

THE LOVE STORIES OF RUSKIN BOND

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Love is an emotion that has predominated the world literature since time immemorial and isn't it true that this feeling is the only driving force for us, the humans? It is there in the present modern literature and it was there in the old literature. Love knows no boundaries and can never be confined to any human made chains. It is free and a person in love touches the pinnacle of eternal joy which otherwise stays unknown to him. Love can be interpreted in a diverse way, but the basic underlying thing never changes.

Writers through ages have brought the passion, the beauty and its effects on people and on themselves through the words. It has been seen that love, no matter of what kind, has a hold on to the human beings and other creatures on the planet. It is never governed by reason; it is a feeling that can only be felt. Shakespeare has rightfully put it in the words "Love is blind" and surely it is because it can never be explained by reason. Artists whether a painter, musician, dancer or a writer has always been able to interpret it more beautifully and through their art they have made people around them feel the feeling which moves everybody to greatness.

Therefore, when one plunges deep into the works of Petrarch one gets drowned in the depth of love which he creates through his words. On the other hand, there are gentle feelings of love in Shakespeare, whereas impetuous prose of Dickenson or deep expression of yearning and experiencing love in the Metaphysical and Romantic poets like John Donne, Shelley, Byron etc. From the very beginning of literature one can witness the profound imprints of love in every form and piece of writing. Love is a feeling which is not restricted to only literature but has also become a matter of interest in different fields of studies such as Psychology and Sociology. There are different kinds of love which we all experience. The meaning of love is subjective and varies person to person. But this is for sure that it makes us feel the most alive. It could be with anyone and anything, it creates magic and fulfils the basic need of humans of being more than oneself. Love has various shades. It could be unrequited, required, lustful, immoral, moral, religious, national or for world in general. Encyclopedia Britannica has described love in these words "Love (libido) is the term used to describe such diverse manifestation of behaviour and experience as the parent-child relationship protecting reactions and appreciation of protective friendship, attachment to places, to occurrence or to food." ¹

The idea of romantic love known in Western Literature is said to be inspired by courtly love which was portrayed by Chevaliers or Knights in the middle ages. This kind of love is neither physical nor marital. It is an unrequited love with women who were from high status societies whom the knights used to serve. The courtly love was the principal theme found in literature of that time. The marriages of the age were more formal than a business meeting. In the middle ages, a chevalier was needed to raise the living standard of the downtrodden or poor people of a particular state. He was depicted as the humblest and most loyal towards his duties. There is this book called "De amore" popular by the name "The Art of Courtly Love" was written in the 12th century. In this work one can see a clear difference between physical and romantic love. It is a known fact that romantic love which was in vogue in late nineteenth century in England was majorly inspired by French culture. Romantic love is completely opposite to platonic love which is not about physical or sexual relations.

The other two forms of love which are-The platonic and unrequited love are beautifully described and expressed in the stories and narrations of Ruskin Bond. His concept of love is expressed in several ways. It is comic, tragic and sometimes there is a gleam of romance in it. The lovers in his stories are aware of the norms of the society and are somehow bound by them. They do have their escapades but the love never sees the future because it soon gets buried in the demands and expectations of their family members. but the dominant and never lasting feature is of spirituality which is hardly seen in other writers and their works. At different phases of life, we experience different kinds of love and each has its role to play in expanding our consciousness. There is love between two persons of opposite sexes, which is built on intimacy, passion, compassion, compatibility and appreciation. Bond focusses not much on physical as much as he does on the soul. He is a believer of the love that transcends all the boundaries of mind. He believes in it being the only thing that gives a human being something to live for. In traditional Indian society the arranged marriages are more popular and it is because of this that many real love stories face the tragic ends. But there are always some cases through which we see the success of arranged marriages. The legendary playwright William Shakespeare always supported arranged marriages and through his plays one comes to understand the Elizabethan England. His plays like The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar and A Midsummer Night's Dream are the perfect examples of his writing. He, like any great writer understood love which begins with physical attraction leading to marriage and then finally it blossoms into divine ecstasy. He believed in happy endings though some tragedies had brutal endings nonetheless there have been some plays which speaks

¹Encyclopedia Britannica v: 8 pp 399

profoundly of his faith in the institution of marriage. His one of the most popular plays "As you like it" ends up with marriages of four couples.

