

A JOURNEY OF AWAKENING: FROM VAGRANCY TO RESOLUTION

Sujata Sahu

Principal, DAV Public School,
Pokhariput, Bhubaneswar
sujatadavpkt@gmail.com

Purpose begets power. The true purpose appears before one when one risks the tides of the unknown- leaving the safe harbors of the known and venturing to discover the fantasy of self-discovery. This is what the adolescents Rusty and Kishen undergo in *The Vagrants in the Valley*. The characters struggle like the novelist himself- ‘I have always had a special affection for it, because it was written at a time when I was struggling to make a living as a struggling writer,’ says Ruskin Bond feeling nostalgic about the mentioned novella. In his adolescent days, he wielded his pen to narrate young Rusty’s further wandering and adventure in search of his identity. Like his debut piece *The Room on the Roof*, Bond’s experience of bygone days influences the movement and motives of the characters of its sequel. Children and the surrounding ambience is a recurrent theme in *The Vagrants in the Valley*. Bond’s children are precocious, but they do not try to escape the hardships; rather they roll their sleeves up to face them with guts. Bond deftly argue the innocent portrayal of his brilliant characters when he says,

‘Many people ask me why do I write so much about children.....I had a pretty lonely childhood and that helps me to understand a child better.’ (Bond, “My Writing Reflects My Lonely Childhood”)¹

Bond had a lonely and cheerless childhood since he was only four, when Edith Clerke and Aubrey Bond separated leaving him to be reared by his grandmother. At that juncture and in the absence of parental love, he longed for friendship and the warmth of its adoration. Probably, that is why the two novels of adolescence were filled with great friends- Kishen, Somi, Suri, Sudheer, Devinder and Hathi. Bond through his stories portrays that innate truth that when conditional relationships break off, one can still find true friends standing beside him. An English boy, a spoiled son, a peddler, a wrestler, a thief and many others from the eclectic layers of the society come together in his stories to forge a heartfelt and sincere friendship. Standing up for each other binds more people in camaraderie than any other social doctrine for the same. One rarely finds Rusty sans a friend throughout the novella .Heaven sees the nature inundated with the feeling of friendship. Muthu Meena says:

¹Bond, “My Writing Reflects My Lonely Childhood”, indianexpress.com, Accessed 22 October 2015

Nature is a friend, guardian spirit, who protects him, comforts him, renews him, refreshes him and Rusty never likes to depart her. The trees sal, neem and banyan are symbolic representation of friendship, Rusty has in this novella.²

Bond, to render the depth of true friendship, has brought Rusty and Kishen together with unfaltering love, despite their very different backgrounds and persona. In the story, Rusty is a parentless, Anglo-Indian boy in his teenage, still innocent and free from the white man's prejudices. He is optimistic and content to enjoy the new-found pleasures. Although he searches and accepts positions to give English lessons, he is never bereft of the lofty idea to become a writer one day. Kishen, in contrast, is a spoiled child of the Kapoor family, full of mischief who never considers Rusty to be his teacher. After his mother's death and father's remarriage, he runs away from home and becomes a thief. Unlike Rusty, he is whimsical and is prone to losing his poise quickly. During their vagrancy, he fancies to start a *chaat* shop. Their demeanors, apparently, are moulded by their diverse environments and family values. Though Rusty adores his father as a hero, who even after his death bequeaths him with a rich legacy of books, Kishen runs away from his own father who remarries, without any remorse and any pang of separation within a month of his mother's death. Nevertheless, Bond keeps the two distinct characters close to each other so that they seem to be inseparable limbs of an entity, for quite a time. Their journey through the valley, though symbolic is a sort of education for them. However, a curricular education might have found them a vocation with no toil. In the absence of that they wile away themselves by wandering here and there. Save for their sporadic hopelessness, their wandering in the valley is an adventure that chiseled them from naïve fleers to fully-fledged adolescents standing up for themselves.

A vagrant is peripheral to the contours of society and unleashed from all the strands connecting to a home or a job, thus he has all the time to escape into the cocoon of the inner self and experience and explore the ambience of the surrounding. Therefore a valley with all its assortment of sights, sounds and zestful living forms provides a rich milieu for an adventurous sojourn. They are all there in Bond's novella *Vagrants in the Valley*, to joyfully transport the reader to the opulence of nature in Dehra through Rusty, the protagonist, and his companions.

The novella *Vagrants in the Valley* begins as the readers are introduced to the rural setting of Dehra with a large banyan tree and a boy filling the locale with the melody of his flute. Both the banyan and the flute are close to Indian cultural ethos and experience. Bond relates his writing to Indian culture that reveres the banyan tree for its spiritual association, the vastness of its look and longevity, standing there offering shade and shelters to one and all. The beginning also reminds the readers about the flute, once a unifying force in *Mahabharat* in

²A Muthu Meena Losini, "Children and Nature in Ruskin Bond's Works: A Study". Diss. Mother Teresa Women's University, 2013, 21

the hands of Sri Krishna, which can be considered as an instrument of spiritual awakening. The very setting is really suggestive of the protagonist's journey into the domain of spiritual awakening.

