

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDING HOME IN WRITING

5.1 Conceptualizing Home through Writing

The ability of children to successfully occupy the space of the nation reflects their capacity to perform at the highest level. Thus the space of the nation allows them to configure a home for themselves within its confines. But if we consider the spaces of writing, then we have to question whether writing provides the authors of Indian English children's literature the space to perform? In other words does the genre allow them to find a home for themselves within its limited space and scope?

The concept and definition of home varies from person to person and from place to place. What is home for one may be hostile ground for another and, on the other hand, home may signify liberation for some but, for another, a cloistered and suffocating place. Home also serves as an important arena for the self-gratification of desires and wishes hitherto hidden and unfulfilled. At the same time, home functions as a means through which an image of the self is created and projected and thereby acts as a site through which the external world examines and judges the self. Tony Chapman, Jenny Hockey, and Martin Wood in their study of homes say that:

While the home may provide people with a site of retreat from the public gaze, it is also the stage upon which people project the most intimate image of their 'selves' to the world. The fact that they can 'control' this image to a certain extent is important, but their control is mediated by expectations about acceptable forms of decoration, furnishing, social manners, service and order. (195)

This creation of the self's image can be through mundane things like decorations and furnishings or through other, more subtle means which reflect the attitudes and manners of the inhabitants. Home thus becomes inextricably linked to one's own identity and serves as an important medium through which the self is sustained. This concept of home does not contain within itself the position of those for whom home is a concrete reality and who subscribe to the notion of home as a construction. The site

that we interrogate as home is not necessarily a construction or building which, more often than not, is the societal image of home. The constructions of home can be situated in more of an intangible state and cannot be limited to a single address or locality. How do we try to locate home when the concreteness of home is replaced by more subtle signifiers that act as directions towards home? More importantly, how do we look at constructions of home where there is no home to call one's own or where the destruction of conventional ideas of home requires the reconstruction of home? It is in this context that we analyze the writings of Ruskin Bond, Arup Kumar Dutta, and Salman Rushdie in our attempts to find homes within their writings and to locate the construction of home as arising out of specific necessities of the times.

5.2 Neither Here nor There: An Endless Journey of Locating Home

Allan Luke asks an important question in his essay "On This Writing: An Autotheoretic Account" namely, "Where does writing come from?"(131). This question will be taken a step further to ask where this writing leads to? The first question is tentatively answered by Luke through various explanations, ending with a generalized statement that might be as much theoretical as it is biographical.¹ He also refers to post-Enlightenment Romanticism's idea of writing coming from the "inside"—writing as an externalization of the self. If all writings are an externalization of the self then, by implication, it also means that all writings are centred on the self and the dissociation of the author from the persona remains meaningless. These ideas are worth considering in the context of Ruskin Bond and, going back to the question of where does this writing lead to, here an attempt has been made to contextualize Bond's writings as not only originating from the self but also leading to a very subjective conception of his search for his roots in India. Writing in this context is more of a questioning, a probing of the self, and a biographical reimagining of the pining of the self within writing. There has been a constant evaluation of Bond on the basis of his search for self in his writings and, consequently a search for identity. Both Meena G. Khorana in her extensive reading of Bond in *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond* (2003), and Debashis Bandyopadhyay's Lacanian analysis in *Locating the Anglo-Indian Self in Ruskin Bond: A Postcolonial Review* (2011), try to situate Bond's writings within the identity crisis of the author and the search for belongingness.² These readings are authentic in recounting the doubts, questionings and ultimately the

sense of freedom that Bond displays in his works. And embedded within this search for identity is the search for a home in India—home as an identity in itself. The place identity theorists (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff, 1983; Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Gustafson, 2001; Manzo, 2003) relate the identity of the self with the place and how the place affects the formation of identity through its relation with the self. But going back to Luke’s argument that writing is as much biographical as theoretical, it is necessary to trace the genealogy of writing in Bond to situate not only the search for home but home itself within his writings. Home, therefore, is not an external, material reality which exists in a fixed time or place but is dispersed not only amongst the tangible writing spaces but also across the reader’s imaginative spaces. Susan Saegert argues that what we understand as residing or dwelling contrasts with the concept of house and home. The concreteness of a physical setting is not home but home is actually signified by “a more active and mobile relationship of individuals to the physical, social, and psychological spaces around them” (qtd. in Manzo 49). These “psychological spaces” in fact are found in the very process of writing and writing itself is a home for the writer and in Bond the urgency of finding success in writing is also the urgency of finding a home for himself. And therefore it becomes imperative here to seek specific biographical references to understand his emergent nature as a writer.

If we understand one of the aspects of home as rootedness to one place or house, then Bond repudiates that notion at the very beginning of his autobiography, *Scenes from a Writer’s Life*. He writes that during his early childhood, he and his family never stayed in any “house or dwelling” for a long time. He assumes that probably his father enjoyed changing places and kept on rearranging rooms whenever he could. His father even talked of setting up a home in Scotland, near Loch Lomond, which was a mere dream that never materialized. The materiality of a childhood home does not exist for Bond and like the vagrants in his later novel, *Vagrants in the Valley*, they also shifted houses constantly. The only stability in his father’s life was the extensive stamp collection depicting far-off places which again reflected the fascination with the outside world rather than the fixity of home. The breakdown of his parents’ marriage and the subsequent separation has left a void and insecurity in Bond which was to an extent pacified by the firm hold of his father’s hand that Bond refers to metaphorically. Lynne Manzo in his essay “Beyond House and Haven: Toward a Revisioning of Emotional Relationships with Place” refers to Marcus’ work on adults’

relationships to their residence to reflect the fact that childhood associations are reproduced by some adults in their present residences and some try to resolve childhood conflicts in their present homes. Thus, adult reconstruction of homes is often formed out of the necessity to find “succor and restoration” (53). In Bond, childhood is a site of parental conflict and a general unhappiness of a child not getting the security and love that a home quintessentially signifies. The childhood home that Bond yearned for is never available to him and he therefore tries to recreate a home through his writings, resolving the conflicts and bringing a stability which he lacked in his own childhood. This is a fact which he accepts in his memoirs:

I don't suppose I would have written so much about childhood or even children if my own childhood had been all happiness and light. I find that those who have contented, normal childhoods, seldom remember much about them; nor do they have much insight into the world of children. Some of us are born sensitive. And, if, in top of that, we are pulled about in different directions (both emotionally and physically), we might just end up becoming writer . . . We become writers before we learn to write. The rest is simply learning how to put it all together.

(Scenes 4)

In trying to understand Bond's maturation as a writer, we have to understand the importance of books in his life. Childhood and books are synonymous for him and Bond acknowledges the importance of books in his life very early on as also the fact that he returns to them to find solace. Bond has lived his life within the pages of books, different and varied in nature, which have helped him to solve his problems from time to time. These books have acted as a home to him, within the covers of which he could find the security, solace, privacy and love that homes provide for its inmates. The childhood and its reading that Bond upholds for us are very different from the western constructs of childhood which look upon it as a quarantined or segregated stage in life where adult supervision is necessary. How do we locate Bond, the child, as a reader within this construct? Andrea Immel says that most books for children are differentiated according to the age of the reader into categories like pre-

reader, beginning reader, independent reader. This differentiation is actually based on another construction of childhood, which follows the notion that the biological and mental development of children takes place chronologically according to age until they reach maturity (21-22). The categorization of books is again constructed on the basis of a canon which is deemed to be proper for children to read and some books are kept out of reach of children which do not subscribe to the notion of canon formation. But this concept of canon formation is again a problematic one because canons by nature subscribe to the dominant cultural, political or social group. David Rudd traces the origin of canon formation to Matthew Arnold who, in his *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), speaks of coming to know the best of thought and sayings in the world. In this process of canon formation children's literature often did not arise as it was never considered to be part of mainstream literature. But even then, children's literature too had its own canon formed within itself by the likes of the American *Horn Book* magazine, Children's Literature Association's *Touchstones* or Fred Inglis' "lesser great tradition" ("Canon" 152). Deborah Stevenson, on the other hand, says that this attempt to create a canon in children's literature came at a time when English departments in various universities were in fact deciding to dismantle canons which, by implication, makes children's literature an old-fashioned subject despite its new entry into the academic circle. The paradox or irony of the situation lies between the intention to exclude literature that forms part of the university syllabus and instead incorporate texts which are enjoyed by the child reader, and the desire to place those texts not before the child reader who will read it for pleasure but before academia, for consideration and critical analysis (111).

