
Ruskin Bond's The Room on the Roof: A Tale of Growth, Friendship, and Belonging

Naincy Kumari

Research scholar, English Department, Ranchi University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

(Email – naincygupta5555@gmail.com)

Article Received: 03/01/2025

Article Accepted: 01/02/2025

Published Online: 02/02/2025

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.02.10

Abstract:

The Room on the Roof by Ruskin Bond has growth, friendship, and belonging in the central scheme of things. This article will explore the theme of the book by Ruskin Bond. The novel is about the journey of Rusty, who navigates the challenges of growing up, creating strong relationships, and seeking a sense of home and belonging in a foreign land living in post-independence India. This article will highlight how Bond portrays friendship and emotional maturity in a space that is undergoing a cultural transition and promotes a rich narrative of creating identity and self-discovery. By analyzing key passages and applying literary theories of postcolonialism and personal growth, this study will investigate and examine how Bond narrates and offers a unique belonging and transformation.

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, The Room on the Roof, growth, friendship, belonging, coming-of-age, adolescence, postcolonial India.

Introduction

The Room on the Roof by Ruskin Bond was first published in 1956. The book portrays the theme of growing up, the significance and importance of friendship, and the quest for belonging. The story is set in the context of postcolonial India; the story is about a sixteen-year-old boy, Rusty, who lost his parents and lives with his strict guardian in Dehradun. The novel explores the emotional and psychological growth of Rusty as he creates meaning and strong connections with the people around him and tries to find a sense of home and belongingness in a foreign culture. By narrating Rusty's journey, Bond effectively showcases the complex process of identity formation and the greater role of human connection in the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

This article will explore the themes of growth, friendship, and belonging by doing a close analysis of the key passages from the novel. The objective is to understand Bond's

narrative techniques and character development and how it is fundamental to their evolving sense of self of Rusty and his efforts to navigate the intricacies of cultural integration.

Passage from The Room on the Roof

“I was beginning to feel at home in my little room on the Roof when I was called down to the verandah, and I saw Somi sitting there with a couple of his friends, all of them laughing and joking as if the world were made of fun. I had never seen anyone laugh like that before, or talk in such an easy, casual way, without the stiffness of my guardian’s manner.” (Bond, *The Room on the Roof*, p. 64)

Analysis: Growth and the Journey of Self-Discovery

The above passage shows a significant moment in the novel when Rusty is starting to find some sense of freedom in his life. He lived most of his life under the rigid, controlling environment in his guardian’s home. Rusty’s “little room on the roof” can be considered a symbol of his attempt to create a space of personal freedom and a place where he can express himself. The room, which is not connected to any of the other rooms of the house, serves as a metaphor for Rusty’s wish and desire to distance himself from the restraints of his past and begin his own journey of emotional and psychological growth.

Somi and his friends laughing and talking casually are somewhat different from what Rusty is used to. He has always been very formal and keeps his distance from everyone, as he is shaped in that way, and his guardian has been very strict with him. The way Somi and his friends were laughing so casually gave Rusty a new way of living, something of which he was unaware. This moment is very important as it is the beginning of the first step in Rusty’s gradual integration into a world that is different and yet exciting and interesting from the world he has been used to.

Rusty realized that he had "never seen anyone laugh like that before," weighing his cultural detachment and emotional isolation. At this point in the story, Rusty is still struggling to find a sense of belongingness. The laughter represents an ease of connection that Rusty has yet to experience. However, it can also be seen as an aspiration for Rusty to become emotionally open and have a sense of freedom. This moment plays a significant role in Rusty’s evolution, as it can be seen as a turning point in Rusty’s journey as he starts to see the possibility of forming real friendships without any burden from the past, which is something that will play a major role in his emotional maturation.

Friendship: The Bridge to Belonging

The importance of friendship in the book *The Room on the Roof* cannot be overlooked. Rusty’s friendships with characters such as Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir helped him in his emotional and personal development, and with the help of these friends, he slowly started breaking free from the emotional restraint of his early life. These relationships prove

to be pivotal in Rusty's journey of self-discovery. It is with the help of these friends that Rusty understood the important life lessons about trust, friendship, and human connection, which are vital for his personal growth.

