

Cherry Tree

- Ruskin Bond

Born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, in 1934, Ruskin Bond grew up in Jamnagar (Gujarat), Dehradun and Simla. His first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, written when he was seventeen received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. Since then he has written over a hundred short stories, essays and novellas (including *Vagrants in the valley* and *A Flight of Pigeons*) and more than thirty books for children. He has also published two volumes of autobiography, *Scenes from a Writer's Life*, which describes his formative years growing up in Anglo-India, and *The Lamp Is Lit*, a collection of essays and episodes from his journal. In 1992 he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for English writing in India. He was awarded the Padma Shree in 1999.



Ruskin Bond lives with his adopted family in Mussoorie Uttarakhand - Uttarakhand
By way of innumerable novels, essays, short stories and poems, the authour (Ruskin Bond) has mapped out and peopled a unique literary landscape.

Bond's sentences are moist with dew and the mountain air, with charm, mostalgia and underplayed humour (heis) our resident Wordsworth' India Today

The poem, Cherry Tree is about poets ecstasy over a tree of his own which took eight years to grow. He is expressing his wonder at the ways of nature and how the cherry blossoms are fragile and quick to fall. The tree gives him immense joy when he can see the stars and the blue sky through dappled green tree.

Eight year have passed
 Since I placed my cherry seed in the grass.
 "Must have a tree of my own," I said,
 And watered it once and went to bed
 And forgot; but cherries have a way of growing,
 Though no one's caring very much or knowing.
 And suddenly that summer near the end of May,
 I found a tree had come to stay.
 It was very small, five months child,
 Lost in the tall grass running wild.
 Goats ate the leaves, the grass cutter's sycthe
 split it apart and a monsoon blight
 Shrivelled the slender stem..... Even so,

blight / blɑt /

shrivelled / 'frɪvl /

next spring I watched three new shoots grow,
The young tree struggle, upward thrust
Its arms in a fresh fierce lust
For light and air and sun.

I could only wait, as one
Who watched, wandering, while Time and the rain
Made a miracle from green growing pain.....

I went away next year-
Spent a season in Kashmir—
Came back thinner, rather poor,
But richer by a cherry tree at my door.
Six feet high my own dark cherry,
And- I could scarcely believe it-a berry.
Ripened and jeweled in the sun,
Hung from a branch—just one!
And next year there were blossoms small
Pink, fragile, quick to fall
At the merest breath, the sleepest breeze.

I lay on the grass, at ease,
Looking up through leaves at the blue
Blind sky, at the finches as they flew
And flitted through the dappled green.
While bees in an ecstasy drank
Of nectar from each bloom and the sun sank
Swiftly, and the stars turned in the sky,
And moon-moths and singing crickets and I—
Yes, I!— praised Night and Stars and tree:
That small, the cherry, grown by me.

-Ruskin Bond

Glossary

scythe	-	mowing and reaping implement of long slightly curved blade swung over ground by long usually crooked pole
shrivelled	-	contract or wither into wrinkled folded rolled up dried up state
thrust	-	push with sudden impulse or force
fragile	-	easily snapped or shattered, weak
finches	-	a small passorine bird
flitted	-	pass lightly, softly or rapidly

thrust / θrʌst /

miracle / 'mɪrəkl /

jeweled / 'dʒu:əl /

dappled / 'dæpld /

ecstasy / 'ektəsi /

nectar / 'nektə /

dappled	-	variegated, with round patches
ecstasy	-	rapture, exalted state of feeling
nectar	-	sweet fluid produced by plants and made into honey by bees
blight	-	a plant disease caused by fungoid parasite

Exercises

Word Power

The poet has used words that are used as ‘nouns’ and verbs both like ‘watered’. Use the following words from the poem as nouns and verbs both in two separate sentences of your own:

summer, grass, scythe, shoots, arms light, air, watch, season, jewel, blossom

Poetic Devices

(A) Following have been ‘personified’ in the poem

- (1) ‘Cherries have a way of growing’
- (2) a tree had come to stay
- (3) a monsoon blight-shrivelled the slender stem

Find more examples of personification from the poem and write an explanation of the lines above (1,2,3) and the expressions selected by you.

(B) **Rhyming scheme** The poem has a rhyming scheme. Mark it and write out the details. Also find out where the poet deviates and say why.

(C) In the beginning of the poem the poet is talking of the Cherry tree and how it grew against all odds towards the end he expresses his own joy and action pick out the stanza and write its meanings.

(D) Alliteration is a figure of speech in which first sounds are repeated to give the poem a lyrical quality.

For example:

a monsoon blight

shrivelled the **sl**ender **st**em

Find other examples from the poem and write them in your notebook.