These western notions when applied in the context of Bond as a child reader seem to be flawed if we consider his diverse and voracious reading. Though his father introduced him to the world of books, yet his choice of reading was not of an ordered nature where the resolve to be a writer was honed through the reading of great masters. There was no particular emphasis on the canon or on the maturity level of his understanding. His enjoyment of books was more of a matter of the availability of books: "I began to read whatever books came in my way . . . it provided me an escape from the reality of my situation and it was during those first winter holidays in Dehra that I became a bookworm and ultimately a book lover and writer in embryo" (*Scenes* 38). Andrea Immel's view that books not only promote reading but also "the

disinterested pursuit of self-knowledge and self-control for the individual's psychological, moral or spiritual well-being" (25) holds true in the case of Bond very much. The school library where Bond was studying turned out to be a veritable treasure-house for him and he delved deeper and deeper into a world where there was always somebody, known or forgotten, to capture his imagination and heart. There was a huge repertoire of authors that Bond read, ranging from Dickens, Wordsworth, G.K. Chesterton, Conrad, Lamb to Sudhin Ghose, R.K. Narayan, Tagore, Walter De La Mare and many more who left an indelible impression in the mind of the young reader (Aggarwal 9). His decision to become a writer when he "was still a pimply adolescent" stems from his reading of Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Hugh Walpole's *Fortitude*. He wanted to be like the writer-heroes of these books and eke out a living. His father had brought him up on a steady diet of books and after his father's death they were the only means of escape for him (*Scenes xv*).

Bond filled up his mind not only with a long list of the crème de la crème of the literary tradition but also quite unknown ones whom he retrieved from the dust of anonymity. He is, in a way, an ideal example of Eliot's notion of tradition and individual talent. His mode of writing is again an emulation of both Lamb and Dickens in being semi-autobiographical and nostalgic in nature. Like Lamb's turbulent personal life lending an edge to his writings, Bond's life too served as a metaphor for many of his works making him an immensely personal writer and, by his own standards, he calls himself an Indian version of Charles Lamb (Aggarwal 11). V. S. Naipaul in an interview with Farrukh Dhondy in *Literary Review* waxes lyrical about Bond's writing and his ability to say a lot through a few words without going into the wordplay that Naipaul feels the new crop of Indian English authors unnecessarily indulge themselves in. Naipaul especially likes his *Memoirs* and feels that in this teeming multitude of people in India it is Bond's achievement that he can write about solitude. For Naipaul, Bond breaks free from the shackles of boasting about oneself and his writings are often painfully understated, even while writing about his own life. This statement seems to give rise to a dichotomy as Bond himself acknowledges that there is a lot of him in the personae that he creates in his writings. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), briefly chart the autobiographical narratives to put forward an important argument regarding this genre. They say that many nineteenth and even

twentieth century novels were presented in the form of autobiographical narrative and the narratorial self used the first-person protagonist to understand the formation of the social subject through personal experiences. These narratives are often termed 'bildungsroman' as they record the journey towards self-realization, frequently marred by personal or social circumstances, but helped through the process of education which again involves encounters with various people and situations to evolve as a social being. But modernists like Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf and others have used the tropes of autobiographical narrative to emphasize the fragmented nature of the self and the social construct of the self (10). Bond's works therefore can be placed in a middle category where he uses the autobiographical mode of writing not only to negotiate his own self in his writings but also, in doing so, creating various selves which are not necessarily social constructs but are in fact constructs of his ideal self. In this tussle between the normal self and the ideal self, Bond tries to hide himself and his conflicts to create and recreate his own life, to question his decisions and to find answers to those questions. By doing so he is creating a space within his writings which serves as the cozy corner where he can weave his tales, the hearth beside which memories unfold, which is nothing but the home he has been searching for. The connections with the outside world take place through his writings and the lonely figure of the child without a family, or many social ties, creates a home for himself. This home serves not only as a secure haven for him but also becomes the means to achieve a sense of social belonging too. Thus home, in this instance, is "conceptualized as processes of establishing connections with others and creating a sense of order and belonging as *part of* rather than *separate from* society" (original emphasis) (Blunt and Dowling 14). Bond's journey home therefore starts with *The Room on the Roof* and is still continuing. It is necessary therefore to look at this first attempt at being an "author" by Bond and to locate the beginning of the journey towards home.

Reminiscent in title to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own", the novel too emphasizes the importance of personal space for creativity to surge. Often visualized as an adolescent outpouring of the longing for home in an alien nation, the novel is based on the journal that Bond kept and it loosely encompasses a rendering of his early life in Dehradun through the thinly veiled protagonist Rusty. Bond's characterization of Rusty is based on his own experiences and, originally written in

the first person, it was later rewritten in the third person on the advice of his publisher. On a very superficial level, *Room* is about Bond's longing for India, a home, where he is accepted as he is and where he can regain his life which he felt was being wasted in Jersey and, to an extent, even in London. Being semi-autobiographical in nature, the justifications for the novel remain embedded within the narrative of Bond's life itself. The death of his father and the distanced attitude of his mother along with a very insufficient education left him incapable of finding a good job where he could sustain himself. But Bond felt himself incapable of any job besides writing. That is the only thing he felt himself equipped to do, given his command of the English language and his extensive reading. How do we reconcile this situation with Bond's first attempt at creating his self in a text and, through this creation, to try to construct a home too in his writings?

Room starts with Rusty, the protagonist, having his first encounter with Somi on a cycle ride and his subsequent feeling of seclusion in the cloistered Anglo-Indian quarters. Meena Khorana, quoting Benita Perry's *Delusions and Discoveries*, says that the sequestered quarters of the Anglo-Indians or the colonials are so constructed because of their sense of threat from India and so they created barriers to keep themselves aloof (*Life* 30). This seclusion which arises out of a sense of superiority on the part of the race is upheld by Rusty's guardian, Mr. Harrison, and he tries to instill the self-same values in him too. But Rusty is not only living in a secluded community but also in a secluded existence. Shy and withdrawn by nature, he has hardly any friends, or for that matter, much of "human contact", except for the sweeper boy who is off-limits for him. He dreams of a world where he could be free and this freedom exists only in the forbidden realm of the bazaar, which in a sense, is a microcosm of India itself (Khorana, *Life* 30-31). The narrative from the very beginning emphasizes the division of space that is prevalent throughout. The community tries to create a mini-England in its housing style with gardens and nameplates depicting a very English landscape. It is difficult to believe that the place is within India itself because India, for the community, exists a mile away where the bazaar begins. This demarcation of space is further accentuated by the community's negation of the existence of an India beyond their created limits through their muted response to the place and their consensual decision not even to think about it. The community is mainly an aging one which has decided to stay back after independence primarily

because of their inability to start life anew in another country. Aside from this, there is also the fact that their money could buy them comforts here which they could not hope for somewhere else.

The demarcation is also very much evident in the structuring of the narrative too. While the second chapter ends with Rusty's fantasizing his entry into the forbidden space, the third chapter begins with a description of this space. But the narratorial gaze shifts immediately from the Indian to the English landscape. Rusty, enjoying a stretch of freedom because of his guardian's absence, decides to cross the invisible line of separation. He has to pass through the European quarters and also through Dehradun's very westernized shopping centre, which contrasts sharply with that of the Indian bazaar. This conceptualization of India as a bazaar is part of the rhetoric of many colonial texts on India, which again stems from the very colonial mentality of India as a place of trade and commerce. In the process of commerce, India came to be visualized as a huge market meant for exploitation and the reaping of benefits from the wares for display and sale.

Rusty, when he has reached the clock tower which serves as a boundary between the two worlds, is hesitant and reluctant to actually cross the threshold. The space that he is about to inhabit and the one that he is leaving behind both exhibit a power struggle. Ann Alston refers to Markus' and Cameron's reading of Foucault's theory of spaces being invested with power to emphasize that the articulation of spaces is connected to power issues. She says that it is not necessarily the school or prison only where power relations are carried out but in fact the whole of culture and, within it, the home becomes a site of control of power (92). Rusty's guardian has control over him within the confines of "home", where he sets up rules and regulations to be followed. In fact, the whole European quarters serves as a confined space which exercises control and thereby establishes its power over Rusty's movement. Once he breaks free of this confinement, he can think of crossing over to a new territory. But here too power relations come into play. Rusty is hesitant because he is "afraid of discovery and punishment" (13). This fear of discovery actually operates from Foucault's understanding of Bentham's Panopticon, a building where there is a fear of being under surveillance although the individual can never be sure whether he is actually being watched or not. Such devices act as an instrument of self-monitoring and help in the maintenance of good behaviour. Therefore the observed connives in his own

policing, even though the observer may not be present (Foucault 201). Rusty is, as such, unsure of the step he is going to take but at the same time India across the clock tower lures him. He breaks free of the shackles that bind him and puts up a resistance to the discipline imposed upon him. When he ultimately gets to enjoy this freedom, he senses a liberation which marks a new beginning in his life. The senses, smells and colours of India engage him in a new understanding of the place and he realises the connections that he shares with it. Timothy Beatley in *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age* (2004) dwells on this connection between a place and the human senses. He says that there are many things which have an influence on our feelings that are associated with a place, what he terms “place qualities”. These distinct qualities of a place are a result of the collective sensory experiences that we have in a certain place. Though it is the visual experience which is given primary importance in our narration of a place, yet the other senses are equally important. He relates the involvement of sounds—the sounds of street vendors, and the noise of pushcarts—which bring to our mind immediately the image of a particular place. Also important is the smell of a place. Smell is often underestimated in relation to defining a place but he says that distinct smells are particular to a certain place only and that smell immediately evokes the memory of that place (26-27).³ Rusty similarly feels the sounds and smells of the bazaar and he consumes them in order to make himself at one with his surroundings. The narratorial description actually emphasizes the vividness of the bazaar amidst the din and hustle of daily life in India:

