the time when he was caught trying to steal a baby crocodile from the river. Despite his love for pets and adventure, Ruskin Bond also experienced moments of sadness and loss. He talks about the death of his mother when he was just ten years old and how it affected him. He also talks about his complicated relationship with his stepmother and how it was a source of tension in his childhood.

Throughout the book, Ruskin Bond shares his passion for writing and its role in his life. He talks about the various authors who inspired him, including Charles Dickens and Rudyard Kipling, and how writing helped him make sense of the world around him. Ruskin Bond also describes his challenges as a young writer, from dealing with rejection to finding the time and space to write. In the final chapters of the book,

Ruskin Bond reflects on his teenage years and the decisions he made that shaped his life. He talks about his sad emotions while going far from his father for the sake of school:

I did not cry or make a fuss when my dad said goodbye. He had promised to come up and see me at the first opportunity, and I knew he would keep his word. Having spent many days on my own in the Atul Grove flat, I had developed a certain fortitude, an ability to stand alone, a dependence on myself rather than on others. I was devoted to only one person- my father. And when he was'nt around, I got on with what I wanted to do. (Bond 52)

He talks about his decision to drop out of school and pursue writing full-time and how it was a difficult but ultimately rewarding choice. He also talks about his father's role in his life and how his unwavering support and encouragement helped him pursue his dreams.

In addition to the many adventures and misadventures that Ruskin Bond recounts in the book, *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy* also provides a glimpse into India's social and cultural context during the mid-20th century.

Ruskin Bond talks about the impact of World War II on India and the changes it brought to the country. He also touches upon the class and caste divisions that were prevalent in Indian society at the time and how they affected his life and the lives of those around him. He says:

On the following day the landlord and his wife invited me to have tea with them. There was bread and butter and strawberry jam. They were 'upper-caste' people and told me very gently that I should not be on the roads all day, roaming around with a 'low-caste' sweeper boy. I remained quite. I was a stubborn boy (and still very stubborn today) and when I wanted to do something I did not get into an argument. I just did what I wanted to do. I finished all their bread and jam, said thank you very politely and went back to playing with Raju. (Bond 38-39)

Ruskin Bond's writing provides a vivid picture of the India of his childhood, with its lush forests, winding rivers, and diverse communities. One of the recurring themes in the book is Ruskin Bond's relationship with his father. He says:

He gave me the habit of knocking out and examining my shoes every morning. I did not realize the importance of doing this, until one day a centipede dropped out of one of my shoes.

After that I was very careful to examine them. And it's a habit that is still with me. Only the other day I found a harmless little skink (a tiny member of the lizard family) in one of my shoes. It would have been crushed had I put my shoe on without the usual examination. Anyway, I deposited the little fellow (who reminded me of Bill the lizard from Alice in wonderland) on to the base of my rubber plant, and he seemed quite content there. But we have no control over the vagaries of nature. The next day he fell victim to a marauding cat. (Bond 6-8)

Despite his father's absence during World War II, Ruskin Bond idolized him and looked up to him as a role model. He talks about the many lessons his father taught him, from the importance of honesty to the value of hard work. Ruskin Bond's father was also supportive of his son's love for writing and encouraged him to pursue his passion.

Midway through World War II, when his parents had already "been at war with each other," he came to Delhi. His father was a member of the Royal Air Force and resided on Humayun Road in New Delhi in an Air Force hutment.

That summer, Bond encountered his first snake, walked around Red Fort's perimeter, collected water in an earthen jug called a *sohrai*, and was content to be by himself while his father was at work. They went to the movies and spent time organizing his father's collection of stamps while the father and son were together.

One of the most memorable misadventures that Bond recounts in his memoir is his encounter with a leopard in the hills near his home in Mussoorie. While out on a walk, Bond was suddenly confronted by the animal, which he describes as "big and powerful, with a wicked glint in its eye." Despite his fear, Bond managed to scare the leopard away by throwing rocks and shouting loudly. He narrates:

It happened one evening while he was taking Hitler for a walk in the forest. It was not really a forest, just a clump of pine trees on the ridge above the school. A leopard sprang out of the bushes and made off with the dachshund, leaving poor Mr Oliver holding a broken lead. A brief yelp, and Hitler was gone, providing a light supper for a hungry leopard. (Bond 93)

Another misadventure that Bond shares is his experience with a group of bandits while travelling by train. The bandits boarded the train and began robbing passengers, including Bond, who lost all of his possessions in the robbery. Bond describes the experience as "terrifying," but also notes that it taught him the value of resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity.

In his biography, Ruskin Bond also recounts a number of funny mishaps, like being lost in the woods while out hiking, running from a swarm of bees, and eating a fly while sipping tea. These stories add a sense of lightness and levity to the memoir and showcase Bond's ability to find joy and laughter in even the most challenging situations.