Love has always been a central theme of his plays. The kind of love that he portrays is not always a romantic one. It has many forms. Through *Rosalind and Orlando* he shows romantic love, whereas through *Silvius and Phebe* he shows the love in the lower strata of the society, that not only survives the throes of life but also comes out victorious and grateful. Then there are *Audrey and Touchstone* which take lust to be real love. Shakespeare makes his plays interesting by imbibing the varied shades of love and its expression.

In the next age which is Victorian age love seems to be more like a business deal than a human emotion. For example: Marvell in his poem "To His Coy Mistress", tries his best to convince the young woman to give her consent to him to love her. His appreciation of her beauty is all physical, of what meets the eye which is typical of Victorian poets and writers who were impatient and pushy. They looked only at the outer beauty of females and did not remember anything about the soul and its treasures. Ruskin Bond's stories speak of his deep understanding of love and it seems as if he patronizes love so much that he sees it in every speck of his life. He is a lover of not only humans but of nature and its elements but he is the person who doesn't believe in its everlasting element. His stories are mostly about the unrequited and platonic love. He writes of such love because he hasn't experienced it. The first relationship which is very close to a child, of parents, he has seen it fall apart. And this disruption of his family at a very tender age of Ruskin seem to have done too much damage on a young mind. In his autobiography "Lone Fox Dancing" he has written about his state of mind when he witnessed the quarrels of his parents. He says:

"Through it all, my parents' quarrels became more frequent, and this broke the harmony of our life. There would be harsh words and blind, angry shouting. My mother would threaten to go away, or my father would threaten to send her away, and it was all a bit frightening. I felt helpless and insecure, and this feeling of insecurity was to become a part of my mental baggage for the rest of my life."

He has suffered the repercussions of the broken bond throughout his life. This has become the reason why he doesn't show his characters to be happily married or even married. Everything ceases to be when love reaches to its pinnacle. It never flowers to full blossom instead it gets severed by the adult members of families. In his childhood days he had seen his parents fighting and getting divorced. He has been most affected by it and hence he has never supported this institution. According to him it is the bond that leads to misery and unhappiness. One can read in his book called "The Rupa Book of Love stories" these lines that profoundly speak of what he thinks of love and its end. "Why do so many great love stories end in sadness or tragedy? Whether it's Laila and Majnu, Romeo and Juliet, Sohni and Mehar, Antony and Cleopatra, or the star-crossed lover of Opera's such as Carmen or Tosca, hero and heroine seem doomed to dying in each other's arms. Happy endings Are hard to come by."²

Ruskin Bond writes about the innocent love which brings in the life comfort and not any kind of compromise or sacrifice. It never demands any commitment or promises. It stays and flourishes in the minds and hearts of the characters. He knows that the strong emotions aroused by love are as deep as ocean. The known thing about love and its expressions is, they never die. This trait is much present in his writings. In a nutshell it can be said that his works reflect the universal, never dying aspect of love. In his stories two individuals get attracted towards each other, they fell in love but never reach to a lasting relationship. Still their love lives which gets transformed to a selfless bond. They are separated because of many reasons but the love between them knows no bounds. With time it never seems to fade rather the glory of it increases manifold day by day. The characters seem to be blessed and happy to have at least the memories with them, if not each other. This reflects his own thoughts on love and how he has been cherishing the love that never ceases to be even when he no longer is with his beloved.

His love stories are often about the unrequited love in which the real happiness of the lover lies in living the bygone days rather than lamenting the loss of the person. Ruskin Bond in the introduction to "The Night Train at Deoli and Other stories" says this:

"I can't really write unless I am in love with my subject."³

For Ruskin Bond love and human emotions hold a different meaning. He has always listened to his heart. His mother and relatives did try to dissuade him from becoming a writer but he did not listen to anybody. Further, he was asked to make a career in England and get settled there which he found impossible to live. In England, while struggling to adjust with the climate and people, he discovered how much in love he is with India, its flora and fauna, and of course the people. He couldn't write anything except about India and his Indian friends. He longed to go back and so he came back to India never to leave it again even if it meant he had to live meagrely. In his Autobiography "Lone Fox Dancing," he says this:

⁴"But the real reason was different. Yes, I could have settled down in Jersey and grown old there, on a comfortable salary and the prospect of a pension. Everyone would have approved- my aunt and uncle; my mother back in India; my well-meaning

²Bond, Ruskin. (Ed),"Introduction ", Rupa Book of Love Stories". New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2010.