The boy plunged into the throng of bustling people; the road was hot and close, alive with the cries of vendors and the smell of cattle and ripening dung And above the uneven tempo of the noise came the blare of a loudspeaker playing a popular piece of music Accustomed as Rusty was to the delicate scents of the missionary’s wife’s sweet-peas and the occasional smell of bathroom disinfectant, he was nevertheless overpowered by the odour of bad vegetables and kitchen water that arose from the gutter. (13-14)

This introduction of Rusty into the Indian cultural ethos makes him feel increasingly that his “home” is a place of oppression, suppression and suffocation. The concept of home changes fast after this first encounter with India, despite strong opposition from his guardian, Mr. Harrison. When he returns home after his second encounter with the bazaar, he finds that Mr. Harrison has returned home and is waiting for him. His act of transgression does not go down well with his guardian and thus he is suitably punished. As Alston argues, in children’s literature straying into others’ space will bring on both danger and punishment for the child. Children only move into the spaces of those characters who are outside the ambit of society. (93). Unlike the concept of home as a secure place, for Rusty home becomes a site of violence. Mr. Harrison thus tries to discipline Rusty as he has committed the crime of going where he does not belong. Foucault describes such an act as an act of power since discipline is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. And it may be taken over . . . by pre-existing authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power (215)

The disciplinary action taken on Rusty cannot deter him from moving through forbidden spaces and engaging in prohibited practices. When Ranbir beckons him to join the celebration of holi, he cannot resist the urge to follow his instincts. Rusty sees for the first time in his life the riot of colours and it acts as an initiation into Indian life and, for him, this celebration should never be over. For the first time he feels that the distinction on the basis of his skin colour becomes meaningless when he is smeared with the colours of holi. The narrator conveys his desire, “He wanted this to go on forever, this day of feverish emotion, this life in another world. He did not want to leave the forest; it was safe, its earth soothed him, gathered him in, so that the pain of his body became a pleasure . . . He did not want to go home” (27).

When he ultimately returns home, he is confronted by his guardian who points out the binaries between the Indian and English lineage, positing the English as proper,

civilized and decent as opposed to the Indians who are seen as improper, barbaric and shameful. Out of nowhere Rusty returns the violence imposed on him by revealing a new violent side of himself and he vehemently accepts his mixed heritage. This rush of physical aggression on Rusty's part can be seen as an attempt to purge the subdued self inside him and release and give birth to a new self which has shed its Anglo-Indian skin (Khorana, *Life* 33). He leaves his guardian's home forever and goes out into the wide world to fend for himself. The sudden anger that gripped him subsides after some time but the anger is now replaced with gnawing concern regarding his near future. Rusty was earlier homeless in the sense that Blunt and Dowling conceive it; that is as a state where despite being sheltered, there is abuse, violence and unsuitable conditions for growth (127). He is not only homeless now but houseless too. His assumption that he will find a house, if not a home, is dependent on finding Somi and Ranbir the next day. For the present, the night in the bazaar can either bring him brief stays in a prostitute's room or on the bench, which provides him space but not shelter. Despite the challenges, the one thing that is certain is that he is never going to retrace his steps to his guardian's home. He has severed all connections with Mr. Harrison, and for that matter, the whole community as such and there is no question of reclaiming that existence or lineage. He is about to build a new one out of his newly formed friendship.

Somi finds him under the bench and immediately takes stock of his situation and also takes over his friend's problems. He is not at all surprised that Rusty has run away from his guardian and naturally assumes responsibility for Rusty's food, clothing and shelter. Somi provides for Rusty a home in his own home and the narrative for the first time fixes its gaze on the room. Despite the title of the novel referring to a room, the narrative does not incorporate any description of the room that Rusty inhabits in his guardian's home. It is just referred to as a room with no narratorial description to make it feel a part of Rusty's being. But in Somi's home, one of the first descriptions is that of the house covered in crimson bougainvillea creeper and the garden a mass of marigold. The room that Somi takes Rusty to is described as:

The room was cool and spacious, and had very little furniture. But on the walls were many pictures, and in the centre a large one of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion: his body bare, the saint sat

with his legs crossed and the palms of his hands touching in prayer, and on his face there was a serene expression: the serenity of Nanak's countenance seemed to communicate itself to the room. (37-38)

The reference to Nanak's countenance and the serenity of the room lends to the narrative a distinct understanding that, unlike the previous room which Rusty occupied, the space within is inviting and secured. Nanak sits like a guardian angel, a deity who will guard the room from all kinds of problems. At the same time, the narrative emphasizes that Rusty has not slept so well before anywhere. Sleep comes easily to the weary and contented, and Rusty is both. This reference to sleep contrasts sharply with an earlier reference that those who sleep last are the first ones to wake up. But he needs financial security also and ultimately he gets it by becoming a teacher to the spoiled son of Mr. Kapoor, Kishen. In the process, he acquires a room of his own, a home which he can describe as of his own making and where he enjoys the freedom and privacy that home symbolizes. Compared to his earlier room in his guardian's house, this room is stripped to the bare essentials, consisting only of a string bed, a table, a shelf and a few nails on the wall. It is because of the miserly condition of the room that Rusty thinks of it not as a real room. While talking to his friend Somi, he refers to this room as one where poetry is written or music is created. Rusty, for the first time, acknowledges his literary bent of mind to Kishen while teaching him by disclosing his intentions of becoming a writer. The room serves as the medium through which Rusty's literary interests grow and it is here that we first come to know about it.

Despite Rusty's acceptance of India and distancing himself from everything that his guardian symbolized, he cannot completely get rid of his lineage. The holi colours which erased all distinctions of skin colour are no longer there to shield him from prying eyes. Kishen asks him why he is fair, like Suri, which prompts Rusty to ask the reason for Suri's fairness. Kishen replies that Suri is Kashmiri in origin and Rusty replies that he is English. Bond tries to eradicate the distinction of skin colour by trying to show that fairness is not necessarily only associated with the English. But Kishen's astonishment at the fact that Rusty is English only confuses Rusty all the more. He is unwilling to go back to his origins but it is a question which he cannot evade always. Rusty develops an attachment to Mrs. Kapoor, Kishen's mother, and it

strengthens his connections to the place, the room. Mr. Kapoor's drunkenness and his dwindling finances make his wife all the more alluring to Rusty. He wants to be there to protect her and care for her always. On the day of the picnic, when he passionately kisses her and she responds to him, Rusty feels that he has found his home among the jungles of Dehradun and wants to remain there forever. But Meena Kapoor feels that his room offers more freedom than the vastness of the jungle or the world itself and thus the room becomes a microcosm of the world. It is a home which provides privacy and freedom at the same time. It provides the scope for his literary pursuits and his emotional exploration too. He is portrayed as the king of his room and the monarch of all he surveys. When Mr. and Mrs. Kapoor leave for Delhi, Rusty feels that he has been entrusted with a responsibility which he is unwilling to shoulder. He has to look after Kishen while they are away and he finds himself inadequate for the job because his longing for Meena is more intense than the necessity to look after Kishen. But the rootedness and the enjoyment of life that the room provides for him is rudely shattered by the death of Mrs. Kapoor. The journey that he embarked on to find his place in the world as a writer is disrupted and he has to undergo a more literal journey now. The home that he made for himself away from the confines of the Anglo-Indian community and the freedom that he found there is the very thing that is now revolting to him. He wants to leave the place now because he feels no connections to it anymore.

