

# **In conversation with Ruskin Bond :**

## **The Maestro in our midst**

**By Saloni Nahata, Biproyoti Bhattacharjee and Pritam Saloi, River Talks 2016**

D' Royal Auditorio, an auditorium of substantial size seemed pretty packed on the second day of River Talks 2016. It was alive with people of all ages ranging from students from the primary section to the grey haired elderly, everyone getting head over heels to watch the storyteller live and hear him speak. Dr. Shrutimala Duara and Mr. Dhruva Hazarika were the moderators of the event. Even the air conditioners seemed inefficient enough to maintain the temperature inside the hall as the sheer exuberance of the audience peaked the atmosphere inside turning it into a heated precinct.

The event started with the felicitation of the moderators by the student volunteers. It was then time to greet the luminary and officially welcome him with a felicitation by Mr. Pansari. After this, without any delay in the proceedings, the moderators who themselves were tongue tied with excitement started the conversation with Mr. Ruskin Bond.

The conversation started with the moderator addressing him as a living legend, to which he humorously replied "It's better to be a living legend than a dead one." He elaborated, saying that he has been writing for more than 50 years and even though he is an established writer now it was difficult for him to garner popularity during the first 30 years of his career. So now that he is popular, the acclaim and glory that he has achieved does not get into his head. He went on to express how his mother wanted him to join the army since writing wasn't as fashionable as a profession in those days as today. On being asked if he practices hard at not being deceptive the octogenarian replied that he is, "as simple as a jalebi". He prefers writing for children which is why he is deliberately simple. However, he doesn't choose to avoid using complex words and it is his hobby to browse through the Oxford English dictionary daily. He stated that experience is an important part of being a writer as all writers begin as readers themselves and even earlier as book lovers.

He was then asked about the character of Rusty in his book 'Room on the roof' and how much of Ruskin Bond is there in Rusty, to which he replied that he was very young during the time he penned down Rusty's adventures and had not seen much of the world due to which he incorporated a lot of his personal experiences in those stories. He was also asked if there are times when he runs out of things to write about, to which he hilariously replied that he writes about people, and one can never run out of people to write about. If he does he writes about non scary ghosts and the pesky crazy relatives from his family.

Talking about his short lived career as an actor in the adaptation of his own book “Susanna’s seven husbands” he said, he was so nervous that they had to retake the shot of him giving Priyanka Chopra a fatherly kiss on her cheeks seven times. Other adaptations of his works include ‘*Junoon*’ by Shyam Benegal and ‘The Blue umbrella’.

The conversation then moved to an interactive session with the audience where the students and guests were showering their love for him with letters, poems and portraits. A member of the audience asked him an intriguing question about a problem faced by most writers, “the writer’s block”, to which he elaborately replied about keeping lots of paper and dustbin nearby. The audience had a lot of other questions ranging from his personal experiences to his works, from media’s portrayal of today’s politics to Bob Dylan recently winning the Nobel Prize for literature. A humble man, Mr. Bond answered all questions patiently and sumptuously.

When questioned about the Nobel Prize Committee’s decision to award singer poet Bob Dylan with the Nobel Prize for literature, Mr. Bond evidently expressed his disapproval of the committee’s decision. Saying that this decision is an ‘insult’ to all the great writers who have received the award so far, the Padma Bhushan awardee said “Dylan is a successful musician and a great entertainer, but I’m not sure if he was given the award in the right category.” Speaking about his future works, he said that he is currently working on a mystery series, an assortment of crime thriller stories which is set to be published next month.

Even though it was a two hour long session time still seemed short as everyone in the hall wanted to hear more from the legend. The conversation ended with many hands still raised in anticipation to express their heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Bond for gifting them with such wonderful stories and poems throughout the years. His stories have been stressbusters for many and a wonderful world of its own and have acted as a means of escape from the tiresome and mundane reality for individuals who have to live by the clock in today’s uber competitive era.