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Vagrancy in Ruskin Bond's Vagrants in the Valley

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Abstract:

The literature of Ruskin Bond is a symphonic combination of the songs of experience and the ceremonies of virtuousness. His works are highly approved by society at large. His stories are very famous and he writes in an extremely enjoyable language and style which even holds a child throughout the entire narrative. Bond's writings are very famous and he writes in an extremely enjoyable language and style which even holds a child throughout the entire narrative. Nature, life, sense, forms, love and secret of the celestial power are therefore the key words to his credo as a writer. This paper intends to look at his personal glimpses and influences. This paper focusses on vagrancy of the protagonist in the novel *Vagrants in the Valley*.

Keywords: Society, Language, Style, Narrative, Nature, Vagrancy

Ruskin Bond's novel *Vagrants in the Valley* celebrates adolescent vagrancy as a passing phase. The novel tells the story of two adolescent runaways named Rusty and Kishen. The boys have no roof over their head and wander in a valley. However, the quality of their life ensures that the valley in which they wander is very much a home. Rusty is a seventeen-year-old Anglo-Indian boy of Dehra, born of an English father and an Indian mother. His parents died when he was a small boy. A distant relative of his father's, named Harrison, became his legal guardian and tried to bring him up as an English sahib, keep away from everything Indian. But, at the age of sixteen, Rusty cultivated the friendship of a boy named Somi, who showed him "India and the world and life itself". Mr. Harrison beat Rusty for this and the boy, after that ran away from home. Somi helped him to a job, teaching English lessons to a boy named Kishen. Kishen's father let Rusty use an upstairs room in his house and Kishen's mother showered maternal love on him. When Kishen's mother died, Rusty left the place. At the time of the creation of the novel, Rusty has been wandering for about a year. Kishen is a fifteen-year-old Punjabi boy. When, upon the death of his mother, his drunkard father married again, Kishen ran away from home. An aunt of his took him to Hardwar and he lived on his wits for weeks. Rusty found him at Hardwar and, when the novel starts, they are returning together to Dehra on foot. Rusty is alone he has no one

and nowhere to go to, while Kishen, though he has distant relatives, prefers "the hazards and pleasures of vagrancy", and, therefore, makes his home "by his friend's side". The other juveniles who share their home are: Hathi the wrestler-craftsman-farmer, Devinder the peddler student, Sudheer the Lafunga (meaning, loafer) and the dumb nit-wit called the Goonga (meaning, dumb) because his entire vocabulary consists of the single sound, 'Goo'. In the absence of a conventional home, the adolescents draw all their homely comfort from youthful comradeship. Kishen will not mind anything as long as he and Rusty are together. Sleeping in the licentious church of SL Paul's, he finds reassurance in the proximity of Rusty's body. When an old friend of his mother's, Mrs. Bhushan, virtually imprisons him in her house, Kishen slips out at night and returns to his friend Rusty in the abandoned church. Hathi, who is leaving for his intuitive village in the Garhwal hills, extends an open invitation to Rusty to come there and live with him. Devinder and Rusty become friends almost at first. Devinder imposes upon his friendship with Sudheer to obtain money for Rusty's proposed trip to the north in search of his aunt. Sudheer, in turn, imposes upon his friendship with two dancing girls to procure funds for Rusty's proposed trip. Sudheer collects information about the whereabouts of Rusty's aunt and accompanies him on his visit to her. The adolescents entertain a sincere concern for one another. Rusty, who is on his way to Delhi to try and leave for England, leaves up the plan for the sake of Kishen. On the way to Dehra, Rusty muses, "I don't know how, but when we get to Dehra, I've got to make a living for both of us. Kishen is too young to look after alone even for a little while". Rusty advises Kishen to go back to Mrs. Bhushan because he "cannot mosey about aimlessly forever". All the other adolescents help Rusty in some way. The vagrant's life is remarkable for its sheer joie de vivre. They frequently indulge in what could well be described as "the coarser pleasures of... boyish days and their glad animal movements", to borrow Wordsworth's words. Playing in the lap of Nature intoxicates them and fills them with "a zest for living", and they have a whale of a jolly time, slinging mudballs at one another and trying to ride a buffalo after the fashion of the Goonga. When the bus to Rishikesh hits a boulder and forces the passengers to walk the last few miles, Rusty runs ahead and revels in the freedom and the beauty of Nature around him. Adventure adds zest to the vagrants' life. Walking to Dehra from Hardwar, Rusty and Kishen glance at a bone-rattling ride in a bullock-cart. Walking beyond Doiwala railway station through woods, they come face to face with a tiger. While staying with Hathi in the Garhwal hills, Rusty is surrounded by a dark forest teeming with bears and leopards. While Rusty and Sudheer are in the cottage of Ram Singh in the Kotli forest, a bear on the roof keeps them conscious through the early part of the night. The vagrants display an irrepressible sense of hilarity. Forced to ride in a bullock-cart, Kishen jokes that, all the same, to the world, Rusty is "still the son of an English sahib", and he himself still the distant relative of a distant maharaja. Anticipating the consequences if they are caught travelling ticketless by train, Rusty and Kishen joke about the prospect of a month's free board and lodging in jail followed by a stint with social workers or making mattresses in a remand home. After their close encounter with the tiger in the woods, they joke that, probably, they frightened the tiger more than the tiger scared them. Rejoining Rusty after giving the slip to Mrs. Bhushan, Kishen says that he had been "kidnapped". The vagrants display a precocious maturity and wisdom. At Raiwala they select a cheap eating-place by its degree of dirtiness. Travelling ticketless, they slip off the train at Doiwala station when a ticket-inspector comes round, dawdle in the corn-field near the tracks for some time and pick a