Rusty was seventeen and was very thoughtful. Walking in the scorching sun was exhausting for him. Even it was more tiresome for Kishen who was fifteen. However, both of them were rebels against indifference and unjust authority. Although, divided by birth, they were united by a purpose of rejection of the security of living with people they did not know,

“He possessed distant relatives, but he preferred the risk and pleasures of vagrancy to the security of living with people he did not know. He had been with Rusty for a year, and his home was by his friend's side. He was Punjabi; Rusty was Anglo-Indian.”(Bond, “The Homeless”, 122)

They might have run away from home, but could they escape from hunger, the basic necessity of existence? They plan to sell some of their belongings to manage their needs. Then, the love of Rusty for books comes to the scene. He is not ready to sacrifice his books- his best friends filled with hidden treasure. Rusty shows his deep respect for family inheritance through his action- “I would not sell them. Well, they were the only things I got out of my guardian's house, before I ran away.” (Bond, “The Homeless”, 122). They get a bullock cart, to go to Raiwala. The arrival of the cart is fairly dramatic. It appears from the swirl and eddy of dust about the footpath. One really gets the sensation of travelling with the cart as Bond describes the attire of the driver, smell of cow-dung, rattling sound and bumping movement of the contraption. The way the driver talks to the bullocks reflects a kinship between man and beast as he shares his anger and adoration with them. The company of bullocks seems more engrossing than that of unknown humans. The boys get down at Raiwala, a busy little market town without paying a penny to the driver. Although Kishen brags about their noble lineage and the fact that he is a distant relative of a distant Maharaj and Rusty, the son of an English sahib, they feel miserly to spend their scanty pool of money. Their generous litany of ‘thanks’ is not received by the driver was already lost in the ecstasy of smoke and talk.

Ruskin Bond brings to fore an insertion of two cultures through his setting –one local and the other, foreign. Rusty and Kishen are now at the Raiwala railway station to spend their night in the first class waiting room with a plan to go to Harrawala, a place eight miles away from Dehra by road, in the morning and without a ticket. The two friends meet an American from Delhi. For a small town like Raiwala, Delhi was not far and very big- a symbol of complexity and modernity. However, the modernity part of Delhi is not acknowledged by the denizens of Dehra. But Rusty's was a personality that was both loving and lovable. From the very beginning he had many friends and he was no stranger to strangers. There was a quick

chemistry between the American and Rusty. They sipped some brandy together. Here the novelist reveals a hint of high aspirations of Rusty,

The absence of a roof over their head does not deprive the vagrants of dreams or optimism. Rusty has always wanted to be a writer and the dream never leaves him. Much impressed by the manners of the American businessman they meet at Raiwala station, Rusty resolves to go to America some day. (Home Sans Roof: Celebration of Vagrancy in Vagrants in the Valley by M.A. Jeyaraju, “The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond”, 85)

Soon after a pleasant conversation between the two and through this period of vagrancy, Rusty developed a deep rationality. He understood that one can rarely find a person having best of both the worlds – pleasure of freedom and affluence of wealth. It is aptly said that when the mind keeps talking, the heart remains silent. A generous amount of brandy intoxicated Rusty and made him feel light in the head thereby opening up the heart to recite the past episodes of his life. Bond reiterates the storyline of *Room on the Roof* in a nutshell to set the link between the two novellas of adolescence as *Vagrants in the Valley* picked up the line from where it was left in *Room on the Roof*. He spoke about the cause behind his vagrancy. Sinha, Jauhari and Dave note in *Ruskin Bond: A Critical Evaluation*,

A child, if loved by the members of his family, is tied to it first. When there is some kind of disruption in the order, he becomes a vagrant. (55)

Arrogance of the guardians, support of friends and care of the acquaintances got their due place in Rusty’s narration. Rusty remembered the injustice inflicted upon him and at the same time mentioned about the sweetest infatuation of his adolescence. Like every other man in love, he used superlatives for the lady of his choice – Mrs. Kapoor, Kishen’s mother- ‘She was sweet and kind to me. She was beautiful. There will never be a woman as beautiful.....’ (Bond, “The Homeless”, 127)

Rusty was not just a co-fugitive of Kishen. Rather he stood by him with all his capacities. He was for him a big banyan tree, a shady shelter giving him fatherly protection, motherly love and providing the joy of a friend and the guidance of a teacher. He had chosen this path of a flier only for Kishen. Like Robert Frost’s traveler in ‘The Road Not Taken’, he preferred the less trodden and adventurous trail to safety and surrender,

‘And if it wasn’t for Kishen, 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 Kishen.’ (Two Novels of Adolescence: Vagrants in the Valley, 127)

But it was time for a separation from an acquaintanceship – brief but beautiful. The train for Delhi arrived for the American to board. Only a visiting card was left with Rusty with a

feeble hope that they might meet again someday in Delhi .A railway platform has always been a wonderful ground to present the show of Indian social life. It is the microcosm that presents the people of diverse profession and position, creed and character mingling together. The sleepy platform woke up to sudden vibrancy of life with the arrival of the locomotive. Like a huge monster the night train swallowed the crowd and within in it American. It was a sea of humanity where every drop is different from the other.

Rusty once again regains his thread of life after the train leaves. Having come back into the waiting room, he is beside Kishen to lose himself in the arms of sleep as a doting mother by the side of her child. They board the train in the morning, but their plan to get down at Harrawala fails abruptly. The arrival of the TTI forces the ticketless duo to get down at Doiwala, about twelve miles from Dehra. They cross through maize fields just outside the Siwalik range on their way to Dehra. Nature provides man sustenance in many ways however, it has to be explored. Breaking of corn cobs by Kishen shows the act of self-preservation. The roasted corn cobs were a feast for them and provided sustenance for their hungry stomach. As they move ahead, they were lost in the maze of their own thoughts. Bond shows that real friendship flourishes when one puts the other before one's own self. Rusty could dream about making a living by writing stories. Bond appears to have arrogated some of his personal dreams and aspirations to Rusty.