In Ruskin Bond's novel, friendship is portrayed as a major part of the process of healing and transformation. Rusty's early life under the watch of his guardian is shown as a period of isolation and emotional suppression of him as he fights his sense of displacement and grief. However, when he became friends with Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir, he began to feel the freedom of emotions that comes with having a real friendship. His friends respected him, shared their experiences and Rusty also respected them and shared his experiences with them and with the help of them Rusty got the emotional support and guidance he longed for in his early life. Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir, representing different aspects of society, help Rusty plan and direct his feelings of isolation and alienation and, in the process, provide him with a new way of connecting to the world and people around him.

In the previous passage we analyzed, the nonchalant laughter of Somi and his friends represents the joy and the warmth of friendship that Rusty is just starting to feel and recognize. Rusty, before making friends with them, was bound to a rigid and authoritarian relationship with his guardian, where he was unable to express his emotions freely and rarely made any relations with anyone due to the social etiquette set by his guardian. The difference in the carefree, raw behavior of Somi and his friends and the formal, suppressed interactions Rusty previously had showcased the emotional isolation Rusty has faced and experienced. It's a surprise for him when he sees Somi and the others laugh carelessly and feels "as if the world was made of fun." Rusty then starts to learn and understand that relationships do not always need to be defined by formality and being formal, and also that human connection can be made in doing simple things as simple and joyful as laughter.

Rusty was fascinated and in awe of his new friends as he admired their natural, easy-going nature and the sense of mutual respect that they had for themselves. There is a sense of longing in his observations; he wanted to be like them, too, and he also wanted to live life freely, something that he had not fully embraced yet. The distance that Rusty initially maintained in their relationship while observing them is important as it shows his emotional and cultural disconnection. However, as the story progresses, Rusty slowly becomes a part of his friend's world. He slowly accepted Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir's friendship, and that marked a significant turning point in his life. Rusty started engaging actively with his friends, developing humor, trust, and a sense of mutual respect that is necessary for forging true human connections.

The significance of friendship and relationship In the novel *The Room on the Roof* is important in the context of post-colonial India, where Rusty, who is an English orphan child, feels like an outsider. As Rusty is English by birth, he is not fully accepted by the

locals. He keeps himself emotionally distant as he is unable to engage and connect to the people around him, and also, his being an English person doesn't help him either. When he becomes friends with Somi and others, it allows him to fill the cultural gap between himself and the local community around him. It provides him an opportunity to mix himself in the world where he can finally belong and overcome the barriers of cultural differences and colonial history.

His friendship with Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir provides him with a newfound sense of belonging, something that he never felt before. These relationships with his friends gave him emotional nourishment, companionship, and an entry into the community he so eagerly wanted. In his friend's company, Rusty gets the freedom to laugh freely, speak his mind, and express himself without anyone judging him. It is with the help of these friends that Rusty finally starts to heal himself from the scars of his past and form his own identity while coming out of the orphan status.

Ruskin Bond portrays how Rusty becomes a part of the local community, breaking away from the isolation caused by colonialism and the repressions. By weighing on the healthy friendship between Rusty and his friends from the local community, Bond criticizes the social divisions and the barriers created by colonial rule. Rusty's transformation journey can be taken as a representation of the post-colonial time, where people from different races must navigate the complexities of identity, power, and belonging. Through the friendship Rusty made, He learns that human connection can overcome cultural boundaries and that belonging is not something that is definite of nationality or community but rather by having mutual respect, shared experiences, and emotional connection.

In a way, friendship becomes more than a lifeline for Rusty as it also becomes a metaphor for a possible cultural reconnection in a post-colonial world. Rusty, guided by his friends, finds personal peace and a sense of hope to create new connections in a world that is still recovering from the impact of colonialism. Rusty finds warmth and a feeling of acceptance in the friendship, which helps him overcome the coldness and disconnection that he felt in his life earlier.