³Bond, Ruskin "The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 1988. No Page.

⁴ Bond, Ruskin. Lone Fox Dancing. Speakingtigerbooks, pp. 149

colleagues. But I wasn't looking for permanency or the unexciting life of a government servant. I didn't refuse the permanent job, but in my heart I knew I wasn't going to stay."

Since his return he has been writing about the experiences he has every day and about the life he cherishes, living with his adopted family. He is not a writer who follows a professional or formal style. He let the things be as they are and capture the beauty of them in an honest and simple way. In his autobiography he says "I cannot breathe life into political leaders, media tycoons, or businessmen, because one has to peel off too many layers of protective armor to get at the flesh and blood that lies beneath the skin."⁵

He enjoys writing about the adolescents and children. Hence, the characters in his stories are youngsters and he portrays the world through their eyes. The unadulterated mind of these characters seem to lend a view of things which could rarely be found in any adult. Ruskin Bond has found in children the true philosophy of life and it is also because he has been through a lot of emotional turmoil in his childhood days. He has not yet been able to shake the past which seems to have deep impact on him and that's the reason he considers children to be more mature than the adults of the society.

In a story "The Night train at Deoli" an eighteen-year boy develops feeling for a basket girl who he had first seen at the platform. He plans his trip again so that he can meet her but it didn't happen. The memory of the girl remained with the longing to be with her. ⁶"I prefer to keep hoping and dreaming and looking out of the window up and down the lonely platform, waiting for the girl with the basket." The whole story seems like a beautiful dream which the narrator didn't want to let go of. Characters like Rusty, in the Room on the Roof, the sensualist in "The Sensualist" seem to be the representatives of varied aspects of life. In his creations love is depicted as a mystery and each individual tries to make something out of it in his own way. The hero in "Delhi is not so far" says: "Few things reassure me ...the desire to love and be loved, the beauty and ugliness of the human body, the intricacy of its design...sometime love as a sort of exploration of all that is physical. Falling in love becomes an exploration of the mind."

Ruskin bond has always been an affectionate and caring person and this is the very reason why he has made so many great friends. Among his fast friends was a Vietnamese girl named Vu-Phuong, to whom he proposed for marriage, but unfortunately she had to leave London to visit her parents in Vietnam, because at that time there was a war going on between the North and South Vietnam. She never returned, leaving the heart of Bond full of love and memories. He has mentioned her in his autobiography "Scenes from a Writer's life" and has written "It was Thanh who introduced me to a Vietnamese girl called vu-Phuong, and I promptly fell in love with her. At that age it did not take long for me to fall in love with anyone, and Vu was the sort of girl- pretty, soft-spoken, demure who could enslave me without any apparent effort."

to fall in love with anyone, and Vu was the sort of girl- pretty, soft-spoken, demure who could enslave me without any apparent effort."⁷

Ruskin fell in love with her but it was a one sided love as she treated him as her brother. The feelings he had for her were the reflection of his pure soul. The love stayed unrequited which finds existence in his characters.

The love that has been portrayed in the stories of Ruskin Bond time and again is an experience, an escape that seems to take one away for a passing minute to the world where there is a celebration of humility, humanity and innocence.

Love is an emotion given to every human being, it acquires various dimensions in consonance with the level of consciousness reached by any human being. For an awakened soul it takes the form of compassion, all forgiving, and all embracing like in Christ, Buddha or Mahavir.

In a social milieu it has found expression in human beings who are head of a particular clan or tribe, with an exclusion of others.

Similarly, in a family it finds expression in a mother or a father for their progeny, again its expression or its mode of manifestation changes from person to person such as between two lovers. Finally, emotions surrounding love, finds its reflection in the belief system that is deeply embedded in its cultural ethos, found in a particular society. But still one can say language of love has no barrier, it can be understood by anyone.

Love cannot be thought about, love cannot be cultivated and love cannot be practised.