They walk through the jungle. The rich view of the hills lush green Sal trees and gushing sound of water makes their journey a refreshing experience. They near the river at the water's edge. Water, the magic potion for a thirsty throat, can create fear when it is of unknown depth and in an unfamiliar region. Both the boys overcome the natural fear by the strength of their being together,

Bond mentions the Sal tree. The particular quality of the tree is that it does not like being alone. It is found in its own group. It is much happier amongst its own kind in the forest. Similarly, Rusty always likes to be with the friend of his own kind like Kishen.³

They are dumbstruck with the sudden appearance of a tiger. Even though its appearance petrifies Rusty and Kishen, it had not come there with any violent intention. Tiger, though ferocious, was a life form of nature following the natural law of attack in self-defense only. So the tiger of Bond's creation left them unhurt. Soon they forgot the incident and continued their journey-

Such is the character of adolescence. An adolescent is dashing, has a zest for life and drive to do something extraordinary and forgets all the trials and tribulations once the ordeal is over. So is the case with Rusty and Kishen (Ruskin Bond: A Critical Evaluation,56)

³A Muthu Meena Losini, "Children and Nature in Ruskin Bond's Works: A Study". Diss. Mother Teresa Women's University, 2013, 73

As the story progresses the growth of Indian identity of Rusty is zeroed in on. In pre-independent India, there was a rift between the colonizers and the colonized. The creed that the masters are high above in a social hierarchy from the bonded people made the English contemptuous of Indians. Even they did not allow their children to play and talk with their Indian peers. This class consciousness was a sheer disrespect to equality of human race. Sinha, Jauhari and Dave opine that,

The white people maintained a distance as they were the rulers. As Edward Said has discussed in his monumental work *Orientalism* (1976), the colonizers considered the Asians and Africans far inferior to them and made distinction between “we” and “they”. Rudyard Kipling, born in India, but settled in Britain advocated the legitimacy of the empire and asserted the supremacy of the white people (Ruskin Bond: A Critical Evaluation,57)

Rusty is a revolting spirit against this unjust conception. He is rebuked by his elders for being an iconoclast. But he is so mesmerized by the Indian diversity and the richness of culture that he wants to rejoice every bit of it. He is not an individual to accept and submit to one particular faith; rather he is proud of his double inheritance. Their journey continues through the valley of Himalayan foothills. The rich aroma and spectacles of plants, herbs and trees create ripples of joy in them. They reach the outskirts of Dehra and suddenly became conscious of their exhaustion and problems.

They have a sumptuous meal at Tandoori Fish Shop pampering their hungry and tired body. After food, what anybody would require is sleep. And they drag their tired bodies to their old room, but it is found locked. The lock is suggestive of portents of rejection and unfamiliarity. They are heart broken when they come to know that the room has been already let out to someone else. Seth, the landlord, did not want to give them the room on rent. Munsii, the manager, informs them that their belongings are in the store room. They could have them the next day. They leave the place with a bitter belligerence. Their search for a night shelter begins. They think about the railway platform. But that holds no appeal to a suitable solution. Rusty decides to visit a tea shop. Bond through Rusty underlines the importance of a teashop as a venue for social interaction. Being a rendezvous point for people from various strata of the social order, a tea shop suggests a way out for their predicament. Even the novelist while sketching the character of the shopkeeper hinted the vitality of interpersonal skills like narrating something skillfully in the prosperity of a business. That was why one could find most of the customers of the teashop standing outside to listen to the shopkeeper’s story, at the end of the bazaar.

It is here that we come across Goonga, a dumb boy, who is butt of everyone’s jokes. He is teased by one and all and this creates waves of insensitive laughter. But Goonga is showered with lot of kindness by Rusty who offers him a glass of tea knowing it well that they were

running short of money. That mark of generosity must have left a mark on the mind of people there and that was why he was asked to tell a story after the shopkeeper's tale was over. Kishen takes advantage of the opportunity and bargains to find a place for them to stay. The presence of the hill boy brings a ray of hope in them as he promises to find a place for them. Rusty proves himself a brilliant story teller who received rapt attention of the audience with his ghost story. However, the help they get to find a place was of little use; rather it was Kishen who burst with the idea of sleeping on the maidan. For Rusty, it was like back to square one. Life was really queer. In the name of advancement, sometimes we reach a place after years of treading and plodding only to find it the place where we had begun- "Rusty gave a sigh of resignation, and thought: A year ago when I ran away I slept on the maidan, and again I am going to sleep on the maidan. That's called 'Progress.'"(Bond, "A Place to Sleep",138)

They leave for the maidan in the late evening but expectedly they are followed by Goonga. A glass of tea had made him hopeful of receiving more kindness. Though Rusty was calm and had his faith in humanity, Kishen was annoyed for being followed by Goonga. Goonga left them as they lay down on the maidan for the night's rest. The morning sunshine in the pristine natural surroundings brings a flicker of hope as they decide not to collect their belongings from Munshi and thought of a work division. Kishen is asked to persuade Munshi for a room on rent and Rusty to find out a job. Rusty speaks irritatingly about the adolescence's problem of shaving regularly. He takes four annas for the shaving and gives Kishen nine rupees to offer advance for the rent. Kishen could not convince Munshi for a room as he asks for fifteen rupees as advance. While coming back Kishen got into card games with three other young men because of his old habits. At the same time Rusty goes to a barber who is an old friend. The barber not only cuts his hair but also gives a head massage at a bargain. The kinesthetic of the barber's skillful hands has become a lively event through Bond's pen:

