



## **ELEMENTS OF HORROR AND COMEDY IN RUSKIN BOND'S FICTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper analyses the elements of horror and comedy in the supernatural short stories of Ruskin Bond. While Ruskin Bond creates an element of supernatural thrill in his fiction, the element of comedy refrains it from becoming malevolent like the horror fiction of Stephen King or Edgar Allen Poe. The setting of most of Bond's stories is either the foothills of the Himalayas or the Tarai region of Uttarakhand.*

**Keywords:** *horror, comedy, supernatural, hills*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ruskin Bond is a renowned Indian author who has made a name for himself with his captivating stories. His work spans across various genres, including horror and supernatural stories. Bond's unique style of storytelling has earned him a loyal fan base that eagerly waits for his next release. Ruskin Bond is one of the most celebrated authors in India and has been writing stories since the 1940s. His stories often include supernatural elements such as ghosts, legends, and horror. He has a knack for describing the spookiness of his characters in great detail which draws readers into his stories and keeps them hooked until the end. He takes inspiration from Indian folklore, superstitions, and legends to create stories that are both entertaining and intriguing. He often uses creepy settings and strange occurrences to add an

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extra layer of suspense to his narrative. As a result, readers can't help but be captivated by his tales of fright. His ability to incorporate supernatural elements into his stories is what sets him apart from other authors as it creates a unique atmosphere that will keep readers on their toes throughout the entire story. Ruskin Bond, the eminent Indian author, is famous for his heart-touching stories. He has a unique style of blending humour with horror, which makes his stories distinctive and interesting. Bond's stories can make readers laugh at one moment and shiver with fear the next moment. The element of horror and comedy in his stories is not just for entertainment purposes but also serves a deeper purpose. Through his stories, Bond explores the complexities of human nature, the existence of good and evil, and the inevitability of death. This article examines the element of horror and comedy in select stories of Ruskin Bond.

### 1. The Supernatural world in Bond's fiction: Horror and Comedy

Ruskin Bond has written many ghost stories, some of which have been adapted into films. He grew up reading about ghosts and believes they aren't out to scare people but instead seeking ways to help people in some way. However, he also acknowledges there are certain things which can cause fear if someone is unaware of them. Some of his books have been adapted into movies, making him a famous author for his supernatural fiction. With over 65 years of experience under his belt, he loves writing about different topics as it helps him learn new things. One of his best books, *Rusty, the Boy from the Hills*, tells the tale of a young boy living in his grandparents' custody. Due to strict rules, it becomes difficult for him to live with them so he runs away to India where he meets many people and finds work teaching English to children - soon feeling at home in India. Another book of his is *Rain in the Mountains*, which captures the simplicity and serenity of simple living. For urban dwellers it will strike a chord when it describes Himalaya's wilderness with chirping birds and clear blue skies. Another book written by Ruskin Bond is *Roads to Mussoorie*. This captivating account recounts his life and adventures in Mussoorie, India's favourite hill town. Now we take a look at the element of supernatural in some of his select stories.

- (i) **“The Man who was Kipling”**: The spooky element in “The Man who was Kipling” is the appearance of a ghostly figure claiming to be the famous writer Rudyard Kipling. The protagonist, who is sitting in the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, encounters a tall, elderly gentleman who looks familiar but also disturbing. The man claims to be Kipling, who had already died, and engages the protagonist in a conversation about his life and work. The spooky element lies in the uncertainty of whether the man is an imposter or an actual ghost, which creates an eerie atmosphere throughout the story.



Bond uses this element to highlight the enduring legacy of Kipling's writing and its continued influence on readers even after his death.

Towards the end Bond describes the disappearance of the man claiming to be Kipling in a mysterious manner- "A mist seemed to have risen between us — or had it come in from the streets? — and when it cleared, Kipling had gone away. I asked the gatekeeper if he had seen a tall man with a slight stoop, wearing spectacles. 'Nope,' said the gatekeeper. 'Nobody been by for the last ten minutes.'" (Bond, *The Night Train at Deoli*)