Per Gustafson, in "Meanings of Place: Everyday Experience and Theoretical Conceptualizations", discusses the Three Pole Triangular model of place identity which recognizes one of the basic elements of the self's relationship to a place is the self's relationship with others who inhabit the place and these ties lead to an individual's sense of community, recognition or anonymity (13). With Mrs. Kapoor dead, Kishen taken away by an aunt, Somi poised to go to Amritsar, and Ranbir and Suri already having left for a boarding school in Mussoorie, Rusty's identification with the place diminishes and the bonds with the place no longer exists. His friend Somi tries to make sense to him that without a birth certificate and a passport he cannot leave the country: "You are neither Indian subject nor British subject" (94). The anguish of Rusty is evident as he says: "But I don't belong here, Somi. I don't belong anywhere. Even if I have papers, I don't belong. I'm a half-caste, I know it, and that is as good as not belonging anywhere" (94). But Rusty is also wise enough to

acknowledge that it is not his inheritance that is making him run away but his own agitation which is compelling him to leave. He does not leave immediately and rootlessness and emotional detachment harass him for days and nights in Dehradun, merging into a meaningless blur for Rusty, compels him to return to the same frame of mind that he was in at his guardian's place. The change of seasons with the coming of the monsoon brings in a change in his mindset too. He realizes that he could not keep on living in someone else's home and not having one of his own ever. He has to break free from this room which he once believed to be home and be somebody or nobody in the world. But he cannot bear to be just anybody.

Rusty decides to go to the British High Commission in New Delhi for an assisted passage to England. But fate has other things in store for him. He decides to meet Kishen on his way to Delhi and stops at Haridwar to say one last goodbye. There he learns that Mr. Kapoor has remarried and Kishen no longer stays with them and has instead become a thief because he could not reconcile himself with the fact that his father has married barely a month after his mother's death. He discards his decision to go to Delhi and instead tries to find Kishen, thereby bringing a purpose to his life. When he ultimately meets Kishen, both his and Kishen's purpose of life changes. Kishen decides to give up stealing and return to Dehradun and Rusty's dream of England, fame and riches are forgotten and pushed into the realm of dreams. The room beckons him again and, though he realizes the practical discomforts of the room, yet it is the only place that he knows and which can claim something of him. Rachel Anderson says, "When a person goes away from his place, he leaves a part of himself behind" (quoted in Wilkie-Stibbs 26). This part that he has left in his room is the one that calls him back. The night before they leave Haridwar, Rusty and Kishen sleep in the open, becoming a part of the roofless and the homeless, merging themselves with these people as a last act of purgation to reclaim their home and a roof above their heads. This decision to return emphasizes Blunt and Dowling's claim that home is more than just feelings of attachment for a particular place or to some particular people but is, in fact, the hearth or the anchoring point through which human beings remain centred in their lives (11).

Rusty thus accepts responsibility and, through this acceptance, he acknowledges his roots in India. To the question from a woman in a ferry boat in the Ganges as to who

he is, he replies, “I am nothing . . . I am everything” (117). When the woman questions him again regarding his home, he replies proudly that he has no home. This answer also brings to the reader’s memory Somi’s assertion that, because he belongs nowhere, he belongs everywhere. He immerses himself in the waters of the Ganges and reconstructs himself as a part of the whole universe. But it is the question from the woman regarding his relationship with Kishen that makes him think about it. Like him, Kishen too is an outcast from society; they are refugees from the world and are also each other’s refuge. Rachel Anderson’s remark that a “refugee is an unwanted person who makes claims on the humanity of others without having anything to give in return” (quoted in Wilkie-Stibbs 24) does not hold true here because both of them, being nothing to anyone else, are everything to each other and it is this bond that ties them. Bond incorporates a space within his writings for the creation of his second work *Vagrants in the Valley* by referring to both Rusty and Kishen as outcasts who hold promise of a future home but one that will be realized not through unrealistic hope and dreams but through real struggle and suffering. Kishen reiterates his faith in Rusty by giving him hope that he will be great one day and he will be a writer. The end justifies his return as Rusty says: “He could not run away. He could not escape the life he had made, the ocean into which he had floundered the night he left his guardian’s house. He had to return to the room; *his* room; he had to go back” (original emphasis) (117).

This rendering of the tale of Rusty’s rediscovery of self in writing is actually Bond’s rediscovery of himself through writing. The angst that lies dormant within Bond due to his inability to write because that is the one thing that he wanted to do most in his life is released through the act of writing. How do we locate home through this act of writing? The novel has often been categorized as a form of domestic fiction in content and setting as also the actual conditions of writing and reading (Blunt and Dowling 48). Mezei and Briganti write that “novels *and* houses furnish a dwelling place—a spatial construct—that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts” (original emphasis) (qtd. in Blunt and Dowling 48). Shelley Mallett while referring to Merleau-Ponty and Ingold in “Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature” says that the homes that we inhabit, be they concrete or imaginary ones, are build out of our engagement with, or, as she calls it,

“immersion” in the world which is nothing but the “homelands of our thoughts”(83). Robert Ginsburg makes the same argument and says:

We make our homes. Not necessarily by constructing them, although some people do that. We build the intimate shell of our lives by the organization and furnishing of the space in which we live. How we function as persons is linked to how we make ourselves at home. We need time to make our dwelling into a home. . . . Our residence is where we live, but our home is how we live. (qtd. in Mallett 83)

Both Mallet’s and Ginsburg’s statements are significant in the context of Bond because the construction of homes in our thoughts and home being our way of living emphasizes his home as existing in the realm of his thoughts and his way of living, which is writing. This creation and discovery of home is not confined to just this one text but is a continued exercise whereby the notion of home is changed and reconfigured text by text as Bond reconstitutes himself from the naivety of his first attempt at being an author to his cool aplomb as an accomplished one. *Room* in a way is also symbolic of a physical space, a material or tangible structure, through which Bond has found his footing in the world. This work by itself is a guarantee of the fact that he can be assured of his place in eternity as an author, though whether known or unknown is a different matter altogether. As he himself says in his autobiographical work, *The Lamp is Lit: Leaves from a Journal* (1998)⁴:

At twenty I was a published author, although not many people had heard of me! And although I wasn’t making much money then, and probably never would, it was the general consensus among my friends that I was an impractical sort of fellow and that I would be wise to stick to the only thing that I could do fairly well—putting pen to paper.(13)

The sense of achievement that he acquired with the publication of his first book and the financial freedom that it allowed him gave him the opportunity to return to India. Having resolved his questions regarding his identity and, content with his dual

heritage in that he had “come home” in the context of writing, he returns to India to a writing career of which he himself was very unsure. Interestingly, the English inheritance and the relocation to the west which troubles him so much are not only instrumental in his establishment as an author but also in his understanding of what home really means for him. On his return to India, Bond realizes that the home secured for him in writing through his first book does not exist in an India still struggling to find its position in the world as an independent country. What scope does it offer to someone like Bond who writes in English and hopes to make his living through writing? Practically none, and Bond realizes only too soon that the home that he has created through his writings has disintegrated once he reached his homeland. There is the necessity to contextualize the home created off-shores in the milieu of India, where it is going to be much more difficult. Bond humorously says that, from his “small flat in Dehradun, [he] began bombarding every newspaper and magazine editor in the land with articles, stories, essays and even poems” (*Rain in the Mountains* viii).

Life was hard and only the intense desire to succeed at any cost gave him the impetus to keep going. The sense of dislocation and loss of home that he felt is reflected in his writings too and it is in this context that we try to look at *Vagrants in the Valley*. Written only a year after returning to India, the work reflects the disparity of his situation and the fact that, except for serialisation in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, it never found any publisher till Penguin published it together with *The Room on the Roof* in 1993, after a long gap of 37 years. As opposed to the concreteness and fixity that a term like “room” supplies in his first novel, the term “vagrants” by itself denotes homelessness and a nomadic life. *Vagrants* therefore not only captures the struggle of a writer but also reflects the loss of home and subsequent tussle with fate and one’s identity to find a home in writing.

Vagrants in the Valley starts where *The Room on the Roof* ends, with both Rusty and Kishen returning to Dehradun to start life anew. But from the very beginning, the stability that the earlier work provided is debunked to critique the self-same notion of home upheld. The naming of the first chapter of the novel, “Homeless”, signifies the stance that Bond has taken in his writing. Rusty’s room and Kishen’s home are not there any longer for them and, unable to pay the rent, the landlord does not even allow

them in. Though momentarily provided with shelter by Somi's mother, yet for both of them home does not exist anymore and a life of vagrancy seems inevitable for them. Rusty finds a place for shelter in the derelict St. Paul's church on the outskirts of the town. The decaying church tells the plight of the Anglo-Indian community and Rusty's sadness at the decay is not due the fact that the community has lost its hold in the present times "but because it was old, with historic and personal associations, and he hated to see old things, old people, suffer lonely deaths" (142). Despite this, Bond integrates into the narrative the need for holding onto one's beliefs and passions. In the darkness of the church, under a candle light, Rusty starts writing, probably because of Somi's mother's questions regarding his progress in writing. But at the same time, the narrative throws light on Rusty's own initiation into the world of books and how, in the most desperate of circumstances, Rusty has turned to books. Into this vagrant lifestyle, Bond introduces a host of other narratives to highlight the plight of the homeless and the diverse nature of human suffering, especially that of children. Meena Khorana, in the context of the novel, asks an important question regarding home. "Is 'home' a sense of belonging to a physical dwelling, such as a room, or is it the comfort of a familiar place, a place where one is loved and where one matters"? (*Life* 50). *Vagrants* tries to answer this question through the wanderings of both Rusty and Kishen. The vagrancy in their life is to an extent self-imposed as both of them have run away from the security of a quintessential home—Rusty from his guardian, Mr. Harrison, and Kishen from his father, Mr. Kapoor. But Bond at the same time problematizes the concept of the homes they have run away from because none of the homes could provide the boys what they expected from it. The notion of acceptance and love that they associate with home is provided by each other's company and home therefore becomes a long journey of friendship enduring the vagaries and hardships of life. Even in his earlier work also, Bond emphasizes the concept of home as friendship and acceptance without questioning. The novel actually fictionalizes Bond's own struggle to find a home in India and to establish himself in the writing scenario.