His fingers drummed and stroked and pressed; and with the palms and sides of his hands he thumped and patted Rusty's forehead. Rusty felt the blood rush to his temples; and when the massage is finished, he was hardly conscious of having a head, and walked into the street with a peculiar, elated, headless feeling. (Bond, "The Old Church", 142)

Rusty is fairly unsuccessful at getting an offer from a school for English tuition. However, the last of the three schools asked him to come again after a day or two. Rusty tried to find a shelter in the old church of St. Paul's. It was an abandoned worshiping place of the Catholics of Dehra and the padre had left it. The church created an environment of a sense of loss, decay, abandonment and desertion. Rusty compares the church with a lonely old man dying slowly being forgotten by everybody. The feeling of sadness was overwhelming. Bond, the

writer, showed his fondness for serenity and subtle whispering of nature that inspire ripples of thoughts in the soul to the din and bustle of a noisy crowd. Likewise, Rusty much in the manner of Bond repented the anonymous death of an establishment, but not for its perishable gregarious gatherings. He felt pity to see the once-a-contributing institution dying without a company except the people buried in the graves keeping each other's company in the grounds. The imagery of the dilapidated old church leaves a lasting effect on the audience as they could feel each object, sound and smell of the decaying things. Pouring of sunlight through the stained glass, movement of a mouse, wrapping of the bleeding finger of Rusty with his handkerchief and every other minute event had not escaped Bond's observant eyes. Even when he describes the populace of Dehra, he has not forgotten the details of multiculturalism running through the veins of the city, thus the unity in diversity in India.

Most of the kabaris were Muslims, who had been too old or too poor to leave Dehra after partition of the country. They made up only a small part of the town's very mixed population, which included sturdy little Gurkhas from Nepal, easy-going smiling Garhwalis from the hills, and bustling, Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs.(Bond, "The Old Church", 144)

Both Kishen and Rusty visit their new shelter, the church and went to the nearby stream for a bath. Nature plays a great role in Bond's writing. When they pass through the wild forest and ravine towards the stream slowly they start to feel the joy inside. And the soft and cold touch of water revitalise them with new hopes .It is a feeling of rejuvenation which they certainly needed,

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.⁴

They decide to visit their friend Somi's house quite aware of his absence in Dehra, with a hope that his mother could be a great help. They had an awesome time there and were satiated with a sumptuous meal. However, Rusty in whom a great writer was growing up had the appetite for pencils and paper and those he stuffed inside his pockets. Here, Bond illustrates a tussle between self-esteem and necessity, because when Somi's mother offers Rusty some money, there is an effortless reply that they have enough of that. But Rusty could

⁴M.A. Jeyaraju, "Home Sans Roof: Celebration of Vagrancy in Vagrants in the Valley", *The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond*, Ed. PrabhatK.Singh, 85

not refuse to accept the money when it was thrust in his hands as needs could not be neglected. In the church, Rusty tries to lose himself in writing which have been his obsession and the best way to reinvent him in a more meaningful way. Bond, as always, painted Rusty as a bibliophile who has got voracious appetite to gorge on the hidden gems in the books,

Once Rusty was absorbed in a book, only something disastrous would get him away from it. He had been book worm ever since he had learnt to read, but the final commitment had been made at the age of twelve. (Bond, "New Encounters",150)

Bond calls the adventure enthusiasts of the hills as braggarts. Rusty who has been with them several times becomes bitterly bored as their expedition bear barely minimum against their mouth-filling words. They talk about elephants and tiger, but what they get is a Hare or a partridge. However, the great haunt for Rusty is the discovery of a shelf of books in the forest rest home which consist the works of Charles Dickens, P. G. Wodehouse, M. R. James and many others novelists. This encounter of Rusty's has a matching parallel, a representation of Bond's experience in his school days – "The school library – the Anderson library – was fairly stocked, and it was to be something of a haven for me over the next three years." (Scenes from a Writer's Life, 64)

The night stay at the church in the company of mice is much troublesome and uncomfortable which is of course all washed off in the morning ablution in the ice-cold mountain water. Their meeting with Hathi, their old acquaintance, a wrestler with a huge body brought back fresh memories. He informs that he is going to his village very soon. The agenda for the day was – Rusty to go to the schools in search of a job; and Kishen to be with Hathi who is going to recover some money from various people with a promise to meet again at the clock tower. A separation waits for them. Kishen when wanders away from Hathi meets Mrs. Bhushan, an old friend of his mother's, and her daughter Aruna and is taken away by Mrs. Bhushan to her home as she could not bear to see Kishen as a vagrant. Bond uses humor and exhibits his understanding about female attributes as he describes Mrs. Bhushan-

Mrs. Bhushan was an imposing woman of thirty five years and she walked with a heavy determination that kept people, and even bulls, out of her way. Her dogs, her husband, and her servants were all afraid of her and submitted to her dictates without a murmur. Her cocker spaniel slept on her bed, and her husband slept in the drawing room.

