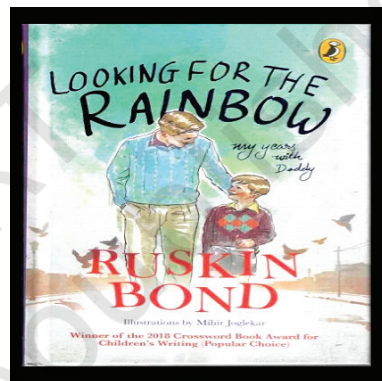


## BOOK REVIEW

### *Looking for the Rainbow: My Years with Daddy*

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**Author** : Ruskin Bond  
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**Illustration** : Mihir Joglekar



Ruskin Bond is a name familiar to most children who are fond of reading books in English. He has written over five hundred stories and essays for children.

This is Bond's first memoir for children in which he talks of his childhood days spent with his father and pays a tribute to him. "As I sit here, soaking up the mellow spring sunshine, the distant past looms up before me, and I remember things that I thought I had forgotten. Most of all I remember my father—'Daddy', as I always called him," he writes.

Born in Kasauli in 1934, Ruskin Bond grew up in Jamnagar, Dehradun, New Delhi and Shimla. Ruskin was four years old when his British parents, Edith Clerke and Aubrey Bond separated (followed by a divorce later). He was raised by his grandmother. It was inevitable perhaps, that he was sent to a boarding school quite early.

The separation of parents would certainly leave a lasting impact on a child's mind, and Ruskin's was no exception. Yet, in the memoir, he deals with it in a short, ironical comment:

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“It was 1942, the middle of World War II, and my parents too had been at war with each other. They had, in fact, separated, and my mother was about to marry again.”

Later, his mother remarried an Indian. Ruskin was called back from the boarding school. But he preferred to go to his father. As he says in the memoir,

"My father was serving in the Royal Air Force, and was living on his own in an Air Force hutment in New Delhi, working in the Codes and Cyphers section at Air Headquarters. I was particularly close to my father, and I insisted on going to live with him rather than to a new and unknown home."

Thus, for two years he lived with his father. This book 'Looking for the Rainbow' tells the story of the two years he spent with his father in New Delhi and Shimla.

Young readers would need to be told, and adults would need to remember, that up till then, Calcutta had been the capital of British-ruled India, and Shimla was the summer capital. At the time of the narration, however, the capital was New Delhi, still very new and was still coming up. The hutment consisted of two brick-walled rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom, located in Humayun Road, which at that time was only a lane with shrubs and bushes.

The author recalls his encounter with snakes and jackals, and the rush to the Air Road Shelters

during bombing. He also remembers suffering from prickly heat in Delhi. He recounts the various stamps in his father's stamp collection, and how both father and son spent an entire rainy afternoon classifying them. Bond and his father then had to shift from their hutment which was prone to leaking, and things became worse as soon as the monsoon broke.

That was the last time he saw his father though he did not know it at the time. His father's sudden death a few months later pushed the author, then a young boy of ten, into a different and unfamiliar world. As Ruskin Bond writes in his Foreword, "Most of us grow in our teens or twenties I think I grew up when I was ten".

The author reminisces that he was lucky to have a father who gave the boy nearly all his spare time, who brought him books, took him for walks, shared his interests and most important, held his hand in the dark. 'Not many fathers are capable of tenderness towards their children. They are usually too busy 'earning a living for the family'—at least, that's the excuse they make.' says the author, with the dry humour so characteristic of him.

As the author begins to write, he remembers things that he thought he had forgotten. In a life full of stress and strife, he vividly recalls the warmth, love and tenderness of his father.

Bond introduces readers to the realities that are around, perhaps

unnoticed, such as the chirping of birds, the clattering of raindrops on the rooftops, the fragrance of flowers, the smell of the earth when it rains, the dancing of leaves in the breeze, the musical gurgling of running streams, the swaying of trees, and simple routine activities such as the churning of butter, the smell of toast and details of everyday life. For instance, he learnt the habit of knocking his shoes against the floor or wall and examining them carefully every morning from his father.

"I did not realise 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."

Readers will be enthralled by the descriptions of visits to the cinema, long walks and the conversations that created a bond between father and son. What adds to the attraction is the unassuming style. The visual element is very strong: it is like a film unfolding before one's eyes. 'Straightforward' best describes Ruskin's writing style: it is simple, direct yet lovingly indulgent to young readers.

Bond's father played a major role in teaching him how to enjoy reading and writing, which later shaped his creative talents. The author's words show that from his childhood days he developed this habit. This reflects the autobiographical elements found in Bond's work. Nature plays an important role in Bond's writing.

Bond's description of natural surroundings of northern India and foothills of the Himalayas forms the background in his stories.

Parents, and teachers, may take the opportunity to point out to young readers at some point, that good literature need not always be full of difficult words or obtuse terms. What an author should strive for, is clarity. There is a certain elegance in simplicity. This can be seen in the theme, the choice of words, and in the illustrations. Ruskin Bond writes about nature and ordinary people and their daily lives. His stories are written in a simple, lucid and engaging style. The illustrations are in black and white, with the shadow outline technique rendering it suitable for the theme of nostalgia, complementing the work exceedingly well. The book is small-sized, making it easy to hold by young readers.

The author once said, "When I sit down to write, I write to enjoy myself. I write what interest me or what is personal to me. I write to inform and educate the readers. Whatever I write, I want to keep it simple, adopting a simple style so that readers could relate to my writing and enjoy the experience."

I write a story in my mind in advance. Afterwards I need to put it on paper only, using the words that are effective and writing beautiful sentences.

The Indian Council for Child Education has recognised Ruskin Bond's contribution to the growth of

children's literature in India. He was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992 for, 'Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra', his novel in English. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999, and the Padma Bhushan in 2014.

What exactly is it that has won Ruskin Bond the hearts of millions of readers?

Countless charming short stories and introspective novels are underlined by a strong note of optimism. The literary world of Ruskin Bond is like an oasis, a green patch in the dreary desert of modern feverish literature. Ruskin has extended an

uncorrupted world of simple, but delightful and absorbing stories narrating life in a new healing order. The tales of innocence and experience are revealed through his fiction and poetry to comfort his readers, not to lull them to sleep but to usher in an awareness of the beauty of everyday life, the wonders of nature, and the varying shades of the lives of men, women and children.

As an observer of human life and a perceptive student of human character. Bond displays the maturity, sophistication and ease of a master storyteller.