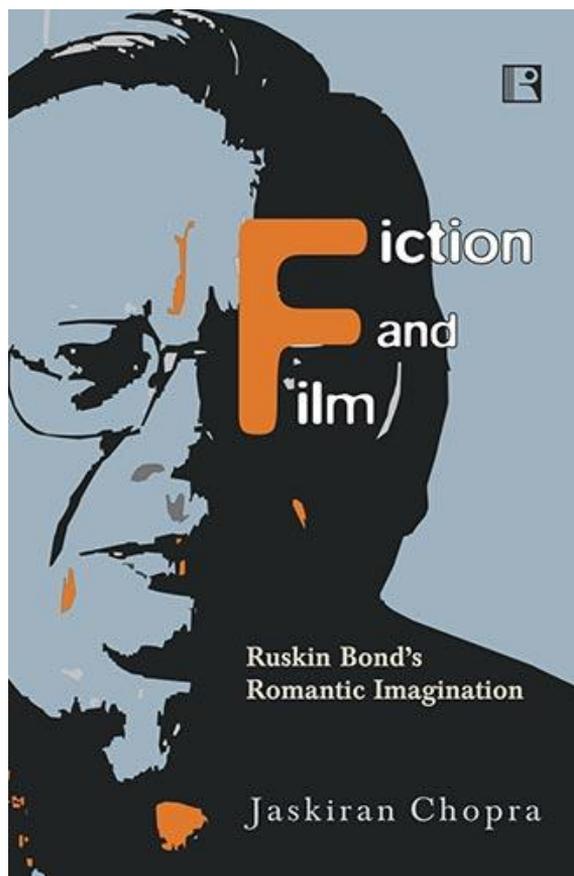


Jaskiran Chopra, *Fiction and Film: Ruskin Bond's Romantic Imagination*. Jaipur and Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2018. 196 pp. ISBN: 978-81-316-0910-1.



The debate whether Ruskin Bond should be labelled as a marginal Anglo-Indian writer or just an Indian writer in English has been going on in academic circles for quite a long time. Bond himself has been in favour of calling himself an Indian writer. He has been on the literary scene for more than six decades, and has written in almost every genre, except drama. From short stories to novellas, from travel writings to ghost tales, from children's stories to poetry, from essays to autobiographical texts, the range of his work is tremendous. His works, written against the backdrop of the Doon valley and Mussoorie, have most endearingly, brought alive this region. Memory, imagination and fantasy intermingle to play an important role in his works.

The present book under review seeks to focus on the romantic tradition and looks at the romantic imagination, which is the soul of Bond's work. According to the author, his romantic vision binds together the elements of his writing like innocence, personal narration, love for the past, love for nature and environment, and interest in childhood. In the introduction to the book she contends that despite his universal appeal and popularity, mainstream recognition has not yet come Bond's way as much as he deserved. She places Bond in the great romantic tradition of the nineteenth century due to his lyricism, spontaneity, subjectivity, interest in the mysterious, and the quality of innocence and wonder in his writings. The book also locates Bond among his contemporary writers in English besides establishing the fact that he cannot be confined to being a children's writer.

Divided into seven chapters, including the introduction and the summing up section, the study attempts to focus "on hitherto unexplored dimensions of Ruskin Bond's works" (19). Chopra further explains the focus of her study in the following way:

Eco-critical, spatial, psychological and autobiographical approaches have been mainly used through which Bond's work is explored and located both in his autobiographical experiences and his philosophical ideas which go on to define the human through the different phases of individual growth. (19)

The introductory chapter touches upon various aspects of Bond's life and work, establishing the close connection between the way he lives and the way he writes. His writing and his life are difficult to separate. The second chapter, "Prelude: Growing up as Rusty," discusses the author's childhood and adolescence and analyses *The Room on the Roof*, his first novel and the sequel, *Vagrants in the Valley*, written later. It also takes up the stories in which Bond has described his days as a child in the Doon valley. He has often said that the town inspired him greatly to write. It is interesting to note that as a young writer, Bond wrote for adults. It was only after he settled down in Landour (Mussoorie), in 1963, that he began writing for children. Childhood as a state of mind can be seen in many of his works and the adolescent protagonist Rusty in many of the stories is etched directly from his own experiences.

The third chapter, "Notes from the Himalayas: Bond of the Mountains," describes and explores Bond's fictional as well as non-fictional writings on the Himalayas where he has been residing since 1963. His deep love for nature, especially the mountain landscapes, is dwelt on in this chapter. He says that the mountains are in his blood. The wildlife of the Garhwal Himalayas, the flora and fauna, the rivers, waterfalls, springs and mountain streams – all these constitute the landscape of the major part of Bond's writing. The writer finds a close similarity between Bond's nature writings and that of Henry David Thoreau. The

following chapter deals in detail with the past of Mussoorie and Dehra Dun, their historical roots and looks at his historical novella, *A Flight of Pigeons*, as well as his historical work on Mussoorie titled *Mussoorie and Landour: Days of Wine and Roses*. Bond's interest in history focuses more on the British Raj. His fascination for cemeteries where thousands of English men and women lie buried is well-known and he believes that the lonely graves with their touching epitaphs of forgotten men and women have a very human story to tell.

"In a Different Medium" takes up the films and television serials made on Bond's works. Till date, three films and one television serial have been produced. These are *Junoon*, directed by Shyam Benegal in 1978, based on his novella *A Flight of Pigeons*; *Ek Tha Rusty* (TV serial Season One), made in 1996-97 by Shubhadarshini Singh, for Doordarshan; *The Blue Umbrella* (a film made by Vishal Bharadwaj in 2005, based on the short story by the same name); and *7 Khoon Maaf*, made by Vishal Bharadwaj in 2011, based on the short story "Susanna's Seven Husbands." It is interesting to know that unlike many authors who do not involve themselves in the film adaptation of their works and often express displeasure in the way their stories are handled by the film director, Bond was actively involved in the production of *7 Khoon Maaf*. He expanded his four-page short story into an 80-page novella and also made an appearance in the film for the first time. This was followed by *Ek Tha Rusty*, Season Two, in two parts done in 2012 by Shubhadarshini Singh once again. Since the fictional avatar of Rusty was created by Bond to impersonate himself in his stories, viewing the 26-episode series makes the viewer acquainted with some of the best short stories of Bond, even without actually having read them. The author concludes by exploring at length the various narrative approaches of Bond across the many genres he writes in. Besides the role of space and memory she also discusses autobiographical and nostalgic elements in this chapter.

Developed from her doctoral dissertation, this book, in spite of claiming to be the most comprehensive study of Ruskin Bond's work till date, suffers from a few lapses which could have been rectified with a little more careful editing. The "Critical Review" section cataloguing and explaining the contents of all the relevant books and articles published on Bond earlier seems redundant. There are several repetitions of statements, and a few grammatical and factual errors. For instance, the definition of autobiography by Philippe Lejeune quoted and explained in page 25 is again repeated almost verbatim in a paragraph in page 30. Again, in page 16, Henry James's famous essay "The Art of Fiction" which was published in 1884 is mentioned to have been written in 1882. The name of the British publisher Hamish Hamilton is mentioned as Hamish Hilton (183). However, in spite of these minor drawbacks, the book can be read as a ready reckoner to Ruskin Bond since not many book length studies have been devoted to him. Though it is difficult to assess a living author who keeps expanding in his sphere, the author attempts to show the directness with which Ruskin Bond

bridges the gap between himself and his readers by interweaving romance and reality. This is where the strength of the book lies.

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