And she trod on the accelerator with such ferocity that a lame beggar, who had been dawdling in the middle of the road, suddenly regained the use of both legs and sprang nimbly on to the pavement.(Bond, "New Encounters",154-155)

Kishen is restricted inside his room and could not go to meet Rusty. Rusty was on his feet through Dehra. The dry river bed of Rispana, a peacock, tea gardens, the poinsettia leaves hanging down like red tongues of fire gave a typical description of the valley in a crystalline

and colorful manner. There he meets Mr. Pettigrew, an old friend of his father and comes to know about an aunt of him who was living in some village in Garhwal. Rusty's father was very close to the aunt and even trusted her more than Harrison, Rusty's legal guardian. Readers can find that Rusty's love for books and nature was no accident rather a capital inheritance by heredity. Pettigrew described Rusty's father as a great lover of natural beauty.

He was interested in birds and insects and wild flowers – in fact, anything that had to do with natural history. Both of us were great readers and collector of books, and that was what brought us together. (Bond, "New Encounters", 159)

Rusty waits for Kishen near the clock tower. Bond with his eye for details could effortlessly describe almost everyone – the toy seller, the fruit vendor and the cobbler and all. While returning he meets with a new character – Devinder, a Sikh boy. A common book loved by two people can be a common ground for a faster friendship and it is Devinder with Goldsmith's *The Traveller* that helps in forging a bond between the two. Books, although used for different purposes- it is pure enjoyment and addiction for Rusty whereas for Devinder it is an element of the syllabus for examination, still bound people with a common interest of reading.

Bond clearly understood the customary Indian interest to know each other's background to form a meaningful friendship. He made both Rusty and Devinder homeless and reminds us of a *Purana* parallel tale of the friendship between Sri Ram and Sugreev in Ramayan. Ram and Sugreev had lost their wives to Ravan and Bali respectively and they had to rescue them. The common ground developed their closeness. Likewise, Bond equates Rusty more with Devinder than Kishen for a lasting friendship.

Kishen would always have one foot in Rusty's world, and the other foot in a world of middle class homes. Devinder had both his feet planted in the greater world, the open world, the world that is both lonely and free. He had been in it even longer than Rusty. (Bond, "Prospect of a Journey", 163)

The growth of adolescence in Kishen is noticed when he began to understand the subtle differences of the other sex and sought pleasure in them. Bond jotted down how Aruna managed Kishen to forget Rusty for a few moments. The infatuation for the feminine charm was silently growing stronger inside Kishen,

He became actually conscious of the scent of her hair and the proximity of her right ear, and the sun gradually lost its urgency. The right ear, with its soft creamy lobe, was excruciatingly near. Kishen was tempted to bite it. (Bond, "Prospect of a Journey", 164)

However, loneliness makes one resort to the memories of the past and that might shake one's very existence. In the loneliness of the night, Kishen steps into darkness to meet Rusty and

Aruna knew it. The church becomes the meeting ground for the four friends and all of them enjoys the book *The Traveller*, although, in different degrees. Really, all of them were travelers in search of certainty in this uncertain world. When Mrs. Bhusan comes in the morning to fetch Kishen, Rusty sends him to her in a much unattached manner. Bond characterizes Rusty as a saintly figure who sacrifices his possession living or non-living, for their own good. Rusty convinced Kishen to be a part of Mrs. Bhusan's household and was hopeful that one day they would meet in a better environment. Thereafter, Rusty and Devinder goes in search of Hathi. Quite amazingly they find Hathi who uses more physical power than skills at wrestling is also skilled at making delicate toys. It reflects the softness at heart even for a hardcore. Not finding Hathi who has gone to his village they met Sudheer, the Lafunga on their way back from bazaar. He is a crook – who cheated people. He has been a homeless refugee from a very tender age and is adapted by a smuggler. So it was no wonder what he had made of in his life. Bond mentions that he is not a man who waited for opportunity rather a man who created opportunities.

Sudheer is of course a thief, but a person with a set of principles. He only stole from the rich and the greedy. Sudheer comes to know from Devinder that Rusty is in need of money, so he tries to return twenty rupees that he has borrowed from Devinder which may find a new lease of living for Rusty and hence goes in search of money.

Sudheer, a lafunga, it seems, is modeled after Bhim to some extent. Bhim in real life is a friend of Ruskin Bond and helps him to sell his old books and takes commission for that. If we read the relationship between Bhim and Bond in *Scenes from a Writer's Life* we will surely see some similarity between fictional Sudheer and real Bhim: both talk of investment. (Ruskin Bond: *A Critical Evaluation*,66)

In the meantime, Rusty meets Mr. Pettigrew. There he happens to see a photo of his father's. Rusty got a help of twenty rupees from Mr. Pettigrew. All the time he was imagining about his father when quick came the answer from Mr. Pettigrew. 'You don't really have to find out much about your father,' he said. 'You're just like him.' Finding some relief he leaves. Sudheer is a charming young man, yet dangerous as a person. He is not harmful to the common folk as Bond had bestowed upon him some traits of Robin Hood. Sudheer has well-understood the value of soft sugar-coated talks that make hard things simple. Basically the two dancing girls –Hastini and Mrinalini-were crazy about him .One can see the adroit hands of Bond at nomenclature. We have already seen the names like: Hathi, Goonga, Lafunga which are self-explanatory in their meaning and rather expositing to their personality. Hastini and Mrinalini repeat the same graceful art of name giving,

Between Hastini, of the broad hips, and Mrinalini, who was small and slender, there existed a healthy rivalry for the affection of Sudheer...Mrinalini envied the luxuriousness of Hastini's soft body, while Hastini envied Mrinalini's delicacy, poise

and slenderness of foot, and graceful walk. Mrinalini was the colour of milk and honey; she had the daintiness of deer, while Hastini possessed the elegance of an elephant. (Bond, "The Lafunga",176)

The mind always rules over matter and, wit over the physical abilities. As per Indian diplomacy, Saam (to advice and ask), Daam (to offer and buy), Dand (to punish), Bada (exploiting the secrets) should be used where ever required to gain control over others. Likewise, Sudheer realizes that jealousy between Hastini and Mrinalini is the best way to capture them. He persuades them very cunningly with his submissive yet touching words and could manage to get fifteen rupees for Rusty.

