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A Dialogue with Ruskin Bond

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Better perceived as the Indian 'William Wordsworth', Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli in the then Punjab Province in the year 1934. Born to a first generation British migrant, Bond spent most of his childhood in amidst Himalayas. Passing through a lot of trials and tribulations, Bond could accomplish sky high success and could become a model for the people of this generation. The recipient of Central Sahitya Academy Award, Padma Shri, Padma Bhusan and many more, Bond has created a unique place in the history of World literature. A story teller, novelist and an author of numerous Children books, Bond has established a place in the galaxy of literary world not because of his personality but because of his aesthetic merit. He who believed, "Race did not make me one. Religion did not make me one. But history did. And in the long run, it's history that counts."

I am privileged to have some dialogue with the legendary Ruskin Bond on 23 May 2010, in his visit to Bhubaneswar.

Q1. At the Age of 17, you passionately wanted to carve a niche in writing why?

Ans: Yes, I was passionate about writing at an early age. In fact when I was in school around 14-15 years I was into writing. I studied a lot. At the age of 17 I sat down to write my first novel. It took me a couple of years to find a publisher. I was about 21 when I actually got my first novel published.

Q2. How did you feel when you first saw your novel in print?

Ans: When first time you appear in print its' always exciting and though I had published short stories before that, a book is something special and it was a great feeling!! Actually what happened was that I had written a book and got it published in England when I was still 18-19? Before it was published I came back to India and it was only after I returned that I received copies of the book and an award also came. Though it was serialised in India, in the Illustrated weekly which at that time was the main magazine, a sort of family magazine a 'The Night Train at Deoli,' "The Woman on Platform 8" etc. those were written in my 20's. That was my, you can say my romantic period and now is my humorous period.

Q3. "The Room on the Roof" is your first autobiographical first person narration written in England. Can you cite some of your experiences while writing this book?

Ans: Yes, that's interesting. I was young; I had to take a job. I did not have any financial backing or close relatives. I have worked in various capacities. Once

in a travel agency, once with the Public Health Dept., once in a photographic company in London etc. I worked at night when I came back from my office. If you got 2-3 weeks of holidays which you are entitled to once in a year, other people went off to the continents or to the beach while I would sit in my room and write my book.

Q4. Do you still have acquaintances with your Dehra friends chiefly Somi, Haripal and Daljeet?

Ans: No, not with all of them. Somi is in touch. He has settled in abroad now. Kishan who was the character in the “Room on the Roof” died at an early age. Others have scattered. Haripal is around. He has become quite a famous mountaineer but goes about now in a wheel chair. He runs an institution in Delhi for paraplegics. He had got a wound in the first war in Pakistan that paralysed him. He is first among the teams who conquered Mt. Everest.

Q5. “Children experience is universalized”. Is there anything you feel of your own in your children literature?

Ans: When I started writing, I went back a lot into my own childhood. 30-40 other children began to influence me and I was telling their stories. So I think experience of children is universalized. Childhood in India is distinct. It varies from one region to another, from rural to urban, to the kind of schooling you get, traditions in your family etc are the chief binding factors too and of course the sort of entertainment they get interested in.

Q6. In *The sensualist*, the pride in sex skill evaporates when he confronts a simple woman in the hills. What do you actually want to convey by this?

Ans: When I wrote, this was done in 1970's; it appeared first in a Magazine form in “Debonair”. I guess I just wanted to do something different at that point. I don't think I had any particular intention; excess of anything is self destructive.

Q.7 Parent-child relationship emerges as a persistent theme in many of your fictions. What is the reason behind it?

Ans: My own parents had separated. So I think the reason may be partly because of my parents' separation. I stayed with my father for 2-3 years, and then he passed away. Then I went to my mother and step father. She had then remarried. Those years were quite traumatic and left an impression on me. I wrote a lot about my grandfather but I have never seen him. So it's purely fiction. When I was only one year old my grandfather died. Although I heard stories about him from my mother and others, I never knew him so. Actually, had I seen him ... I may not have been so fond of him.

Q8. At one point of time you wanted to be a football star or a Broadway tap dancer.

What made you change?

Ans: When I was young I used to go to see Musical films and I did play football quite well. But I joke when I say so. No ...No, that would have been unrealistic.

Q9. You had the opportunity of witnessing life during the British Raj and now you experience your grandchildren's childhood days. What difference do you notice?

Ans: I was 12 when in 1947, independence came, so life did not change that much for me. My step father was an Indian. Changes that took place were quite gradual. I continued in the same school, I was going to in the hills. My interest in books was not that affected. Gradually I began to make friends with Indian boys, before that I did not get a chance to mix or meet with them. These boys like Somi, Harpal and others came around in my life in 1948-49. My school too changed from boarding in the hills. A lot of European boys, Anglo-Indian boys left the country and other boys came in their place. Changes were there, of course.

Q10. 'Never Lose hope' is the motto of their life for Deep Chand the barber, Pitamber, Aziz, Suraj and Arun in 'Delhi is not far'. Was that a reflection of yourself when you were trying to live a comfortable life?

Ans: This is my adopted family. Their original home is a village in the mountains. A lot of people from that area now came to towns and cities to make a living, in search of a good school as you cannot get good schools in remote areas. This would be the same as in urban areas; their interest would be same as that of urban children.

Q11. You have a habit of cross culture reading habit. Which do you think is better?

Ans: Reading has improved in India. More teachers are aware of importance of reading and do encourage children to read. Parents also have become aware. 20-30 years back when I was a school boy, in a class of 30 there were only 2 to 3 boys who were fond of reading. Everyone was used to taking a book from library and putting it back there. There were no TV, no internet and no other forms of entertainment which are popular now. You would go to cinema once in a month and lots of kids read comics and that's how knowledge has grown and spread. That's how knowledge of English too has grown. Even if a few are reading, those few are increased. If they have grown with TV and it's difficult to switch over to books but once it's done you became a reader and always you are a reader.

Q12. Most people know you as a children's author or a romantic author or a writer who is hopelessly in love with the mountains, rivers and tree. By writing "The Sensualist" you have crossed all these bars. How did you make an attempt towards *The sensualist*?

Ans: No, I don't think it was a deliberate attempt. Just gradually, nature played the greater part as did children and relationships. I don't run out of ideas much as if you are interested in people, you will have always some stories. If I run out of people I write more stories. About super naturals, I don't have any great belief on the supernatural. I have never seen a ghost, try as hard I might. Some people experiences psychic. Though I am very sensitive to the natural world and to people's thought or feelings I can sense the presence of a personality even if that person is no longer alive or far away.