- (ii) **“The Window”**: In another story entitled “The Window” we find subtle element of horror, but it creates an eerie atmosphere. The story begins with the protagonist taking a room on the roof of a long building that houses several families. He describes his view from the window, which overlooks a banyan tree, a garden, and a broad path that runs besides the building. He sees various people pass by, including a lame beggar. The setting of the story creates an impression of isolation and loneliness. The spooky element is introduced when the girl named Koki comes to stay for the summer months with her aunt. When the protagonist first speaks to her, he tells her that he is a ghost, and she laughs at him. The protagonist, then, takes Koki to his window and shows her the world, and they become friends. However, the fact that the protagonist claims to be a ghost creates a sense of unease, especially since he is an adult speaking to a child. Furthermore, the protagonist's detachment from the world outside, even though he is observing it, gives a sense of a supernatural entity. Koki compares the window to a cinema screen and the world to the picture, which further adds to the eerie atmosphere of the story. The rain that floods the room and makes an island of the bed adds to the spooky element of the story, as it creates a sense of confinement and isolation. Overall, the spooky element in “The Window” is subtle but effective. The story creates an atmosphere of isolation and detachment, which is further enhanced by the protagonist's claim to be a ghost and the eerie setting.
- (iii) **The Black Cat**: Not a bad omen or the malevolent cat of Edgar Allen Poe in the story by a similar name, this story is partly amusing owing to the narrative style of Ruskin Bond. The author buys a broom from a junk shop to clean an old dilapidated house that he rents in a hill station. The arrival of the broom also invites a black cat whom the author feeds. He sees the cat's fascination with the broom which foreshadows a possibility in the mind of the reader as well. The suspense becomes intense with the arrival of an old lady called Miss Bellows dressed in black. She informs the author that she is searching for her



cat. Bond builds up the mysterious element further when she asks him for boiling water in which she puts two different coloured powders and drinks the boiling concoction. The Climax is mind boggling as the witch and the cat are not to be seen and the broom is also missing. The author hears the song followed by the sight of the three shooting like a rocket:

*With the darkness round me growing,*

*And the moon behind my hat,*

*You will soon have trouble knowing*

*Which is witch and Witch's Cat.*

Something whirred overhead like a Diwali rocket. I looked up and saw them silhouetted against the rising non. Miss Bellows and her cat were riding away on my broomstick. (Bond, *Tigers Forever: Poems and Stories*)

- (iv) **A Face in the Dark:** This is a very popular story of Bond which has been prescribed in many schools across India. It is so popular that animated videos have been made for school children to be able to visualize for the board exams. (ICSE CBSE LEARNING) and (ICSE CBSE LEARNING, “A Face in the Dark || Ruskin Bond || ICSE Short Story || ICSE Treasure Trove || ICSE Learning ||”) The story is very short and is a suspenseful story that uses various elements of horror to create a chilling atmosphere. The story revolves around Mr. Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher, who hears a schoolboy in uniform sobbing. The element of horror is evident throughout the story, as the author skilfully creates a sense of foreboding and tension. The watchman without a face is a particularly eerie character, as he is an unknown entity that seems to be watching Mr. Oliver and the boy from the darkness. The author's descriptions of the watchman's movements and appearance add to the overall feeling of dread and fear.

One of the most striking elements of the story is the use of anti-climax. The story builds up to a tense and frightening climax, but it ultimately ends with a whimper, rather than a bang. This is exemplified by the fact that the watchman without a face is never fully revealed, leaving the reader to imagine the worst. This lack of resolution creates a sense of unease and leaves the reader with an unresolved sense of fear. Overall, “A Face in the Dark” is a masterful example of the horror genre, effectively using elements of suspense and anti-climax to create



a memorable and unsettling story. Bond employs various elements of horror to create a sense of fear and unease in the reader. Some of these elements include:

- a. **Setting:** The story takes place in a dark and isolated forest, where the protagonist finds himself alone and vulnerable. The setting adds to the sense of isolation and fear, as the forest is portrayed as a place of darkness, danger, and mystery.
- b. **Characterization:** The protagonist is an ordinary person who is afraid of the dark, which makes him relatable to many readers. This creates a sense of empathy and increases the tension when he is forced to confront his fear.
- c. **Suspense:** The story builds suspense through the use of foreshadowing, with the protagonist hearing strange sounds and feeling an ominous presence in the dark. This creates a sense of anticipation and fear, as the reader is unsure of what will happen next.
- d. **Fear of the unknown:** The story plays on the fear of the unknown, as the protagonist cannot see what is lurking in the darkness. This creates a sense of dread and unease, as the reader is forced to imagine what could be out there.
- e. **Symbolism:** The story uses the motif of a face in the dark to create a sense of horror. The face is never fully revealed, which adds to the sense of mystery and terror.

Overall, these elements work together to create a sense of fear and horror in the reader. The story is effective in creating a sense of dread and unease, as the reader is left to imagine what could be lurking in the darkness.