In *The Room on the Roof*, the act of integrating oneself within India takes place through Rusty's privileging his Indian identity over his British one. Despite his leaving the security that the Anglo-Indian community provided for him, life for Rusty was not very tough as he found a second home amongst his friends and, also, a means

to sustain himself by becoming Kishen's teacher. At the same time, he found emotional anchoring through his fledgling love for Meena Kapoor. But in *Vagrants in the Valley*, the process of engaging with the Indian landscape and milieu takes place through a much tougher instance of literally mingling himself with the dust of the Indian soil. Both Rusty and Kishen are outcasts of society in the sense that they have rejected the traditional roles assigned to them as children and in fact have chosen the "outside" to the "inside" of home. The sanctity and sanctuary of home is declined and denied at the same time. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, in *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book* (2008), describes this position of being an outsider as:

To have been physically removed from their home . . . unaccompanied by loved ones, out of comfort into discomfort, or to a different climate or language environment, is the most drastic sense in which a child is cast as an "outsider." Such a displacement, perhaps even more for a child than an adult, takes away kin, ancestry, habits, memories, and all those material, historical, and political determinants of culture which create and sustain identity. The habits, customs, beliefs, and values, and the familiar contingencies of a child's perception which constitute the defining and protecting envelope of both their selfhood and their sense of outside reality, are all destabilized or destroyed. So children positioned as outsiders may have to reconstruct themselves as people at an age both beyond and before the innocence and maturity which better equip them to do so. (26)

Wilkie-Stibbs is quoted here at length to underscore the notion of vagrancy and its associated features. The necessity to redefine and reconstruct themselves as individuals within the constraints of vagrancy starts with being self-supporting and so they refuse Somi's mother's helping hand. Rusty, like a big brother, assumes responsibility for Kishen and thinks of finding a teaching job to sustain them and, if nothing else happens, he can always revert to his writing since it is the only work that he likes doing. Along with this sense of responsibility there is also the sense of

freedom, of being at one with nature that makes Rusty enjoy this phase of vagrancy (Khorana, *Life* 50-51). Bond introduces snippets from the underbelly of Indian life through the other vagrants that they meet in their roaming. Each vagrant has a story to tell—of homelessness, of abandonment by family, of the lack of love that a child feels intensely and, above all, the stark reality of the trauma of partition of the country. Bond very skilfully handles these themes to show how the independence of India has not only left people from the Anglo-Indian community without a sense of belonging but people from other communities are also rendered homeless. Despite being apolitical in nature, Bond's writing reflects highly the actual pain and suffering of a nation of people who have been made to leave or flee from homes, all in the name of regaining a home—India. The vagrants Devinder, Goonga, Sudheer and many others like them are all in search of a home which will free them from vagrancy and will give them a firm hold in this country. Vagrancy therefore is already assumed to be a temporary phase which will culminate in the claiming of a home and the sense of freedom enjoyed during this phase will be readily traded for the security and bindings of home. At the same time, Bond does not try to take a moralistic stand in describing the vagrants but is rather sympathetic in description. The outcasts of society are given a place within Bond's narrative to tell their own stories as they are denied space anywhere else.

This phase of vagrancy begins to come to an end with Kishen being adopted by Mrs. Bhushan, who takes responsibility because she was a friend of Mrs. Kapoor. As Kishen's needs are taken care of, Rusty too meets Mr. Pettigrew, a relic of the past glory of the Raj. He knew Rusty's father well and gives him a further clue to his lineage: an aunt who may have an important heirloom to give him. Rusty thus goes to meet his aunt, the widow of his father's brother, who is also a recluse living in the memory of a time which is never going to come back. The legacy which his father left for him and which he receives from his aunt is, again, books, one of which is a rare first edition of *Alice in Wonderland*. Bond weaves together the relation with his own father and books into the novel to show Rusty's only known connection with his father was that available through books. This priceless gift that he receives gives him enough liberty to break out for newer pastures and give direction to his aimless life. This intention of Rusty's in a sense brings a closure to the band of vagrants, though the other vagrants are not as lucky as Rusty and Kishen. For the rest of them, life is

still an uphill task before they can rest their tired legs at home. But the closure also leaves much to desire for the readers as it involves conforming to societal norms and aligning oneself with them, thereby giving up the very ideology on which vagrancy is formed. Joanne Neale in “Theorising Homelessness: Contemporary Sociological and Feminist Perspectives” says that the individual in society is constituted by diverse discourses of society which come into conflict to constitute meaning. These discourses, which are limited in number, are determined by the historical moment and the individual’s choice is dependent on the discourses available. The number of “obvious” or “natural” choices are not large in number and thereby societal control works more through “consent” and “acceptance” than through “coercive power”(45). Kishen, thus, with a little persuasion from Rusty, readily trades the freedom of vagrancy for the bondage of home that Mrs. Bhushan offers. Rusty, on the other hand, does not actually end his vagrancy but in fact tries to give direction to it by embarking on another journey. The last chapter is thus named “Start of a Journey” and leaves open options for further adventures and a further search for home. The paths that both Rusty and Kishen have chosen for themselves actually reflect the fact that a child, by itself, has limited means of determining the outcome of dislocation and homelessness. Bond, in fact, is realistic in the sense that he tries neither to romanticize the idea of vagrancy nor explicitly dwell on the bondages that home implies. Yvonne Hammer in “Power through Intersubjectivity: Representing the Resilient Child in Urban Survival Narratives” says:

Narrative representations of displacement address important issues such as the loss of a primary caregiver, the fracturing of family connections The realistic portrayal of homeless children acknowledges that such children have little power to act independently or determine their own circumstances, and that childhood agency is always limited. Depicted outcomes will lie between two polarities: at one pole is an ideal concept of childhood power that is in practice unachievable, and at the other is a form of disempowered alienation that denies characters what might be deemed a reasonable degree of social agency. (66)

The novel in a sense is a plot within *The Room on the Roof* as it ends with the original decision of Rusty intending to go to England to try out his hand at writing. The last lines of the novel resonate in the mind of the reader long after the novel ends: “I’m going to England I’m going to Europe and America and Japan and Timbuctoo. I’m going everywhere, and no one can stop me!” (223). He is going everywhere, to a lot of places. And he belongs everywhere. The idea reverberates from *The Room on the Roof* too and thus belongingness or rootedness is not fixed to a single entity called home but is dispersed all over the world. The whole world is one’s oyster. And this could happen only to the select few who exist beyond the man-made walls and boundaries of home, homeland, countries and territories. Ruskin Bond, like the great stalwarts whose spirit he has imbibed in himself, belongs everywhere. Though he physically resides in his small flat in Dehradun, as an author his works find a home all over the world and also in the minds and hearts of his readers spread across time and space. Struggling over a period of lean financial security and acceptance as an author, *Vagrants in the Valley* serves as a reassurance to Bond himself that he belongs to the whole world and there is the hope of youth that he will survive in his chosen vocation and will find a home for himself.

This hope of writing that he has sustained within himself has led to the writing of numerous books that followed and made Ruskin Bond a household name, especially in children’s literature. But the trend started by Bond with regards to English children’s literature did not flourish much except in his hands and there was hardly any output in this field. It was Arup Kumar Dutta who first ventured into an area which was not treaded earlier. Dutta took up the daunting task of rendering a very popular genre, that of the mystery and adventure fiction, into the Indian format without making it seem merely an imitative version of the more popular and acclaimed western one. Dutta was venturing into a territory which was well marked in western children’s literature and was also initiating his own writing career. Not only was children’s literature a new form of writing at the time Dutta was starting to write but Indian English writing in North-East India was itself in a fledgling state. Dutta’s attempt, therefore, could well be read as one where he was finding his home in writing and, at the same time, creating a home for Indian English children’s fiction, especially mystery and adventure stories, and Indian English writings from North-East India.