Despite the many misadventures that Bond has experienced throughout his life, he maintains a positive and optimistic outlook. He views each experience as an opportunity for growth and learning and emphasizes the importance of resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Another aspect of Ruskin Bond's life that he touches upon in the book is his love for nature. He talks about his many adventures in the forest behind his house, from building a treehouse to exploring the streams and rivers. Ruskin Bond's love for nature is reflected in his writing, which often features the natural world as a central theme. He says:

We were inclined to take nature for granted in those days. We had our forests and lakes and unpolluted rivers. There were still many birds and animals to be seen. Wild flowers covered the hill slopes. Crickets sang in the grass.

There was a small stream at the bottom of the hill, and sometimes we broke bounds in order to visit it and paddle in its shallow, clear waters. If we were caught we were given the back of Mr. Priestley's large hairbrush, but we didn't mind; the escapade was worth the punishment." (Bond 80)

In *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy*, Ruskin Bond also shares his insights on the craft of writing. He talks about the importance of finding one's own voice and style, and how it takes time and practice to develop as a writer. Ruskin Bond also provides valuable tips for aspiring writers, such as the importance of reading widely and observing the world around them.

Another important theme in the book is Ruskin Bond's love for books and reading. He talks about the many authors who inspired him, from Enid Blyton to William Wordsworth, and how reading helped him make sense of the world around him. Ruskin Bond's passion for books is evident in his writing, which often features literary references and allusions. Bond narrates:

I read whatever I could find in the bookshelf- books that I hadn't ventured to read before: Mr Midshipman Easy by Captain Marryat, a rollicking adventure story which kept me company till dawn. The next night it was Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. This one scared me stiff, and I resolved to avoid horror stories, at least until my father returned. (Bond 31)

My father was not a great one for making up parcels, preferring to send me picture postcards of famous ocean liners, trains, birds, racehorses or Long John Silver or the Mad Hatter, with little messages on the reverse suggesting that I read the books in which these characters appeared – that is, Pickwick Papers, Treasure Island, Alice in Wonderland, and others. (And in due course I did read all of them!) (Bond 78)

The book also provides a glimpse into Ruskin Bond's personal life, including his relationships with family and friends. He talks about his father's remarriage and the difficulties he faced in accepting his stepmother. He also talks about his close relationship with his maternal grandmother, who was a source of comfort and support for him during his childhood. Ruskin learns tragically one day that his father has passed away.

For the little youngster who was abandoned and has no one to care for him, the news is too difficult to handle. Both the author and the reader will find this section of the book to be quite upsetting. One of the most poignant moments in the book is when Ruskin Bond reflects on the death of his father:

Poor Mr. Young. He'd been handed the unenviable task of giving me bad news. Not just bad news.

This was something the headmaster should have done. But Mr Priestley was busy practising on his violin, and his wife did not think it was her duty.

Mr Young did his best. He put his hand on my shoulder and led me down past the school gate, down an avenue of young deodars. 'Your dear father', he stammered. 'Your dear father- god needed him for other things-'

I knew what was coming, and I burst into tears. I had no one else in the world- just that one dear father- and he had been snatched away. We had been taught that God was a loving, merciful being, and here he was doing the cruelest possible thing to a small boy. Why did he need my father? What could he possibly want him for? Did he want his stamp collection? (Bond 96-97)

He talks about his deep sense of loss and how it affected him. However, he also acknowledges the many lessons his father taught him and how they continue to guide him in his life and writing. Ruskin Bond's adventures in "Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy" are not just limited to the outdoors.

He also shares stories of his misadventures in school, including getting caught smoking and skipping class. Ruskin Bond's rebellious spirit often got him into trouble, but it also helped him forge his own path in life.

The notable adventure Ruskin Bond recounts in the book is his time spent working in a hotel in Dehradun. As a young man, he took on odd jobs to support himself and gain new experiences. Working in the hotel gave him a glimpse into the world of tourism and hospitality, but it also exposed him to the harsh realities of class and caste in Indian society. Despite the many challenges he faced, Ruskin Bond's adventures in *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy* ultimately celebrate life and the human spirit.

Whether exploring the forests and streams of his childhood or traveling across India as a young man, Ruskin Bond always approached life with curiosity and wonder. His stories inspire us to embrace adventure and pursue our passions, no matter our obstacles. He tells about his school days at Mussoorie thus:

The school in which I now found myself was fairly strict, but it was only the prep school and not as harsh or rigid as the senior school, which I would join two years later. The staff and teachers were an odd assortment. We had a headmaster who did not teach but who, as I mentioned earlier, played the violin at odd times of the day or night. His wife did not teach either, but spent a good deal of her time prowling about the corridors and dormitories trying to catch us out in various misdemeanours, such as pillow fighting, wrestling on the beds or singing loudly. Punishment, however, was not too severe. A whack or two on our backsides with the flat of a hairbrush was the worst we could expect.

