

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

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ABSTRACT

The Indian public loves Ruskin Bond as one of their most popular authors who writes sentimental stories and descriptive passages. 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. The beginning of his book reveals how Ruskin Bond experienced his pleasant childhood in the Indian town of Dehradun. The narrative describes how his father spent time in the Indian Air Force before disappearing during World War II to affect the entire family structure. Ruskin Bond developed his love for literature during this particular time. As a child Ruskin Bond displayed curiosity along with bravery which resulted in many incidents of misbehaviour. The author recounts multiple times he was caught stealing mangoes while fighting with other boys and losing himself in the woods throughout the book. While he acted mischievously his father gave continuous support to help him stay loyal to his authentic self.

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

Ruskin Bond, the renowned author of six decades, serves both as a writer of short stories and poetry and literary critic from India. Since his career launch in the 1950s Bond has authored more than 500 stories, essays along with novels and additional works. Multiple languages include his published works which have led to their adaptations into various motion pictures and TV shows. Bond's greatest accomplishment lies in his ability to create writing that presents itself with simplicity yet uses humor and establishes vivid imagery of place. Through his literary accomplishments he has received the Sahitya Akademi Award along with the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan. Through his book *Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy* the author relates his life story from his youth until his teenage years while sharing his various

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life experiences. From the beginning of the book Ruskin Bond presents his memories of living during his childhood years in the peaceful town of Dehradun located in northern India. His autobiography focuses on his father who served in the Indian Air Force until World War II kept him away from 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. During his youth Ruskin Bond tried to steal a baby crocodile from the river yet his love for animals resulted in detection by authorities. While Ruskin Bond deeply loved animals and adventures he sometimes faced both sorrowful events and pet losses. He reveals his experience of losing his mother when he became ten and describes its emotional impact on him. Throughout his recollection Ruskin Bond reveals about his unresolved tensions with his stepmother who created constant conflict throughout his childhood years.

In his book Ruskin Bond continuously displays his strong interest in writing and the fundamental place it has in his existence. The book discusses his favorite authors Dickens and Kipling though he explains writing enabled him to understand the world around him. As a young writer Ruskin Bond describes his battles with rejection together with the struggle to locate periods and environments for composing. In the final chapters of the book, Ruskin Bond examines the important choices he made when he was a teenager which led to the creation of his life's path. 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 entered the train where they executed robberies against passengers until Bond lost everything during the assault. The encounter brought Bond great fear yet he realized that it taught him essential lessons about staying strong and making good use of available resources when trouble strikes.

The biography of Ruskin Bond gives readers several amusing accounts that span his time living in the woods during a hike and his frantic escape from bees and the accidental consumption of a fly during teatime. The humorous anecdotes which appear throughout the memoir demonstrate how Bond kept a positive spirit by seeking enjoyment despite adversity.

Many life experiences throughout his life have led to Bond's many misadventures but this has not dampened his keen sense of optimism. Each encounter functions for him as a developmental and educational chance which stresses that we must remain resilient through tough times.

The book demonstrates how Ruskin Bond develops his deep respect for nature during his lifetime. In the book he recounts his numerous forest excursions behind his residence where he installed a treehouse while consequently experiencing the surrounding aquatic habitats. In his writings Ruskin Bond shows his dedication to nature by giving prominent positions to natural elements. 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 developed his individual way of living thanks to his rebellious tendencies although these rebellious acts often resulted in legal troubles for him.

Ruskin Bond describes his most distinguished experience from the book as his period working at a hotel located in Dehradun. At young adulthood he needed to find various jobs to sustain himself and acquire more life wisdom. Working in the hotel job introduced him to tourism and hospitality while revealing the intense use of hierarchy in Indian society. The many obstacles he encountered during his period of living with Ruskin Bond could not diminish his heartfelt celebration of life and human resilience throughout Looking for The Rainbow: My Years with Daddy.

Throughout his life as a child and adult Ruskin Bond remained curious about and admired everything he encountered in forests and streams and during his young adult travels across India. 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.

Ruskin Bond develops his most significant bond throughout his adventures with nature's elements. Throughout the book Ruskin Bond displays an intense admiration for Indian forests and mountains as well as rivers through his evocative descriptions.

He explains how different natural elements stimulated his literature while introducing their sensory characteristics. Ruskin Bond develops many of his adventures by deepening his bond with nature. The author describes his underwater Ganges River experiences and his mountain hikes and wildlife encounters across India.

His book portrays both the exciting moments of natural exploration and the threatening situations that come with them when he explores the wilderness. Throughout his travels Ruskin Bond demonstrates that friendship together with community form central elements in his life. Throughout his life he developed friendships with people of all ages including his childhood companions and professional acquaintances from among writers and artists.

Through his writing he recognizes the essential help he gained from both his family members and mentors especially his father. The experiences Ruskin Bond documents with companions create enduring memories because of the meaningful friendships he forges. 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.

Through his memoir Ruskin Bond develops a profound sense of joy about his background as a person of mixed ancestry despite facing numerous obstacles. The author describes Indian cultural variety and traditional customs which have shaped his personal identification and overall perspective. He pays tribute to numerous artists who have motivated him during his life span among them are Indian poets together with British writers Charles Dickens and Rudyard Kipling.

The memoir of Ruskin Bond serves to boldly highlight our need to respect cultural diversity and understand each other followed by the necessity for society to appreciate our human similarities despite our differences. Through his mistakes and misadventures he teaches us that individual destiny control leads to good change within the world and shows how experiences with others shape personal identity.

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. Throughout the text he explores how colonialism affected Indian society and how it formed national history while influencing traditional Indian 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.

His experiences in the book finally honour the miraculous nature of life together with human determination. Throughout the text he shares his insights about natural world beauty while discussing friendly connections within communities and stresses the value of dedicated passions that lead to dream fulfilment. Through his narrative he emphasizes that literature with art possesses the ability to change people by elevating and inspiring them.

Life consists of a series of exciting experiences together with unpleasant setbacks and according to Ruskin Bond our responsibility rests in extracting maximum value from our

existence. His stories motivate readers to experience life through discovery and bravery together with empathy toward others while working toward enhanced conditions for all people. 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)

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