5.3 Writing From Within

In trying to write about North-East India and especially Assam primarily, the problem is in avoiding clichés. For too long North-East India has been visualized by the rest of the nation through its veil of mist, rain and exoticism, thus obscuring its true perspective. North-East India has been projected through the lenses of an outsider's gaze and, as Sanjib Baruah remarks, "Assam is a rather remote place when seen from the perspective of the newsrooms of the international media" (xviii). This remoteness, as Baruah elucidates, serves not only in the safe distancing of the West from the happenings in Assam, but also posits Assam as a left-over relic of modernity unable to pay heed to or comprehend the greatness of western teachings and knowledge(xix). Tilotoma Misra in her introduction to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* (2011), says that the communities from North-East India

have been seen as living in 'enchanted spaces' bearing unpronounceable names. Significantly, for mainland India, the region known as the 'North-East' has never had the privilege of being at the centre of epistemic enunciation, except perhaps at some ancient time when Assam was recognized as the centre of occult knowledge associated with tantric worship, magic, and astrology, and, strangely enough, the imagination of the 'mainland' has even today not outgrown those constructs of the mysterious 'other'. (xviii)

The necessity is felt to break and change the stereotypes within which the image of the North-East has been moulded. The grim realities of the region cannot be ignored in the face of turbulence that rocks this region but to constantly harp on about these issues means that the real North-East remains under-represented. Far too often, writings about the North-East have come from a journalistic point of view and the literary aspect remains unrepresented. Also, this representation has been from an outsider's perspective, one who sees the place with his or her baggage of preconceived notions and perceptions. The Indian media too, if we consider the case of Assam, focuses either on the violence that has ripped up the state or on its ethereal

beauty, without taking into consideration its actual day-to-day lived-in experiences. The recent Bodo and Muslim clashes, the eve-teasing incident in Guwahati or the perennial flood problem are the incidents that are chiefly reported. Incidentally, the Bodo Muslim clashes have put Assam in the same group as other states hit by violence like Gujarat or Maharashtra. What remains unreported is that Assam, and for that matter, North-East India too has remained for a long time a stable region so far as religious violence is concerned. Any region, state or nation cannot project itself from a single dimension only and to do so is to leave its stories untold before the rest of the world. There is a great diversity in the region which needs to be conveyed from a more dispassionate perspective. This vision is not blurred by the “representations” in the media or elsewhere which provide only a sensationalized perspective, leaving out the insider’s experience and feelings. The stories of home need to be told by the residents of home and this storytelling should exemplify the uniqueness of each and every state of the region, rather than being lost within the umbrella term “North-East”, which hardly does justice to the diversity of the various states.

The important concern in these discussions is the necessity of presenting an insider’s view, which can put firmly in place the actuality of the place without needless sensationalism or exoticism. It is here that Arup Dutta’s writings are important because through them he is trying to present a different picture of Assam and life as it is lived there, neither resorting to the tourism aspect of writing nor to the goriness of the violence that has caused strife in the state. But in achieving this balance, Dutta does not let go of the fact that the format of writing which he has chosen needs some amount of bravura to grasp the reader’s attention. Blatant reality is good enough from a journalistic point of view but, for a book to sell, and that too an English children’s book, Dutta needs to infuse his writings with credibility and to lead the reader along on a journey through Assam that sustains as well as breaks myths regarding the region. This creation of a new home, a new Assam or North-East, within his writings, is also an act whereby Dutta is striving to build a home, a base, for English children’s fiction in India. It is indeed an attempt to breakaway not only from the colonial past but also from our acclaimed, glorious past of children’s literature. Dutta’s endeavour is to base and sustain his writings in the present, in the here and now of things and so he creates a world that tries to infuse new blood into the hackneyed and borrowed forms of children’s adventure stories, which is as also a wise move away from the

harping on the past—the grandmother’s tales and folk tales—which constituted children’s literature, especially Indian English children’s literature, till then.

One of the primary functions that *The Kaziranga Trail* serves is that of upholding the reader’s general perspective about Assam, but the point of departure is in Dutta’s use of language and in the depiction of the setting. The Kaziranga wildlife sanctuary is a familiar signpost of Assam for any non-native and, therefore, immediately captures the imagination of the reader. But Kaziranga is not being portrayed from the tourist’s gaze but from the viewpoint of the inhabitants of the place. Dutta’s writings lend credibility to the milieu by making it as realistic as possible, and at the same time, the plot runs on the lines of the adventure genre. Dutta’s ability in writing is also reflected in his use of mystery settings and plot construction, characterization, the building up of the climax and ultimate denouement. He is using a formulaic pattern that has been created and developed in the west and which Michelle Superle criticizes, as noted before, as “The Indian ‘Blytonnade’”, asserting that Indian English children’s fiction, at least the adventures, mysteries and school stories, have remained spin-offs of western models and authors merely concentrate on Indianizing the texts (109). Two arguments of Superle’s are worth considering here in the context of Arup Dutta’s writings.⁶ The first of the arguments that she puts forward is that:

Indian children’s authors have been vigilant in their attempts to infuse the Blytonnades with Indianness. This cultural content positions these novels as recognizably Indian—apparently a sufficient remedy against imitation, although certainly not against potential essentialisation or homogenisation. (110)

The second argument that she offers in this respect is that Indian authors tend to liberally sprinkle their texts with recognizable cultural markers which appeal to the sensuality of the child readers and, through their imagination they feel themselves touching or consuming these markers (111). Both these arguments, when analyzed in relation to Arup Dutta’s writings, reveal that Superle’s criticisms are accurate to an extent but they also need to be further interrogated in the socio-cultural milieu of India and Indian English children’s literature.

The time, when Arup Dutta started writing, especially *The Kaziranga Trail*, there was a real dearth of English language children’s fiction in India. Except for Ruskin Bond,

there was hardly any author concentrating on children's writing in India and English language children readers satisfied their needs through western imports. Under these circumstances, Dutta presented *The Kaziranga Trail* where he directly addressed a specific problem of Assam and, probably, the rest of India too. Superle's accusation of Indianness holds true perhaps in the context that Dutta has used a very Indian setting and made his characters very distinctly Indian. But the question of essentialization and homogenization does not apply here, at least with regards to *The Kaziranga Trail*. Kaziranga, as a sanctuary is known probably worldwide but the problem of poaching associated with it remains specific to the region and it is only the people of the region who can understand the gravity of the situation. At the same time, the question of homogenization comes in when there is a possibility of replicating it somewhere else. The particular problem of poaching can possibly be replicated somewhere else in India but the deftness of Dutta's work lies in the nuanced rendering of the landscape and its people, with a sound knowledge of the area. One of the first descriptions that Dutta gives shows his acquaintance with the place and his dexterity in handling the language and the setting. He describes a particular morning in the sanctuary in the following terms:

Usually, the sanctuary is alive with sounds, the twittering of birds, the chirping of crickets and the occasional grunts of a rhino. But this morning a strange silence prevailed. Herds of deer stood still, sniffing the air. The atmosphere had suddenly become warm and sultry. Thick, black clouds were gathering in the western skies. (9-10)

This description helps the reader develop a sound picture of the general workings of the sanctuary and, at the same time, makes the reader understand the scenario with which the author is going to dabble for the rest of the times. Dutta does occasionally use words from the Assamese language and also episodes where local myths are enacted out. Some of the words like, *mama, mami, boro babu, dor*, come with translations in English but words like *dao, bez, beel* are left unexplained for the reader to interpret in context. Again when the twins play a trick to detain Bose, the locals mistakenly think that they are *birra* or ghosts, which is a rendering of typical sensibilities and myths of the place. Dhanai also has knowledge of the local herb called *akachu* which he uses in treating the wound of his elephant Makhoni. Dutta's

adaptation of the Blyton formula is limited to his usage of three friends who are enjoying their holidays. The use of the elephant does not necessarily fall under Superle's accusation of tangible cultural markers because the elephant by itself is no longer an animal representative of India. The fact that Makhoni is the pet elephant of Dhanai, which merges into the background, does not stand out as unreal and, in fact is instrumental in the boys' detective work. Chris Routledge, in connection with detective fiction and children, refers to Blyton's children detectives and says that "the world of Blyton's child detective is in sharp contrast with the chaos and fracture of the world of adults, offering its inhabitants an extraordinary amount of autonomy and an unusual degree of cooperation far removed from adult interference"(329). But Dutta does not try to alienate or isolate his child detectives from the grim reality of the adult world but rather situates them at the very heart of the problem. At the same time, parents are not missing from the picture, as is so often the case in western children's detective fiction, but are depicted to be not only anxious about their children's activities but also help them in their pursuits. In the first instance, when the three boys are late in returning home, the boys' parents are waiting for them and even reprimand them for being late. The parents are then let into the secret and properly notified about the events that they are engaged in. Dhanai's mother's anxious query, "But isn't it risky? They are just kids" (26), perhaps for the first time in Indian English mystery children's fiction brings in the parents' perspective and integrates them into the secluded and cordoned off territory of adventures and mysteries in children's literature. What this does is immediately change the whole way of looking at children's adventure and mystery stories from an innocent and naïve perspective and instead situates Indian English children's fiction in a league of its own. Dutta's initiative can be viewed as a conscious attempt to rewrite a formulaic pattern and situate it in the Indian moment and milieu. Thus we find that Dutta has created a home for Indian English children's fiction which later on flourished mainly in his hands.