Rusty's friendship also challenges the traditional belief of class and hierarchy. Rusty was initially separated from the local Indian community as he was an English orphan, and due to class differences, societal norms, and his own sense of self-superiority, he was unable to delve into the Indian community. However, after his interaction with his friends, he learns that true friendship cannot be bound by any social boundaries. This showcases an important evolution in the character of Rusty as he comes out of the colonial mindset that projected him as an outsider to part of the people around him and sees himself as part of the larger community.

We can summarise that Friendship in the book *The Room on The Roof* is not just a social concept or a convenience to progress the narrative. Rather, it is the path that allows Rusty to walk over from a life of isolation to a life built over connection and belonging. Rusty learns the values of trust, respect, and empathy with the help of the relationships he forms, and these lessons later help him overcome the emotional path of growing up. In addition, the friendship portrayed in the novel challenges the colonial thinking that divides people by their race and class and provides a vision of a community that surpasses these artificial boundaries. Rusty's journey can also be viewed as a cultural journey where the meaning of true belonging is achieved by sharing each other's experiences and through a sense of humanity.

Belonging: Rusty's Search for Home

The theme of belonging is an integral part of *The Room on The Roof*, and it plays a major role in Rusty's journey of growing up. His search for a sense of home is not just about finding a place to live; instead, it is about discovering himself and the world where he feels accepted, understood, and valued. Initially, Rusty feels like an outcast as he is an orphan who is removed from his British heritage and alienated from the Indian community where he lives now. He doesn't connect with the life he lived in England and is also unable to truly grasp the idea of living in the current community he is living in.

Emotional coldness and isolation Rusty feels are represented in his guardian home where he is growing up. In his guardian's home, his need for affection and love was always ignored. He is ignored most of the time and is treated as an outcast in his own home. All this absence of emotional connection strengthens his sense of detachment, and he longed for a place where he could really belong. It is with the help of the friends he made in Sumi, Kishen, and Ranbir that he gradually started integrating into Indian society and began to find a sense of belonging. The relationships he made allowed him to come out of his lonely, miserable existence and accept and welcome the possibility and chance of emotional fulfillment.

Ruskin Bond's choice of Dehradun as the city where the story unfolds plays a pivotal role in Rusty's journey. Dehradun, with its breathtaking hills and a warm and vibrant community, serves as both a literal and metaphorical space where Rusty begins to create his identity. The town, with familiar but still a new surrounding, provides a base for Rusty's emotional transition. The natural beauty of Dehradun and the hills helps Rusty to learn the importance of always being grounded and a sense of connection to the people around him and the world. However, Dehradun also represents a place where Rusty can bring together his British identity and his growing emotional bond with India. Dehradun represents the challenges he faces as he leaps towards the path of self-discovery and learns to balance the different cultural values around him.

Rusty finds guidance from the people of Dehradun while interacting with them to make sense of his place in the world. The relationships he made fostered his emotional growth and dropped all the emotional limitations he put on himself in England. Rusty learns to look upon and face his own vulnerabilities and the limitations he puts on himself, finding means to connect with people around him in a true and meaningful manner. In these moments, Rusty's sense of belonging is not just about belonging to a place but an emotional sense of belonging. It is not the walls and Roof of a house or the country that feels like home to him but the bonds he forged, the emotional bonds he forged with the people around him.

Rusty's "room on the roof" is a significant symbol of his journey towards belonging. This small but warm space becomes Rusty's home. Rusty is removed from his guardian's house, controlling and suppressing the atmosphere. The room on the Roof can be seen as a space where Rusty is no longer under control, and he can be himself free from anyone's expectations and nobody to judge him. It is in this room that Rusty starts to think about his emotions and his future. The room can be seen as a symbol of Rusty's craving for his own identity. Rusty later comes to learn and understand that belonging is not something that can be defined by being in a place; it comes from within. The realization of belongingness marks the start of his growth as he learns that it is necessary to find the inner peace that is necessary to feel at home.

A key passage from the book showcases the emotional and cultural freedom that Rusty longs for in his friendship. Rusty is amazed by the laughter and the carefree nature with which Somi and his friends communicate; it is as if he is searching for this kind of freedom. The laughter is carefree, free from all the burdens, free from societal expectations, and free from emotional weight, unlike Rusky, who carries all that with him for so long. There's a daylight difference in Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir's way of interacting and engaging.