meal of corn from the field. Rusty displays extraordinary waif-wisdom in breaking into the abandoned church and in making it their abode.

Despite the exigencies of their destitute existence, the vagrants abide by an admirable code of principles and propriety. Rusty's conduct is generally gentlemanly and Kishen's Punjabi resourcefulness never crosses the bounds of propriety. Considering their destitution, they resort to ticketless travel, but not without some nauseous fidgeting. Devinder's policy of standing on his own feet is absolutely admirable. Even Sudheer, despite his dubious antecedents and criminal involvements, does conform to some principles: "Sudheer was' no petty criminal. He practiced crime as a fine art, and believed that thieves, and even slayers, had to have certain principles. If he stole, then he stole from a rich man, who could afford to be robbed, or from a greedy man, who deserved to be robbed. A stable sense of values depict the vagrants' conduct. Rusty dislikes to see "old things, old people, suffer lonely deaths". Earlier in life he did not like the natter of middle-aged women at the church or the sham shikar expeditions his guardian forced him to join. The superiority of the youngsters' values becomes evident when they are compared to those of adults like the obnoxious Mr. Harrison, the self-centered Ram Singh or the criminal Seth. Nostalgia tosses the life of the vagrants. Rusty remembers with nostalgia the kindness of Kishen's mother. Meeting his father's friend Mr. Pettigrew, Rusty desires to learn all he can from him about his father. When his aunt gives him the collection of books left him by his father, Rusty takes them excitedly, because, "they had once been part of his life. They were the only link between him and his father-they were his only legacy". At Rishikesh, a comfortable Rusty sits on the riverbank, "nostalgically thinking of his friends". The nonexistence of a roof over their heads does not deprive the vagrants of dreams or optimism. Rusty has always wanted to be a writer and the dream never leaves him. Much enthralled by the demeanors of the American businessman they meet at Raiwala station, Rusty resolves to go to America someday. Towards the end of the novel, Devinder points out to Rusty that he is a "dreamer, a kind of poet". Rusty's final decision to sail for England is based on a fervent optimism about what the future holds.

Dreams and optimism notwithstanding, the vagrants are basically hard-headed realists. Their very vagrancy seems to be, in the ultimate analysis, an inevitable compliance with a reality they cannot escape. Throughout their wanderings they display remarkable practical wisdom in coping with the realities of existence. Rusty persuades Kishen to go with Mrs. Shushan because he fully appreciates the realities of life, while Kishen is merely carried away by sentiment. Rusty admits the full force of reality, when he muses, "You can't run away from it (life) and survive. You can't be a vagrant forever. You're get-ting nowhere, so you've got to stop somewhere". Bond's Vagrants in the Valley, presenting, as it does, a mixture of youthful friendship, exciting adventure, irrepressible humour, precocious wisdom, dreams and reality, may well be construed as a paen to adolescent vagrancy as a romantic phase of life.

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