The Kaziranga Trail laid the foundation for other writings to follow and thus we have *Trouble at Kolangijan* (1982), *The Blind Witness* (1984), *Revenge* (1986), *The Lure of Zangrila* (1986), *Smack* (1990), *Footprints in the Sand* (1999), and *The Counterfeit Treasure* (2001) and many more. That he has firmly rooted himself in his writings could be understood from the fact that not only has he given up his job to take up full-

time writing but also that *The Kaziranga Trail* has been translated into various languages, and *The Kaziranga Trail*, *The Blind Witness*, and *Revenge* have been portrayed on celluloid too as *Rhino*, *Netrahin Sakshi*, and *Pratishod* respectively. Dutta's success lies in the fact that he has been able to give birth to a new genre of writing in India and has brought children's fiction from India to an international audience. He started from scratch and was able to build his own corpus of writings, which mark his stature as not only an author but a children's author in particular.

While the predicament of both Bond and Arup Dutta lay in the creation or construction of a home in writing where there was none before, Rushdie's consternation was in the destruction of the home or world he had created through his writings. What option was available to Rushdie when his creative abilities were cruelly curtailed through a fatwa that, in a sense, served as a death sentence for the author? Rushdie's answer, though many would not term it direct, was to create alternative worlds, worlds within worlds, which resisted any decree by any authoritarian ruler and could co-exist peacefully. These narrative worlds constituted Rushdie's actual home—the home in which he could find solace and move about freely—in the harum scarum of perpetual movements in the search for “safe houses” during the fatwa.

5.4 Finding a “Safe” Home

Rushdie's meteoric rise after *Midnight's Children* almost came to an end after *The Satanic Verses* raised a lot of controversy as the fatwa was imposed on him. W. J. Weatherby notes with regards to *Haroun* that Rushdie “had originally planned the story for his young son, Zafar, and he used to read an early version to the boy in serialized form at the boy's bedtime. ‘It was part of the deal so I could finish *Satanic Verses*’, Rushdie once said. He asked why all my books were for grown-ups and I didn't have an answer.”(194). Its publication in 1990 made its readers look up to it as Rushdie's answer to the fatwa and *Haroun* in many ways does just that. It is not only about Haroun's journey towards self-revelation but also Rushdie's own journey towards making spaces of his own and a critique of the fatwa.

In the cloistered world that Rushdie was hurled into following the fatwa, there was hardly any space or opportunity left for writing and it needed much effort on his part

to regain his composure. Writing about the fatwa years in his recent memoir, *Joseph Anton* (2012), Rushdie says that the difficult process of writing again was like “his first awkward steps back towards himself, away from *Rushdie* and back towards *Salman*, towards literature again and away from the bleak, defeated idea of becoming *not a writer*” (original emphasis) (166). This atmosphere was changed by Zafar’s insistence on his father writing the book promised to him and thus Rushdie returned to his home base, to what he had always wanted to do, that is to write. Rushdie, in a sense, was trying to create a double home—the first as a space where he could negotiate and rediscover his own identity as a writer and the second where his son Zafar could find solace and turn to, as his own, even when his own father may not be with him. This space or narrative world that Rushdie builds up is also an alternate world which functions according to his wishes and where he could ultimately engineer a happy ending. Jack Zipes calls this act of creating an alternate world, or world of fantasy, a search for home in the following ways:

The first one occurs in the reader’s mind and is psychological and difficult to interpret, because the reception of an individual tale varies according to the background and experience of the reader. The second occurs within the tale and indicates a socialization process and acquisition of values for participation in a society where the protagonist has more power of determination. This second quest for home can be *regressive* or *progressive* depending on the narrator’s stance vis-à-vis society. (original emphasis) (*Fairy Tales* 173)

The second quest, in the context of Rushdie, is progressive rather than regressive since he creates a home for himself and, like Rashid, regains his narrative abilities. On the necessity of creating fantastic worlds as a means of regaining home, Zipes refers to Ernst Bloch’s argument that it is necessary and important to create and protect fantasies since they serve as a portrayal of “our radical or revolutionary urge to restructure society so that we can finally achieve home” (*Fairy Tales* 174). But, at the same time, for Rushdie it is not enough to create an alternate world but, more importantly, there should be a struggle against the harsh reality and, as he says, “Unreality is the only weapon with which reality can be smashed, so that it may be

subsequently reconstructed” (*Imaginary* 122). He intends to put into use “the power of the playful imagination to change forever our perceptions of how things are” (*Imaginary* 123). For Rushdie, fairy tales have an important function to perform. In the famous interview with Günter Grass, he states, “the purpose of the fiction [. . . is] telling the truth at a time in which the people who claimed to be telling the truth were making things up. You have politicians, or the media or whoever, the people who form opinion, who are, in fact, making the fictions. And it becomes the *duty of the writer of fiction to start telling the truth*” (emphasis added) (“Fictions” 14). Rushdie, through the narrative of *Haroun*, also finds answers to the question that had been haunting him ever since the fatwa—what role does fiction or stories perform in society? Therefore he places this question at the centre of *Haroun*’s narrative structure with the whole novel revolving around this question. When Haroun finds his answer to the question, he arrives home and is reunited with his family and when Rushdie, through *Haroun*, finds his own answer, he too finds his home in writing.

Haroun begins with a provocative question—“What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?”(22). If we, as readers, accept this idea, keeping at bay Coleridge’s idea of a willing suspension of disbelief, that stories are not true, then the whole furore regarding *The Satanic Verses* seems pointless. But Rushdie situates neither *Haroun* nor *The Satanic Verses* in such simplistic planes of existence with monosyllabic answers to accept or deny the “truth” regarding stories. For Rushdie, the fatwa was not just a straitjacket put upon him, to clip his wings and rein in his free flight of imagination. Like Khatam-Shud who tries to poison the source of the Ocean of stories, he conceptualizes the fatwa as a controlling of the different strands of narrative available to a storyteller. The storyteller, like himself, should have the ability and also the option to subject his stories to all kinds of interpretation so that one narrative can bind itself up with many other narratives to open up newer and newer stories. There cannot be one, fixed grand narrative, neither affected nor displaced by time and circumstances, which retains its authority throughout history. Rushdie effectively portrays the dangers of such retention of fixed narratives where not only are all stories being silenced but also all the clocks have been frozen as well.

Throughout the novel, the reverberating question, “What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?” and Plato’s objections to stories and story-telling that art does not really have any claim to truth. It is thus meaningless and the artist in proffering a make-believe, imperfect reality wastes his time in an illogical and irrational pursuit which cannot have any bearing or understanding of reality. These are arguments that resound throughout the novel, but mainly in the accusation that Mr. Sengupta inflicts upon Rashid and in the letter that Soraya leaves for him: “You are only interested in pleasure, but a proper man would know that life is serious business. Your brain is full of make-believe, so there is no room for facts” (22). *Haroun*, within the framework of the novel, offers different responses to this accusation, one response being similar to the one offered by Sidney in his defense of poetry against the Puritan detractors. This response being that the storyteller is not necessarily always relaying “facts”, so he cannot be accused of lying. But primarily, *Haroun’s* and Rushdie’s defense lies on the basis that stories are not necessarily about “facts” or “truths”. Or for that matter, what we conceive to be reality is again a fabrication conjured up in our minds to suit our own understanding of it. Rushdie’s postmodernism rejects the notion of one, fixed, grand narrative and also the stationary concept of reality. Every story leaves within itself spaces and pauses that can be filled by the reader with any number of options. A good storyteller refrains from offering a particular explanation and keeps it open-ended.