Less the luggage, better you are as a traveler; the adage – holds good for all kinds of journey: inward or outward. Rusty was preparing himself for the journey to the hills. Clothes were given to the Goonga and the books were kept with Devinder who also gives him some money for the trip. Rusty sets out in an empty compartment of a north-bound train. Leaving Dehra behind, the train was chugging along towards Hardwar. He is taken aback to see Sudheer entering his compartment in the moving train. The lonely journey becomes entertaining with a friend. Sudheer tries to convince Rusty to be a companion to him and be a part of his project. He promises him money, excitement and friendship. But Rusty is of a different make and lives in his dream. Birds of different feather cannot flock together.

Before the train drew into Hardwar station, Sudheer jumps out of the compartment. At the station, Rusty comes to know that Sudheer has stolen one thousand rupees from a Seth at Dehra .Rusty's walk from Lansdowne bus terminus to Hathi's village is long and lonely but is filled with ocular delight- the scenic pleasure of nature. Not only did Rusty feel the elegance of the hills and forest around Hathi's village, but also understood the dangers hidden behind those innocuous appearances. Through the ferocious sounds of wild animals Bond has built up an environment of fear and destruction .During his stay in Hathi's village, Rusty receives a letter from the shop-cum-post office that is sent by Sudheer. He has given words to be with Rusty in search of Rusty's aunt who is living somewhere in the hills. Rusty gets a companion to go to the hills in search of her aunt. Rusty and Sudheer plodded along the long and lonely road of Kotli forest. As they found a small cluster of houses on their way, they knocked at the door from which light gleamed through the cracks. The man is not ready to take them in, but it is cunning Sudheer and his witty words that make their entry possible. Rightly, language has taught us how to conceal the reality to fulfill our needs. However, our needs should not spell curse for others.

Man is nothing but a bundle of desires. To move someone to help one, one must tickle the need and desires of the person. The old man named Ram Singh whose house they spent the night in stated in clear terms that he did not have anything at home for supper. But when Sudheer tantalized him with a flask of rum, he confessed to have some vegetables for curry.

Ram Singh is a nymphomaniac. He had got three wives in his life. Even at the age of seventy, he wants to tie knots with a young lady. The intoxication of wine turned the talk towards women. They talked about the suitable features of a bride for Ram Singh, although Sudheer is quite sarcastic in his answers. They are disturbed by a bear that clambers up the rooftop for a pumpkin. But more disturbing is the hypocrisy of the old man. He dances as if an evil spirit has entered his body. Sudheer understood the reality behind Ram Singh's hysterics and offered him the leftover rum which made him calm and stable. Rusty wanted to know something about his aunt from Ram Singh, but what he got were some vague answers.

The morning was wonderfully beautiful for Rusty. It has snowed all around. Rusty forgot all his pain and problems for some moments in the midst of the white treasures of earth. They reached Garhwal. The play of emotion, apprehension and anticipation is going on in the mind of Rusty who is with Sudheer as they come to the house with English looks to find whether it belonged to his aunt. They meet Bishnu, the servant boy and a huge black Tibetan mastiff at the gate. It is a piece of good fortune that she was the lady who was being sought after. Bond made her special by giving her a hookah as a symbol of masculinity and self-indulgence.

She had been the wife of the younger brother of Rusty's father, even though she appeared much younger than what she was expected of. She readily identified Rusty and found the resemblance of him with his father and informed that his father had left hardly anything to be given to Rusty. The house and the land around it were his uncle's. However, she welcomes Rusty to stay there. On one hand Bond is quite sarcastic about Mrs. Bhushan in all her moves, and on the other he appreciates the exquisite younger look of the aunt. He gives many rhetoric answers to the question about her elongated youth.

The world has much of everything – good or bad. And those things come to you what you invite with your obsession. Likewise, Rusty always sniffed out books and writing material wherever he went. It happened again and he got the only legacy – the books of his childhood days at his aunt's house. Those were the only surviving link between his father and him. His father had kept them especially for him,

‘You are probably too old for some of them now, but your father asked me to keep them for you. Especially Alice in Wonderland. He was particular about that one, I don't know why.’ (Bond, “Lady with a Hookah”, 196)

Rusty rejects the idea of his aunt that he should stop his purposeless wandering and get himself settled at her place; still he could pursue his ambition of becoming a writer there. They can be of some help and companion to each other. But Rusty decides to walk on. He understands that the freedom is not the price he should pay for two square meals. In the words of Meena G. Khurana, vagrants never liked an individual or an institution to control their movements – “In a sense, the book is a fantasy of freedom. What would it be to live

entirely on one's own with no adults, school or job to dictate you?" (Khorana, Meena. *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond*, 50).

