

### **Theme and Plot:**

Dust on the Mountain by Ruskin Bond subtly highlights the grim issues of deforestation on the mountains in the wake of modernisation.

Bisnu lives with his younger sister and mother in a very small village of Tehri Garhwal. Since the mountains have received scanty rainfall and bare minimum snowfall last year, as a result orchards of fruits and farming in the field have yielded minimum output. The streams and rivers that descend from the peaks are shallow and dry, so the villagers are facing the problems of inadequate ration and fail to obtain any income from the farming-related chores.

To save his family from starvation, Bisnu goes to Mussoorie much opposite to his family's wish. Since summer is a happy time in Mussoorie and the place is full of tourists from the plain areas. After many attempts he finds a job in a cinema hall as a tea seller during the interval. There he meets two other boys Chittru and Bali. They all become friends and work as per the orders. However Chittru and Bisnu become close friends as they sleep in a corridor at night and brave the chill night breeze that comes from the mountains.

Bisnu is satisfied with his work and life. However as September approaches, the cinema shuts down for winter. Bali moves to Delhi for work while Chittru and Bisnu go to a mine site in the hope of getting work. There the contractor keeps Chittru for the work but rejects Bisnu on account of underage.

Understanding the plight of his fate, Pritam, a Sikh truck owner, takes Bisnu as a cleaner on his truck. Bisnu receives good salary from him and they become good friends. They work for the mine site where deforestation and blasting of mountains are common for generating lime powder. However Bisnu feels sickening at the sight of mountains losing their green shine and becoming dusty like plain areas.

One day in an attempt to save a mule being crushed under the truck, the truck topples and goes rolling down in a valley until it is stopped by a strong tree. Bisnu and other laborers manage to escape the accident but Pritam is brutally wounded. In the hospital Bisnu says had they were not stopped by that tree, they would have died by falling in the valley. Pritam decides to live with his sons and Bisnu goes back to his village to take care of his family and the nature around him.

### **As a nature story:**

Ruskin Bond is a prolific writer. In his creative works, he has celebrated nature in a magnificent way. In his works, he has tried to bring nature, particularly the hills and mountains into focus. His concern for the nature and the natural elements are clearly reflected in his works. In his stories, he has depicted the areas of forest which are gradually losing their grip due to the oppression done by human beings. In present scenario, it has been observed that human beings are destroying the habitat of the animal world. They are trying to extract all the valuable needs from the Nature without thinking about its inhabitants. They are not very conscious regarding their acts against the animals and birds. Ruskin Bond is very much perturbed while thinking for these animals and birds which are gradually becoming homeless wanderers due to the brutal act of human beings. Men are trying to acquire all the natural resources and energy to make their lives more and more comfortable and secured. But on the other hand, they are destroying the

natural domain of the animals and birds. In the story Dust on the Mountain, Ruskin Bond tries to portray the problems in the hilly areas. The oppression and tyranny done to these hills and mountains are well portrayed in this story. In the story, the mother of Bisnu remembers the condition of their area at the time of her husband's death. And now, she compares that situation to the present state. She says:

“The year your father died, there was so much snow the villagers could not light his funeral pyre for hours.. And now, there are fires everywhere.”

Bisnu's family just helplessly watches that trees in the Himalayan areas are gradually decaying in the blaze. While thinking about the conditions of the earth, he feels sad. While travelling in search of a job, Bisnu met an old man in a bus. The old man expressed his feelings to Bisnu. He says:

“There were trees here once. But the contractors took the deodars for furniture and houses. And the pines were taped to death for resin.”

Bisnu gets a job as a cleaner boy under Pritam. Pritam is a truck driver and his duty is to carry limestone from the quarry to the depot. Blasting is carried out in the mountain to get the lime powder. As a consequence, in these areas, air pollution occurs and at the same time deforestation is also rampant in these areas. Bond Writes:

“they were nearing the quarries when they saw clouds of dust hanging in the air. The dust hid the next mountain from view. When they see the mountain, they found that the top of it was missing... blasted away by dynamite to enable the quarries to get at the rich strata of limestone rock below the surface. The skeletons of a few trees remained on the lower slopes. Almost everything had gone. grass, flowers, shrubs, birds, butterflies, grasshoppers, laybird.”

In the story, Ruskin Bond tries to depict the environmental degradation that is happening everywhere from the forest to the nearing mountain. His concern for the environment is well delineated in the story.