- (v) **The Monkeys:** This is a story that invokes terror in the reader as dogs and monkeys are raised from the dead. The author rents an old cottage and hears dogs barking at night. His neighbour a colonel asks him if he saw anything unusual. Bond reports having seen some dogs and monkeys at night. The colonel tells him the story of a Mrs. Fairchild who once shot a monkey. In an unusual turn of events one night, he hears the dogs barking and the monkeys shrieking. What follows next is absolutely terrifying:

I leapt out of bed and dashed to the window. A woman was lying on the ground, and three or four huge monkeys were on top of her, biting her arms and pulling at her throat. The dogs were yelping and trying to drag the monkeys off, but they were being harried from behind by others. The woman gave another bloodcurdling shriek, and I dashed back into the room,

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grabbed hold of a small axe, and ran into the garden. But everyone — dogs, monkeys and shrieking woman — had disappeared,... (Bond. *The Very Best of Ruskin Bond: The Writer on the Hill : Selected Fiction and Non-fiction*. 322)

The narrator's discovery the next day is more spooky when he meets his neighbor the following day:

The Colonel greeted me effusively the following day. 'Still seeing those dogs?' he asked in a bantering tone....'Colonel,' I said. 'You never did get around to telling me how Miss. Fairchild died.' 'Oh, didn't I? Must have slipped my memory....Miss. Fairchild, poor lady. The monkeys killed her. Didn't you know? They simply tore her to pieces ...' His voice trailed off (Bond. *The Very Best of Ruskin Bond: The Writer on the Hill : Selected Fiction and Non-fiction*. 322)

The above examples show how Bond uses the element of horror and comedy to create a unique and entertaining reading experience. His stories are not just about scaring the reader or making them laugh but about exploring the complexities of human nature and the existence of good and evil.

Bond's stories are famous for their unique blend of horror and comedy. He is a master of creating a chilling atmosphere and then releasing the tension with a humorous incident. The combination of horror and comedy in his stories is not only entertaining but also serves a deeper purpose. His stories explore the complexities of human nature, the existence of good and evil, and the inevitability of death. One of the earliest examples of Bond's horror-comedy is his story "The Black Cat," which has been discussed above.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Ruskin Bond is a renowned Indian author who has made a name for himself with his captivating stories. His work spans across various genres, including horror and supernatural stories. Bond's unique style of storytelling has earned him a loyal fan base that eagerly waits for his next release. The element of horror and comedy in Bond's stories serves a deeper purpose. Through his stories, Bond explores the complexities of human nature, the existence of good and evil, and the inevitability of death. Bandopadhyaya discusses the reason for Bond's fascination with the supernatural: He comments:

*...the psychological anxiety that engendered the Anglo-Indian mind due to the sociopolitical consequences of hybridity is little represented in contemporary fiction. Those who do represent Anglo-Indians, ...tend to push their characters into a binary choice, ...Only in Bond can we identify the anxiety of a double*

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*bind, the problematics of a liminal situation of psychological belonging. To Bond, the supernatural is the paranormal extension of consciousness. (Bandyopadhyay 401)*

Bond's stories are not just about scaring the reader or making them laugh but about exploring the human psyche. He delves into the human psyche with an almost mundane state of affairs kind of touch.

To conclude, Ruskin Bond's supernatural short stories are a unique blend of horror and comedy. While creating an element of supernatural thrill, the element of comedy in his fiction refrains it from becoming malevolent like the horror fiction of Stephen King or Edgar Allen Poe. The settings of most of his stories are either the foothills of the Himalayas or the Tarai region of Uttarakhand. Through his stories, Bond explores the complexities of human nature, the existence of good and evil, and the inevitability of death. His ability to incorporate supernatural elements into his stories is what sets him apart from other authors, as it creates a unique atmosphere that will keep readers on their toes throughout the entire story. His supernatural short stories are create an atmosphere that is both eerie and entertaining. He uses Indian folklore and superstitions to weave tales of ghosts, legends, and horror that keep readers on edge. The setting of most of his stories is in the foothills of the Himalayas or the Tarai region of Uttarakhand, adding an extra layer of suspense to the narrative. The element of comedy in his stories balances out the horror, preventing it from becoming malevolent like other horror fiction. Through his stories, Bond explores the complexities of human nature and the existence of good and evil, making his stories not just for entertainment purposes but also serving a deeper purpose. Overall, Ruskin Bond's unique style of storytelling has made him one of the most celebrated authors in India, captivating readers for over six decades. His ability to evoke a sense of unease and mystery is unmatched, and his stories have b staple of Indian literature.

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