They continued their wandering to Rishikesh, the town of saints, mendicants and pilgrims. It would be a perfect setting for Sudheer's anonymity and 420 plans. As they moved ahead by bus, one could see the clear contrast between the bus driver and the driver of the bullock cart which took Rusty and Kishen to Raiwala, except the shared habit of smoking bidi. The cart driver is lost in his talks with the bullocks leaving the passengers in oblivion, whereas the bus driver is engaged in a heated up argument with the passengers on political issues. He is so engrossed in the disagreement that the worst could happen to the bus. Even he is satirized by Sudheer to be a rat in his next birth like a political person. The fear came true and the bus was stuck in the hill side. The driver had no compunction for his mistakes as he is rather used to it. Passengers decide to walk to Rishikesh which was at a distance of eight miles from the place. During adolescent days there is an extra enthusiasm among the boys to talk about women and seek pleasure in it. Sudheer and Ganapat, a farmer who is walking with them does the same to lessen the ennui and effort of walking. Vashtayan, whom the Indian culture reveres as the greatest exponent of the art of erotica was alluded through the conversation. Rusty's love for loneliness made him separate from the group as he wants to enjoy the splendor of the river bank nearby.

Hills as symbols of individual strength and self-dependence were inspiring Rusty as he was passing by. He was learning the philosophies of nature to be free and unfettered-

Mountains stand for the sublimity and magnanimity which man can only aspire for. Once the man lives with the mountains, he develops a sense of belongingness with them. Rusty is one of them. The writer hero experiences the great force of the mountains as they pour tranquility and spiritual bliss into innocent hearts.⁵

On his way to the river bank he makes friendship with a village boy whom he has just come across. Even he shares a loaf of bread with him making him a companion. An eerie environment is created as Rusty enters the forest by the river. The astute use of imagery makes the atmosphere really scary. There was a growth of consciousness in the characters especially as the journey of the vagrants is approaching the end. It is Rishikesh with the setting of a full moon night. The Ganges has become a stream of liquid silver. The night and the moon affected the character of men so much that some were romantic and some others were considered rather lunatic.

In '*Vagrants in the Valley*', we find the reference of the festival of the Full Moon. He (Bond) also gives us the details about the evil effects of it. It is strongly believed by the people that the Full Moon does strange things to people. When the Moon is full, it is not advisable to sleep in the moon light. Here Bond comments on the supernatural

⁵A MuthuMeenaLosini, "Children and Nature in Ruskin Bond's Works: A Study". Diss. Mother Teresa Women's University, 2013, 80

Indian belief about the Full Moon.(Dr. Chetan Trivedi, Portrayal of Indian Social Customs, Festivals and Gods in the Works of Ruskin Bond, Abstract)

Rusty, Sudheer and Ganpat witness life and its variety with all its bizarre hues of the holy town. The wolf inside Sudheer finds its sheepskin in the saffron attire of the monks. He decides to leave for Dehra to meet some people and return the borrowed money to Hastini and Mrinalini. At Dehra, Sudheer meets Mrinalini while she is preparing herself for her customers. But the cracked and discolored mirror is a philosophic mentor to Mrinalini which reminds her that beauty is only skin deep that goes down with age. She is neither upset nor undergoes psychological trauma for the ugliness that may come with age. Although Mrinalini sees her distorted image in the mirror she accepts it gracefully. Loneliness brings out the best or the worst in a man. Everyone suffers from this ailment called loneliness. It is easy for an extrovert like Sudheer to come out from its grip, but for Mrinalini it is a tough task although she meets many customers who swarms there to devour her beauty and youth,

‘Yes. The more people I see, the lonelier I get. You must have some companion, someone to talk to and quarrel with, if you are not to be lonely. You can find such a companion. But who can I find?

my mother is old and deaf and heartless.’ (Bond, “End of a Journey”,207)

It is spring and Rusty enjoys the cozy atmosphere of Rishikesh. The surroundings make him nostalgic to be again with his old friends. In that thoughtful moment he realises a profound difference between his other friends and Sudheer. He can understand Kishen and Devinder and loves them. He likes Sudheer but could never understand him. Sudheer comes back. *Seth*’s people could not recognize him in his saffron outfit. The success of disguising himself at Dehra inspires Sudheer to initiate bigger projects in Rishikesh. How hypocrisy gulps man gradually! Sudheer wants to be the devil in a monk’s hide. Such is the game that people play every day. One cannot live a life of a vagrant all the time. The adventures, excitements of wandering and meeting unknown people come bringing in their wake unremitting uncertainty that quickly unsettles the serenity of life. One must settle down among one’s own people and give a sure direction to life-

Even Mowgli left the wolf-pack to return to his own people. And India was changing. This great formless mass was taking some sort of shape at last. He had to stop now, and find a place for himself, or go forward to disaster. (Bond, “First and Last Impressions”, 214)

Rusty goes to Mr. Pettigrew to keep his books at his home as the church is not a permanent shelter for him. When he sees Mr. Pettigrew, he feels as if he has left him just there. It shows the lack of events in a retired life. Mr. Pettigrew is dragging on living a cheerless existence. He tells Rusty how boring his bovine life is! Something must happen – if not good; let it be a

riot. Something really happened on that day. Among the collection of books Rusty had taken to him, Mr. Pettigrew found *Alice in Wonderland* - a rare first edition book that can fetch Rusty several hundred pounds. He need not borrow money all the time like Oliver Goldsmith.

The value of the book can be interpreted in two ways: the first is its material value (it sells for five or six hundred pounds) and the second is its intrinsic value. The best legacy a father can leave for his children is his books which will give them knowledge and inspire them to move on to reach higher goals of life. (Ruskin Bond: A Critical Evaluation, 75)

Mr. Pettigrew is full of enthusiasm that he could do something for a budding writer. His life might be going to wither away very soon, but he could water a life that was going to blossom. He was really hopeful to send Rusty to England,

He looked out rather wistfully at his garden, at the tall marigolds and bright clumps of petunia and the splurge of bougainvillaea against the wall.

