

Ruskin Bond's Ghosts Share The Screen

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to understand the select ghost stories of Ruskin Bond which have been adapted and broadcast by the OTT platform ZEE5 in the beginning of 2019 as a web series entitled as "Parchayee: Ghost Stories by Ruskin Bond". *The Ghost in the Garden, The Wind on Haunted Hill, Wilson's Bridge and The Overcoat* are adapted short stories of Bond. The two award-winning directors, V.K. Prakash and Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury directed the screen versions of the stories. At that time Bond who has been 84, spoke at length about his favourite ghost stories, his inspirations and the prospect of seeing his stories on screen in an exclusive email interview with Lounge.

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Ruskin Bond's short stories are considered as the most loving in Indian English literature. He is also known for his stories in which supernatural or paranormal element appears. Most of his ghost stories are set in the Garhwal hills, where he has lived most of his life. Some of his stories have other parts of the country as their background. But the settings of his ghost stories remain always familiar and simple which heighten the horror and shock of the paranormal occurrences when it appears. The OTT platform ZEE5 has broadcasted four of his ghost stories in the beginning of 2019 as a web series, titled **Parchayee: Ghost Stories by Ruskin Bond**. The adapted stories are *The Ghost in the Garden, The Wind on Haunted Hill, Wilson's Bridge and The Overcoat*. The screen versions of the stories are directed by two award-winning directors, V.K. Prakash and Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury. At that time Bond who has been 84, spoke at length about his favourite ghost stories, his inspirations and the prospect of seeing his stories on screen in an exclusive email interview with Lounge.

The fascination for ghost stories in Ruskin Bond comes from his boyhood reading. He loved reading them as a boy, and he liked listening to ghost stories too. Many people told him such convincing ghost stories that he felt that there really were ghosts, though he wrote somewhere that he had never actually seen any ghost. He told the interviewer though he still had not seen a ghost, he felt that they were all around us, we were just not aware of them being there. And that we were really outnumbered by them. In other words, if you look for a ghost, you'll find one!

The first ghost story Bond read in a forest rest house, where the place itself was scary. The story was penned by M.R. James. He is one of the pioneers of ghost stories. The book was titled as *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*. They were set in colleges and schools and places like that. These stories didn't set out to scare you but they did in the end. Two other writers who had fascinated the author in the boyhood were Algernon Blackwood and Walter de la Mare. These writers wrote very sensitive and lyrical ghost stories. They did

not want to scare their readers but they probably had experiences and believed in ghosts themselves. So their stories were very convincing.

Indian folklore is filled with a variety of ghosts. Ruskin bond was also influenced by them while writing his stories. When He lived in Dehradun in the late 1950s, he had a neighbour who was a lady from a village near Agra, called Mainpuri. She used to tell him ghost stories which emanated from her village. Her stories were full of variety of ghosts like bhoots and prets and peepul trees inhabited by spirits, Jinns and so on. That, to some extent, also helped him write stories like *The Trouble with Jinns* and others.

Once Samhita Chakraborty, and her colleague Kaushik Ghosh from Kolkata came to Mussoorie to see Ruskin Bond. They convinced the Bond that his ghost stories would make for good viewing. They discussed with author and developed a couple of stories for the screen. That's how this web series '*Parchayee*' happened.

Bond's ghost stories are short, anything between two-three pages to 10-12 pages in length. The reason for the briefness of the stories was Bond's earlier stories were written for magazines or newspapers where he had a word limit. So they had to be developed further for the screen.

Ruskin Bond also worked with film-makers like Shyam Benegal and Vishal Bharadwaj for cinematic adaptations before. For the film **Saat Khoon Maaf**, which was adapted from his story *Susanna's Seven Husbands*, he did collaborate on the screenplay too. He even played a small role in the film, of a priest. For Shyam Benegal's **Junoona**, which was from his novella *A Flight of Pigeons*, He gave certain suggestions for the screenplay also.

Creating literary works like short story, novel, or play and adapting them for the screen are two different things. The writer doesn't have any challenges because he writes them just the way he enjoys writing them. But the adaptation is handled by the director and the screenwriter. Looking back at famous films on ghost stories or films where there is a supernatural or macabre element, it can come off quite well, like **Wuthering Heights** or **Rebecca**. But comparatively it is easier for a ghost story to be more effectively adapted when they are short stories.

Reference

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