The love stories written by Ruskin Bond are always narrated in the first person; and mostly the hero or protagonist is not named, who is shown falling in love with a young innocent girl. It is a mutual relationship between two completely unrelated and unmatched couples. The male lead characters in Ruskin Bond's love stories are always depicted as genuine and honest and the female partners are shown as young, immature, erratic and ones who are bound by the restraints of the society. His stories are

⁵The Lamp Is Lit: Leaves from a Journal. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 1998.196

⁶Bond, Ruskm 'The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 1988. pp. 48. 9

⁷Bond, Ruskm. "And Another in London". Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir. New Delhi and New York: Penguin Books, 1997. 151, Print.

mostly tragic and therefore you can find in the introduction of his love stories: "Another appeal of tragic love story is that it leaves the doomed lovers forever young. They are trapped in time- always youthful, always beautiful, always passionate."⁸

The tragic combination between romance and society is very beautifully shown in literature, in Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, In Flaubert's Madame Bovary, and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. In all of these stories the female lead characters' commit suicides to free themselves from the shackles of the society. The Tolstoy's characters highlight the limitations which a society possesses on to its people, mainly through a bond of marriage. Anna prefers to put an end to her life over getting married to her lover because he is not able to get his mother's approval. The society depicted in the novel is equally cruel to her. the same aspect can be witnessed in most of Ruskin Bond's love stories that meet with a tragic end. One such story is "Love is a sad song"

The lover or the protagonist of the famous story of Ruskin Bond which is called "Love is a Sad song," is a writer who is thirty-two years old, who doesn't know where the love is taking him. Sushila, the girl in his life, is a school girl and she is much younger to him. Their love seems odd and unacceptable when one sees from the eyes of the society.

"Love is a sad song" is also based on one of the unsuccessful relationships of Ruskin Bond with Anil Chopra's cousin, Sashi Kishore. The family members never took Sashi and Ruskin bond seriously as the girl was only seventeen years old at that time. Ruskin writes of his love of which the memories alone have remained. One can easily see that his love ended because of the notions of the society. Sushila who had to marry a rich businessman because the narrator was the AngloIndian and was only a writer. The story doesn't end here as they meet again but now Shushila seems to be settled in her so called family life. The longing and love is still there but she couldn't just run away with Ruskin even if she wants to as she is bogged down by the society's norms and family's responsibilities. The narrator understood and felt the love which she could not express. He lived and she loved completely in those fleeting moments. The protagonist comforts himself with the words

"Remembered passion grows sweeter with the passing of time." ⁹

His another story which comes from the treasure house of his memories is "The Girl of Copenhagen." The narrator meets a sweet girl whose name was Ula. Both of them fall in love with each other and become aware of the innocence present in the mutual feelings. They spend time together and enjoy the present moment without thinking much about the future and its repercussions. The sweet friendship and relationship ends as Ula had to leave for her home. There were no pangs of separation or guilt in their minds except love and acceptance of what was there. No promises were made and no commitments were done. Both knew that the bond could not last forever.

The another aspect of love, which he explores and seems to enjoy the most is the innocent love which is found in the hills alone. He personifies this love through a beautiful character "Binya" in the story "Binya Passes By." He describes her beauty in these words "Primeval innocence, an unconcern with the passing of time and events, a deep connection with the forests and mountains; this made her special and magical."

Ruskin bond doesn't only writes beautifully about the love cradled in the mountains side by side the societal that delve into the cultures which are prevalent there and which somehow become the main reason of breaking the hearts and ending a love story. In the story "Binya Passes by" who is an innocent Garhwal girl and is from a typical traditional family falls in love with the narrator Ruskin. Everything appears to be happy for a while until the grandmother of Binya finds out about the affair and sends her away to her maternal uncle's home. Thus the narrator's love ends on a tragic note.

These powerful undercurrents of a society bound by conventions and regulations are not only present in India but is a global phenomenon like in England, even though it was many years ago. In Elizabethan age the legendary play writer, Shakespeare has written about the terrible plight of the lovers and how they had to suffer at the hands of the society.