‘My journeyings is over,’ he said. ‘And yours have just begun. (Bond, “First and Last Impressions”, 218)

On his way to the church, Rusty wants to inform Kishen about his journey to England. But he could not. Nevertheless, he understands that Kishen has found a decent place on earth. The woman who would bring man’s detached mind and ascetic spirit to the ground and make them down to earth has already come to Kishen’s life. Shredding the scales of vagrancy, Rusty is going to start a new journey of life..... his travel to London. Mr. Pettigrew is a real help. He has hired a pony-drawn carriage to the railway station. The novelist creates a lot of humour through the words of the tonga driver and the movement of the tonga. Rusty boards the train. He loses his individuality in the sea of crowds. Hopes were aplenty in the heart of Rusty. His friends were dreaming to receive Rusty one day with a lot of honor and affluence. Not to say, youth and optimism is always quite synonymous. Still there is doubt running in the mind of Rusty that if he would really come back there. He is like the traveler in Robert Frost’s ‘*The Road Not Taken*’, who knew one path leads to the other,

‘Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.’⁶

Surprisingly he meets the American whom he had met during his journey to Raiwala. He is still trying to convince the farmers to use his equipment, but with little success. Rusty like a wise old man precociously finds the reason behind the rejection of his product. A look at Rusty makes it clear that no one can stop him and his pen. He has got all possibilities to make things happen to him ahead. Bond could see the boundless stretch of land in front of him in tune to the optimism and high aspiration of Rusty as he strides towards his goal.

⁶Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken.....

The vagrancy of Rusty disappears like a passing phase as the goal to be an acclaimed writer is in vision and the desire to grab it with all might is rising every day. But the hangover of moving with the vagrants in the sight, scent and sounds of Dehra grips the readers' mind as *Vagrants in the Valley* is a celebration of life with no strings attached. Moreover, the desire of man to explore his own individuality rejecting the dictates of any social order is richly delineated by the characters-

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.⁷

Bond attributes distinct human emotions to his vagrants. The pain and pleasures of life quite foreign to the people confined cozily in the cocoons of the family can be sensed vicariously through these characters. Basically they represent the very many displaced communities of post-colonial and post-partition India. Rusty becomes a vagrant as he prefers freedom to enslavement to a stereotype authority. When Kishen is abandoned by his morally handicapped family, Goonga is deserted by his family because of his inability to speak. Devinder loses his parents in the upheavals of Indo-Pak partition and Sudheer is a homeless refugee who wandered into India from the frontier. Belonging to different circumstances living through life-stories and coming from diverse cultures they are still friends – very genuine and very loyal to each other.

Vagrants, in spite of their personal agonies, bubbled with zest for life in the laps of Dehra. The bullock ride, the splash in the spring, passing through the dark forest, sleeping on the open ground, etc., made them lose themselves in the raw pleasures of life. The journey which as the extended metaphor denotes the growth and maturity of the characters swiftly leads them to the gamut of experience and wisdom. They understand wandering is not the final destiny of their birth; it is like finding out the need of their inner souls and exerts them to fulfill the same. With this Kishen finds himself in the care of Mrs. Bhushan and in the company of Aruna. Rusty finds the strand to reach his dreams and is all set for England. The purposeless wandering gives way for a march of resolution. It is apt to mention a few lines from one of Bond's poems about an army of red ants marching toward their destination single mindedly.

“You stride through the long grass,
Pressing on over fallen pine-needles,
Up the winding road to the mountain – pass
Small red ant, now crossing a sea,

⁷K.L.Readdy, T. Bharati, “Vagrancy in Ruskin Bond's *Vagrants in the Valley*”*The Criterion*, Vol.6.4, Aug. 2015,74. Web. 22 Oct 2015

Of rain drops; your destiny
To carry home that single, slender cosmos seed,
Waving it like a banner in the sun”
(Bond, Book of Verse, Walk Tall, 23)

Works Cited

- Bond, Ruskin. *The Room on the Roof, Vagrants in the Valley: Two Novels of Adolescence*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1993
- Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1997
- *Book of Verse. Nature: Walk Tall*; New Delhi. Penguin, 2007.
- My Writings Reflect My Lonely Childhood* <http://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/lifestyle/my-writings-reflect-my-lonely-childhood-ruskin-bond/#sthash.ggPLIP44.dpuf>, Access 22 Oct 2015
- K.L.Readdy, T. Bharati. “Vagrancy in Ruskin Bond’s Vagrants in the Valley”, *The Criterion*, Vol.6.4, Aug 2015, ISSN 09676-8165, Web. 22 Oct 2015
- Khorana, Meena A. *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond: Contributions to the Study of World Literature*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003
- Losini, A Muthu Meena. “Children and Nature in Ruskin Bond’s Works: A Study”. Mother Teresa Women’s University, Kodaikanal, Kerala, 2013. Diss.
- Louse, Untermeyer. *Anthology of Robert Frost Poems*, New York; Simon and Schuster, 1982
- Singh K. Prabhat. Ed. *Creative Counters of Ruskin Bond: An Anthology of Critical Writings*, New Delhi: Pencraft, 1995
- Sinha, M.P and Jauhari, R and Dave, Nigam J. *Ruskin Bond A Critical Evaluation*. New Delhi: Atlantic, New Delhi, 2012