

## The Tunnel by Ruskin Bond

The Tunnel is a short story written by Ruskin Bond covered in the novella 'The Road to the Bazaar'. Tranquility in nature and duty are two major themes nicely conveyed in this story. Suraj wants to see the train passing through the tunnel, hence he comes to a small village from Dehradun on a bicycle and from there he walks up to a hill mound. He stands at the exit of the tunnel and when the train enters and passes through and fades away in the distance, he feels the true peace of the jungle. When the train passes through the jungle, the trees tremble in the steam it throws out, the railway tracks lay shivering for some time.

He walks through the tunnel. At the entry is a hut in which lives Sunder Singh, the tunnel watchman, his duty is to check the tunnel before a train passes through it. He does it twice a day, one for the day train and next for the night train that crosses the tunnel at nine. Sunder tells that jungles are peaceful and safer than cities. He was almost run over by a motor when he went to the city last time. Suraj sees that there are no people and houses around his hut. Suraj asks him didn't he feel afraid of darkness and wild animals. The watchman tells him that there lives a leopard around the hut who likes to prey on goats and dogs, but not on humans. They both see each other quite often.

Next evening Suraj comes to be with the watchman. Just before the night train, they both hear the sound made by the leopard. They have to run the leopard away to save its life. Both go inside with a lantern and an axe just in case it makes mind to attack them. When they shout inside the tunnel, their voice echoes in the tunnel as if hundreds of humans are there. As a result, the leopard flees away.

A week later when Suraj is traveling to Delhi with his father on the night train, he tries to make out the old man and his lantern and his hut, and soon he sees the lantern hanging outside the hut which means he has done his duty of checking the tunnel and retired for the night. Suraj feels gratitude for the watchman who strictly follows his duty for the sake of others and trains in which thousands of passengers exist. Loved the story, read the character sketch of Sundar Singh.

In *The Tunnel* by Ruskin Bond we have the theme of curiosity, friendship, dedication, innocence, care and respect. Taken from his *Collected Short Stories* collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and from the beginning of the story the reader realises that Bond may be exploring the theme of curiosity. Ranji is a young boy who is fascinated by trains. He travels from his home to the countryside to look at the trains pass. This appears to be Ranji's main source of enjoyment. Ranji's relationship with Kishan is also interesting as it becomes clear that both become friends. With the older Kishan advising or teaching the younger Ranji about life in the jungle. What is also noticeable about Kishan is that he loves the jungle. Preferring the company of the animals in the jungle to the people he might encounter in town. Which is understandable considering that Kishan was the victim of a pick pocket. This may be significant as Bond may be suggesting (ironically) that man may be safer in the jungle than being around other men. At least this appears to be Kishan's belief.

There is also no disputing that Kishan respects the jungle and it is for this reason that Kishan might feel safe there. He does not bother the animals in the jungle and understands that he is a visitor in their home. What is also interesting is the risk that Kishan takes to save the leopard. Though he takes an axe with him to protect himself he still nonetheless is risking his life in order to ensure that the leopard is not killed by the train. This highlights Kishan's ability to care for his environment and his hopes that the status quo is not disturbed. At all times throughout the story Kishan is respectful of the environment he finds himself in and as mentioned he feels safer in the jungle than in the town. Something that some critics might find unusual. The fact that Kishan had his money stolen by a

pick pocket might also be important as symbolically Bond could be suggesting that society in itself is corrupt and people might live a better life if they lived their lives as Kishan does. Though with modernity this is unlikely to happen. Also most people would kill a leopard if they saw one. Rather than understanding that they were in the leopard's home.

If anything Bond could be using Kishan's character to highlight an alternative lifestyle. One that is better than the one that man may be living at present. Nature like society has its rules but unfortunately man does not like to adhere to the rules of nature. Preferring instead to put himself at the top of the food chain with total disregard for other animals. This is unlike Kishan who not only respects his environment but also knows his place in it. However he is not a foolish man and knows that he cannot trust all animals and as such he has an axe to protect himself. Ranji also learns a valuable lesson during his time with Kishan. He learns that the life he lives in town may be more dangerous than living a life in the jungle. This is a valuable lesson to be learnt at such a young and impressionable age as Ranji throughout the story appears to be very innocent of the ways of the world.

The end of the story is also interesting as the reader becomes aware of the impact that Kishan has had on Ranji. While travelling with his father Ranji is looking out for Kishan as though he appreciates what he has done or is doing. He knows that he will be safe on the train due to Kishan's actions and that Kishan himself will also be safe as he guides the trains through the tunnel. If anything Ranji's life is more well-balanced after his encounter with Kishan. He appreciates Kishan, what Kishan is doing and has respect for each animal in the jungle. Something that he would not have learnt had he not got a love of trains. Ranji went on an adventure and Kishan guided him safely home. Just as he guided the leopard out of the tunnel. Though many people might view Kishan's life as unusual he has acted properly throughout the story. At no stage does the reader feel as though Ranji was in harm's way once he was beside Kishan. Ranji has met a good teacher and

he will not forget the lessons he has been taught by Kishan. It may not be the same when it comes to Ranji's father trying to teach Ranji about the family business.