William Shakespeare depicts the role of the Elizabethan English society through his one of the best plays called "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Through the characters Hermia and Lysander Shakespeare showcases the story of two young persons. Hermia's father has been looking for a gentleman for her daughter and tries to convince her that his choice is going to be perfect for her. He does not want her to have a say in it, quite similar to the grandmother in the story "Binya passes by" he also believes that a marriage should not happen just because two people love each other. There are several other considerations that one should think of before a marriage is decided. He therefore speaks his mind:

"But earthlier happy is the rose distilled, than that which withering on the 74 virgin thorn Grows, lives and dies in single blessedness."¹⁰

The parents do not want their children to run away with the ones they love for they are afraid that the groom may not prove to be a good husband. In Shakespeare's plays, the basic human problems are focussed upon with sensitivity. There is humour but

⁸Bond, Ruskin. (Ed), "Introduction ", Rupa Book of Love Stories". New Delhi: Rupa&Co,2010.

⁹Love Is a Sad Song. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1975.

¹⁰Shakespeare, William. Harold F. Brooks, ed. "The Arden Shakespeare "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1979. 76-79

nothing seems to be out of order or unbalanced. the lovers face challenges and sometimes get entangled badly, but everything sorts out in the end.

The love of Ruskin Bond is more about acknowledging love for Ruskin as it is not some kind of concept. It is palpable and its presence can be felt in the self and the things around, be it an animal, a tree or a human being. His famous characters- Rusty, Sushila, Ula, and Sunil represent varied kinds of love. Rusty in “The Room on the Roof,” The sensualist in “The Sensualist,” and the writer in “Delhi is not so far” are all great lovers. The protagonist of “Delhi is not so far” expresses his views in these words:

“Few things, reassure me. the desire to love and be loved, the beauty and ugliness of the human body, the intricacy of its design...some time I make love as a sort of exploration of all that is physical. Falling in love becomes an exploration of the mind.”

According to Sunil in “Death of a Familiar,” life is full of material pleasures and girls are solely objects of enjoyment. He flirts with every girl and fails to understand the meaning and feel of the real love. On the other hand, is Sushila of the story “Love is a sad song” for whom love is a profound feeling, an emotion which seems to fulfil her life and give meaning to her existence. Both the characters, sunil and sushila, of two different stories shows two shades of love. One which is shallow and ends in a sad note while the other defines and completes the person. Similarly, in “The room on the roof” is a boy of sixteen years who falls in love with a married lady, named Meena, who was also the mother of his friend, Kishen. Meena and rusty are attracted towards each other because both of them are deprived of love. They found in each other the affection which they never found in any one around them. Rusty who had no parents and was under the guidance of a cruel uncle have been feeling empty all time long while Meena was feeling the same, married to the man who never had any real feelings for her.

He voices through the story the natural tendency of a human being to expand the consciousness beyond the capacity and that he tries to do by trying to love another person with all that he has. He tries to satiate his unquenchable thirst by pouring his love to the human he finds attractive in every manner. But sadly, he gets disappointment in love. The love stories rarely see a happy ending but without being discouraged they enjoy in accepting the blessings they have in their lives, no matter how small they seem to be.

Ruskin Bond’s stories and novellas show his deep understanding of love in its various aspects. The one kind of love which seems to be recurrent in his creations is unrequited love which leaves the readers drenched in the beauty of its depiction. Nobody can forget the last look of Javed Khan that he gives to Ruth Labadoor before he let go of her and her mother in “The Flight of Pigeons.” The romantic escapade of Rusty and Meena in “The Room on the Roof” and of Sunil and Sushilain the story “Love is a sad song.” There are no happy endings in his love stories. There is separation and longing which are unique and characteristic of his writing and one can almost feel the sadness and is reminded of the heart breaks of one’s own. His entire concept of love can be summarised in his poem-

“We must love someone”

we must love someone

Idf we are to justify

Our presence on this earth.

We must keep loving all our days,

Someone, anyone, anywhere

Outside our selves;

For even the sarus crane

Will grieve over its lost companion,

And the seal its mate.

Somewhere in life

There must be someone

To take your hand

And share the torrid day

Without the touch of love

There is no life and we must fade away.

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- 5) The Lamp Is Lit: Leaves from a Journal. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 1998.196
- 6) Love Is a Sad Song. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1975.
- 7) Shakespeare, William. Harold F. Brooks, ed. The Arden Shakespeare "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1979. 76-79