Comprehension

(A) **On the basis of the reading of the poem, answer the questions.**

1. What difficulties did the cherry tree face in growing up?
2. What is the miracle? How was it caused by time and rain?
3. What does the poet refer to in ‘five month’s child?’
4. The poet says, ‘Its arms in fresh fierce lust.’ What do “Its arms” stand for?
5. Mention two things that the poet saw when he was trying to look at the sky through the leaves of the cherry tree
6. Pick out the lines from the poem that convey that the cherry blossoms are delicate.
7. What is the poet trying to say in the expression ‘cherries have a way of growing’?

(B) What do you understand by the following expressions? Write a sentence for each expression to bring out its meaning.

1. grass running wild
2. monsoon blight
3. growing pains
4. sleepest breeze
5. dappled green
6. blue blind sky
7. fresh fiercest lust

(C) Complete the following summary of the poem by filling the gaps using the expressions from the poem:

The poet sowed a seed about _____ ago because he wanted a _____ own. Once in the month of May he found a tree that _____ and had survived the _____ grass cutter's _____ and the monsoon _____ through it was _____ it grew three new shoots _____ and _____ grew upward when he came back from Kashmir he could _____ believe that a Cherry tree had _____ and _____ in the sun. Next year it bore pink _____ that were _____ and _____. As he was relaxing in his garden he saw the _____ as they _____ and _____ through the _____ green. He saw bees as they drank _____ the _____ from each _____.

Speaking Activity

(A) The poem starts with a flash back where the poet recollects something from the past and then narrates about present. Talk to your friend about your childhood of something that you recollect as a pleasant memory which has borne fruits in your present life. (work in pairs) Share this with your class. Select two best narratives and put them in a poem form. You can think of

- a friend
- a scene
- an incident
- a school happening

(B) Read out the poems in the class and hold discussions on their poetic qualities use of language and figures of speech etc.

Writing Activity

A) Read the following poem and write answers to the questions given after the poem:

ALMOND BLOSSOM

Blossom of the almond-trees,
April's gift to April's trees,
Birthday ornament of spring,

Flora's fairest daughterling; —
Coming when no flowerets dare
Trust the cruel outer air,
When the royal king-cup bold
Dares not don his coat of gold,
And the sturdy blackthorn spary
Keeps his silver for the May ; —
Coming when no flowerets would,
Save thy lowly sisterhood.
Early violets, blue and white,
Dying for their love of light.
Almond blossom, sent to teach us
That the spring days soon will reach us,
Lest, with longing over-tried,
We die as the violets died, —
Blossom, clouding all the tree
With thy crimson broidery,
Long before a leaf of green
On the bravest bough is seen, —
Ah ! when winter winds are swinging
All thy red bells into ringing,
With a bee in every bell,
Almond bloom, we greet thee well.

— *Edwin Arnold*

1. Why does the poet call it April's gift?
2. Why does the poet call it as Birthday ornament of spring?
3. What are the other flowers that the poet names in the poem?
4. What is the colour of almond blossoms?
5. How does the poet tell us that there are no leaves on the tree?
6. What happens when the winter winds blow?

B) Use the following words from the poem in sentences of your own:

trust	clouding
dare	bough
royal	greet
sturdy	

Think it over

All trees have a different way of growing, some are delicate some are hardy plants; some are perinnial and some seasonal; some are fruit bearing and others are decorative with beautiful foliage and flowers; have you tried to grow plants of your own? Which were those? Express your views on pleasures and pains of growing a tree, plant etc.

Things to do

A) You have read William Wordsworth's poem 'Daffodils' where the poet says:

“For oft, when on my couch I lie,
They flush upon that inward eye
which is bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils”.

Compare the lines with Ruskin Bond's following lines:

I lay on the grass, at ease
Looking up through leaves at the blue Blind sky”

B) Read the following verses carefully and answer the questions that follow:

Birches

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn May-coloured
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.

- Robert Frost

(Birch is a slender tree, growing in American woods. The lower part of its trunk is firm enough for climbing but the upper part is so delicate that a child, climbing it up, can swing the tree-top to the ground and if he does it often, the tree becomes permanently misshaped.)

Questions:

- 1) Describe in your own words the effect on a slender birch tree of the snow fall.
- 2) What is the poet trying to say in the last line of the poem?
- 3) Describe the effect of the following on birch trees :
 - a) ice-storms
 - b) rising breeze
 - c) warmth of the sun

- 4) Say whether the following statements are true or false :
- a) A child in the tree is swinging the birch tree.
 - b) The tree is swinging left and right due to the blowing of breeze.
 - c) The birch trees are misshaped by the ice-storm.
 - d) After the sun-rise, the branches begin to move gently left and right and look like a rainbow.
 - e) After the sunrise, the trees 'loaded with ice' become the inner dome of heaven.