And the emotional suppression that Rusty has felt all his life up to now. This passage reflects the joy of having friends and the significance of cultural and emotional freedom that Rusty craves. When Rusty makes himself able to share that laughter along with them and to be a part of something that is larger than himself, it marks a turning point in his journey towards emotional transition and development. With the help of these interactions, Rusty starts to see the possibility of a life where he is not just a person but rather a part of the community.

In the passage from the novel, Rusty looks at Somi and his friends, their laughter cheering through the air:

"Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir laughed as though the world were made of fun. It was infectious, and I found myself grinning too, although I could not understand what had caused such delight." (Bond, *The Room on the Roof*, p. 58)

The moment when he observes them is very important in the context of Rusty's transformation. It is the first time when he really begins to understand the power of friendship and the importance of human connection. It is with the help of these friendships that Rusty begins to grasp the possibility of having a sense of belonging, not merely in a physical sense but with the help of emotional and social bonds, that shapes his identity. Initially, he hesitates and observes, which slowly makes the way for active participation; this change shows his growing sense of self and his getting gelled into a community that accepts him the way he is.

Rusty is able to connect with his friends on their terms, and this marks the start of his finding a home that will define his sense of belonging. Rusty missed the warmth that his friends offered in his early life, and that is something he has been longing for for a long time, something that is above and crosses the borders, heritage, and traditions. It is with these relationships that Rusty learns that belonging is about the human connections we form with others.

In conclusion, *The Room on The Roof* is a moving story about Rusty's search for belonging. Through his friendship and the time spent in Dehradun, he realizes that home is not a place but a space of happiness and connection. Ruskin Bond showcases the power of friendship as Rusty's friends Somi, Ranbir, and Kishen help Rusty break cultural boundaries and help him accept himself. The room on the Roof represents a space where Rusty is free and is a symbol of Rusty's growth. He learns that to belong, one must fully accept himself first. The novel showcases that home is the place where we create emotional bonds and build solid relationships.

Conclusion

In the novel *The Room on The Roof*, Ruskin deeply explores the themes of growth, friendship, and belonging through Rusty's journey. Rusty, a young British orphan, lives in postcolonial India. The novel showcases the transformation journey of Rusty, who is lonely at his younger age, to become a young man who learns about himself and the world around him. The change or rather growth in him happened mainly because of the relationship he formed with his friends Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir. Through these relationships, Rusty learns to understand both the culture that is one from where he comes from and the one he is in now and his own emotions, which eventually lead to him finding a sense of belonging in a world that initially felt alien to him.

Rusty's journey is not just about a personal search for his identity, but rather, it's a promising emotional exploration of understanding how personality-level human connection helps in shaping our sense of self and belonging. Initially in the novel, Rusty is not too comfortable with his English Heritage as well as the post-colonial India in which he finds himself. He finds himself as an outsider in every way. He is not attached and doesn't feel at home in his guardian's home, not able to completely accept the Indian surroundings around him and not sure of where he belongs in the world. As the story progresses, through the

friendship he builds with Somi and Kishen, He is able to come out of his emotional isolation and walk into an open and welcoming world. He gradually accepted the Indian culture and the emotional support he gets from his friends; this marks the start of his journey of understanding that belonging is found through emotional connection.

One of the major aspects of Rusty's growth can be seen in his emotional transformation, and this change is made possible only through his interactions with his friends. Earlier, as seen in the novel, Rusty is often an observer as we see him see people around him with a heart mix of curiosity and longing. As time passes, he becomes active and starts to take part in the world around him, learning the importance of humor, trust, and mutual support among friends. Rusty bridges the gap between his past and present with the sense of companionship he senses from his friends, which allows him to shed the emotional weight he has carried for so long. This shift is clearly shown in a passage where Rusty sees Somi and others laughing freely :

“Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir laughed as though the world were made of fun. It was infectious, and I found myself grinning too, although I could not understand what had caused such delight.” (Bond, *The Room on the Roof*, p. 58).