One of the most striking aspects of Ruskin Bond's adventures is his deep connection to the natural world. Ruskin Bond has a profound love and respect for India's forests, mountains, and rivers, and he describes them in vivid detail throughout the book.

He talks about the natural world's sights, sounds, and smells, and how they have inspired his writing. Ruskin Bond's connection to nature also plays a key role in many of his adventures. He recalls swimming in the Ganges River, hiking in the Himalayas, and observing the wildlife of India.

He talks about the joys and dangers of exploring the natural world, from encountering wild animals to getting lost in the woods. Ruskin Bond's adventures also highlight the importance of friendship and community. He talks about the many friends he made throughout his life, from his childhood playmates to fellow writers and artists.

He also acknowledges the support and guidance he received from his family and mentors, particularly his father. Ruskin Bond's adventures are often shared with others, and the relationships he forms along the way make them truly memorable. His cuteness as a schoolboy captivated his teacher, and she wanted him in the choir just because of his cute face, but Bond spoiled all her dreams. Bond shares his teacher's instructions:

Now listen, Bond, ' she ordered, 'I want you to open your mouth with the others, to look as though you are singing, but you are not to allow any sound to issue from your vocal cords. Not a note, high or low, do you follow me?

He again narrates how he followed her instructions:

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Good. So let's proceed with this sweet lullby.'

I followed her instructions during rehearsals; but at the final performance, held in the senior school chapel, I could not resist letting out a booming low note, in the manner of the great Russian bass Chaliapin. The audience did not appear to mind, but Miss D'Cruz went into a frenzy and did not speak to me for weeks.

'That awful boy, Bond,' she was heard saying to the headmaster, 'he did his best to ruin our choir festival!'" (Bond 62)

Another notable aspect of Ruskin Bond's adventures in *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy* is his exploration of his own identity and place in the world. Ruskin Bond grew up in a mixed-race family in colonial India, and his experiences with racism and discrimination shaped his understanding of himself and his role in society.

Ruskin Bond's memoir explores the complexities of race and identity in India, particularly during the tumultuous years leading up to independence. He talks about the privileges and prejudices that come with being a "half-caste" in India, and how he struggled to find his place in a society that often treated him as an outsider.

Despite these challenges, Ruskin Bond's adventures in *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy* also reveal his deep pride in his mixed-race heritage. He talks about India's diverse cultures and traditions and how they have influenced his identity and worldview. He also celebrates the many artists and writers who have inspired him over the years, including Indian poets and British authors like Charles Dickens and Rudyard Kipling.

Ruskin Bond's memoir is a powerful testament to the importance of cultural diversity, understanding, and the need to embrace our differences and celebrate our shared humanity. His blunders and adventures remind us that we can control our own destiny and have a good effect on the world and that our identities are fashioned by our experiences and the people we encounter along the road.

In addition to his personal experiences and identity, Ruskin Bond's adventures in the book also touch on broader social and political issues in India. He discusses the impact of colonialism on Indian society and how it has shaped the country's history and culture.

He also talks about the challenges of building a new nation in the aftermath of independence and the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality in India. Ruskin Bond's adventures reveal his deep concern for the welfare of his fellow Indians, particularly those marginalized and oppressed. He talks about the poverty, inequality, and violence he has witnessed in his travels and how it has motivated him to use his writing to raise awareness and bring about change.

Despite these challenges, his adventures in the book ultimately celebrate life and the human spirit. He talks about the beauty and wonder of the natural world, the joys of friendship and community, and the importance of following our passions and pursuing our dreams. He also highlights the power of literature and art to inspire, uplift, and transform us.

Ruskin Bond's memoir is a powerful reminder that life is a journey full of adventures and misadventures and that it is up to us to make the most of it. His stories inspire us to embrace

life with curiosity, courage, and compassion and to strive for a better world for ourselves and others. Saket Suman is of the view:

Bond seduces his young readers by repeatedly capturing a boy's state of mind and reminds the elders that kids are particularly looking for "tenderness" from those they love. In this context, he says that not many fathers succeed in providing this tender care to their children because "they are usually too busy earning a living for the family". Bond, fortunately, was lucky to have Aubrey Bond as his father, who gave him nearly all his spare time, shared his interests and held his hand in the dark. (Suman)

Works Cited:

Bond, Ruskin. *Looking for the Rainbow: My Years with Daddy*. India: Puffin Books, 2017.

Suman, Saket. *Looking for the Rainbow: Ruskin Bond's tribute to his father*. 19 5 2017.
<https://www.webindia123.com/user_interaction/asp/article/article.asp?a_no=2295&article=Looking+for+the+Rainbow%3A+Ruskin+Bond%27s+tribute+to+his+father>.