One of the primary aims of *Haroun* is to advocate free speech and to reflect on the idea that freedom of speech and freedom of thought will ultimately result in a stronger nation. The Guppees in the novel represent this concept of free speech but the narrator himself had reservations regarding this power of speech. In the battle against the Chupwalas chaos reigns, initially because every war strategy is argued and debated by the various Guppees. Haroun is frustrated at this constant jabbering of the Guppees and remarks: “If any soldiers behaved like this on Earth, they’d be court-martialled quick as thinking” (119). In reply, Butt the Hoopoe says: “But but but what is the point of giving persons Freedom of Speech if you then say they must not utilize same? And is not the Power of Speech the greatest Power of all? Then surely it must be exercised to the full?”(119). The Guppees later win the fight because the narrator feels that through speech they have created a bond amongst themselves while the Chupwalas are cloistered in their own cocoons of distrust and suspicion, not being

liberated by speech. But it would be too simplistic a notion to accept that the function of speech is only liberation and everything is fine in a nation where free speech is advocated. In totalitarian regimes it can be understood that freedom of speech would lead to a freer society but in democratic nations like India, advocacy of mere speech can even lead to violent situations at times, examples of which are seen all over the country. At the same time, Rushdie ignores the fact that speech, and that too one which can change the face of the nation, is not easily available to everybody. For reasons like these *Haroun* has been criticized of over simplifying crucial issues. But again, if we go back to the birth of *Haroun*, we realize that it was meant to be a children's story where certain issues could be left unattended. Rushdie, in fact, was cunning enough to realize that a children's story could be used as a clever ploy to launch a thinly veiled attack against the Ayatollahs of the world without the fear of censorship.

Haroun is of course a resistant narrative questioning the prevalent truths and realities of the world but it is also very much about the necessity of imagination, the ability to transform dream worlds into reality. It has a lot of political issues associated with it but is primarily a children's story. Rushdie reminds his son and many other children reading the story that one way of transforming the world is a belief in our imaginative faculties. The burden of remaining in exile is eased only if he can create a bond with his son and many others through his writings. This, in itself, is a simplistic way of looking at the novel but probably this is one of the possible ways of reading that allows us to go beyond the restrictions imposed on us and allows us to enjoy Rushdie as a writer rather than only as a political exile. We can quote here Rosalía Baena's argument:

Rushdie, like many other postcolonial artists, dramatizes in his own work his predicament as an artist, including a reflection on the functioning of language and of the imagination within his plots. Thus, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* becomes a metafictional exercise, where references to the artist's creative process and to the meaning and the realm of literature are endless. (70)

In the dedication of the novel, an acrostic using Zafar's name, Rushdie says "Read, and bring me home to you" and this is perhaps the most potent argument in favour of the author finding his home.

5.5 Is There a Home in Writing?

When considered in relation to each other, all the works emphasize the notion of a search for belongingness. In *The Room on the Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley*, the search is for a definite home, be it the room on the roof or a shelter. In this process, when we try to locate Bond as an author and his search for home within these writings, we find that the necessity to create a concrete dwelling place with a name plate to signify its occupation by the owner is fulfilled through the writings or literature that he has created and which has his name attached to them to signify his ownership. Bond's endeavour to find his initial footing as an author is reflected in *The Room on the Roof*, but this effort on his part to start a trend in English writing, the language he is proficient in, faced him with a dichotomy once he returned to India in the 1950s. Debashis Bandyopadhyay neatly encapsulates this dichotomy in his own work where he situates the problematic situation of Bond as a tussle between Bond the author and Rusty the protagonist. While Bond goes to New Jersey in search of work, his protagonist Rusty does not leave India. On the other hand, Bond returns to India in actuality but he initiates the possibility of Rusty going to England at the end of *Vagrants in the Valley*. The return of the author is problematic because England, despite being emotionally a difficult place, provided an opportunity for the budding author to publish his first work and an award also for Bond (Bandyopadhyay 44). But Bond rejected the financial stability and returned to India only to find that India was hardly the place for someone like him. While the west celebrates the image of India as a colonial relic, for Bond it is a lived reality thriving with pain and love too (Bandyopadhyay 45). Unwilling to exchange his emotions for financial gains, he returns only to find that the very land whose memories he did not feel like "selling" in a foreign nation was not accepting his efforts to provide an Indian experience in writing. When Mr. Pettigrew, at the end of *Vagrants in the Valley*, asks Rusty to sell his father's books in England, Rusty is unwilling and he experiences an existential crisis. Debashis Bandyopadhyay poignantly captures the enigma in the following way:

The necessity of commodifying literary objects to make a living appears dangerous for the adverse effect it portends. The ability to sell

words in the changing scenario makes tropical sense of the notion of independence as entry into the symbolic order but, at the same time, implies a willingness to cater to the interests of a reading community whose tastes are being increasingly fashioned by capitalist zeitgeist. Bond clings to the old world values where writing the self per se is tantamount to fulfilling a subjective desire, coming to terms with one's own identity. The tension inherent in such identity-centric transcripts does not readily lend itself to the dominant ideology of the capitalist market. The dialogue between the writer and reader becomes rewarding for Bond only if his readers are of a 'gentle kind'. (50)

This "gentle kind" of reader became a bane for Bond rather than a boon for him as even after more than fifty years of writing different short stories, novels, novellas and poems, Bond is viewed primarily as a children's author. Bond's attempt to find his location in writing and that too through the English language remains problematic supposedly because he has been unwilling to cater to the changing reading scenario in post-liberalization India. The situation is pitiable too because Bond's initiative in English language children's literature to date remains incomplete in India, considering the fact that there has been such a spurt of English language writing in India.

Arup Kumar Dutta is, in a way, carrying forward the tradition of Ruskin Bond in trying to revive Indian English children's fiction. But Arup Dutta deviates from Bond in the fact that he uses an already available format but recasts it to suit the Indian sensibility. He created through his works a niche or a space which facilitated later developments in this field and thus there is a gradual and growing output in Indian English children's fiction. The problem with the kind of writings that Arup Dutta initiated is that they brought in a host of similar kinds of writing which may not be of the same literary value but they homogenized the genre as a whole. Despite the fact that Dutta remains a prolific author to date and the fact that he has been translated into languages such as German, Russian, Hungarian, Japanese and so on, and a host of awards to follow, his works have not been part of critical appreciation or of university syllabuses. Surprisingly, Dutta has been left out of anthologies and collections of

stories for children, including major ones like *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* (Volume I) edited by Tillotoma Misra and *The Puffin Treasury of Modern Stories* (2002) edited by Mala Dayal. These exclusions emphasize the marginal position that Dutta is relegated to and it comes as a surprise that both these anthologies, in which Dutta's works should have been an integral part, remain silent regarding his works. While Tillotoma Misra's edited anthology should have included his works, considering the fact that he has seven non-fiction, one fiction and fifteen children's novels to his name, Mala Dayal's edited anthology in the introduction specifies that the aim of the book "is to offer some of the best Indian children's fiction available in English" (viii) and yet does not consider Dutta to fall under the category of "the best Indian children's fiction available in English". These issues problematize Dutta's endeavour to find a home for Indian English children's fiction and, like the genre he has taken up, his position remains marginalized. But at the same time *The Kaziranga Trail* continues to find audiences despite all questions of selection and preference. Thus, Dutta can be said to have gained a home for his writing in the mind of the reader, although he remains absent from academic attention and this in a way speaks of the condition of children's literature, especially Indian English children's literature in India.

One author who cannot be said to be beyond critical attention or part of syllabuses across the world is of course Salman Rushdie and therefore *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* received huge critical acclaim. As reiterated again and again, *Haroun* is viewed mainly in the light of the critical position of Rushdie post fatwa and thereby its subsequent importance in the literary world. Rushdie's attempt to write an apparently simplistic narrative becomes one of the most politicized texts of Rushdie's. But despite the volatile circumstances of *Haroun's* origin, Rushdie's main regaining of his home ground in writing is visualized by many to be in *Moor's Last Sigh*. Andrew Teverson even goes on to argue that

The optimism of *Haroun* . . . is not characteristic of Rushdie's political philosophy, but emerges *against* his own inclination. By contrast, the worldly pessimism—some would say realism—of *The Moor* is more in tune with the Voltareian instinct apparent in most of Rushdie's writing

to brutally disabuse his readership of any illusions they may have benevolence of the world. (original emphasis) (167-168)

Thus, Rushdie's children's writing is negated blatantly as being "*against* his own inclination", and therefore categorizing Rushdie primarily as an adult author rather than a children's author. Rushdie also has not added more to his oeuvre of children's apart from *Luka and the Fire of Life*, which came twenty years after *Haroun*. This long gap in itself makes clear Rushdie stance regarding children's literature and the home that he created in *Haroun* is in fact searched for in other works rather than in children's literature. What this goes on to prove is that Indian English children's fiction, despite receiving attention from acclaimed authors from time to time, is not a well received genre as yet and those attempts which are initiated to find a home for children's writing in India remain unnoticed or unacclaimed.

The understanding that we arrive at through an analysis of the three authors here is that, despite the definite strides taken up to find and create homes in Indian English children's literature, the concept of home remains fraught with tensions. The Indian authors' search for home and the postcolonial angst in locating home forms the basis of children's literature too and thereby the necessity to reclaim the home lost in various ways. The various discussions in the previous chapters need to be tied down to one overarching theme that has defined the course of this study. This forms the basis of the last and conclusive chapter which will bring closure to the diverse topics taken up for consideration here.