This moment looks very simple, but in the context of Rusty, it marks a turning point for his emotional development. It is at this moment that he realises that the joy of life is in the relationships we make and the moments we spend with our people. The laughter and easiness of Somi and his friends represent the emotional and cultural freedom that Rusty has been longing for for a long time, and when he finds the freedom, he eventually makes peace with his identity.

Ruskin Bond skilfully captures Rusty's struggles with himself and his growth and lends an intimate quality to the story. Readers can get an insight into the complexities of growing up, the vulnerability and uncertainty marked by yearning for connection. Bond explores the theme of belonging through the journey of Rusty when he makes friends, and the friendship shapes his transformation, which eventually helps him to come out of emotional isolation and step into the world of acceptance.

Also, Bond's use of Symbolism further strengthens the depth of the theme of the novel. The room on the Roof becomes a symbol of Rusty's personal growth as Rusty reflects on his life in the room. It represents the space where Rusty learns the importance of accepting one's own

Vulnerability and accepts the changes taking place in life. It is in his small confined room that he finds his sense of independence. Yet, the room also acts as a metaphor in the larger context of personal discovery and signifying Rusty's quest for emotional and cultural space in a coexisting world which is both strange yet familiar to him.

Ruskin Bond portrays the importance of cultural integration when it comes to belonging. Rusty initially faces difficulty in living in post-colonial India, but over time, he gradually starts to accept and appreciate the Indian culture. Somi, a friend of Rusty, plays a major role in this shift. With the help of Somi, Rusty begins to understand the richness of Indian culture that makes the Indian community. He gradually bridges the cultural differences between him and his friends, highlighting the importance of understanding and mutual empathy in the process of belonging. Rusty's journey of embracing his own roots and new culture is key to finding his sense of belonging.

Ultimately, the novel, *The Room on The Roof*, is not just about Rusty moving to India; It is about the emotional and social transformation journey that Rusty goes through. It is a beautiful story about discovering the true power and essence of human connection and the realization that home is not just a place but a state of being. Rusty, through his friends and his becoming a part of the Indian culture, learns that belonging is not defined by place, caste, or heritage but by connections we form and build and the emotional bonds we create. The novel beautifully portrays Rusty's growth and reminds us that belonging is a journey that is continuously growing with each relationship we build.

In conclusion, *The Room on the Roof* gives us a deep understanding of identity, belonging, and the transformative power of friendship. By portraying Rusty's journey, Ruskin Bond shows us the challenges and rewards of adolescence, narrating a story that echoes across cultures and generations. The novel is a celebration of the human strength and quest for connection, growth and understanding, it also strengthens the idea that true belongings are not found in the place we just live at but in the relationship that defines our lives. By effectively portraying Rusty's journey, Bond leaves his readers with the idea and understanding that belonging is not a destination but a journey of finding and creating emotional connection with the people around us.

References

Bond, Ruskin. *The Room on the Roof*. Penguin Books, 1956.

Das, G.N. *A Critical Study of Ruskin Bond's Works*. Atlantic Publishers, 2009.

Ghosh, S. "Postcolonial Themes in Indian Literature: A Study of Ruskin Bond's Novels." *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2015, pp. 112-130.

Sharma, S.K. "The Coming-of-Age Novel: A Study of Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*." *Indian Literary Criticism*, vol. 21, 2013, pp. 65-80.

Nayar, P.K. *Postcolonialism: A Textbook*. Pearson, 2010.

Kumar, R. "The Role of Friendship in Adolescent Development: A Study of Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*." *Journal of Contemporary Literature*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2018, pp. 145-160.

Bhatnagar, S. "Symbolism and Identity in *The Room on the Roof*." *South Asian Literary*

Studies, vol. 19, 2016, pp. 201-215.

Saxena, A. "Adolescence and Cultural Integration in The Room on the Roof." International Journal of English Studies, vol. 24, no. 4, 2017, pp. 98-110.

Citation:

Kumari, Naincy. "Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*: A Tale of Growth, Friendship, and Belonging." *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2025, pp. 1-10. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.02.10.