
THE CHARMED WORLD OF CHILDHOOD IN RUSKIN BOND'S FICTION

Dr. Ritu*

INTRODUCTION

English literature has produced a number of magnets who have taken interest and pleasure in depicting childhood and its pleasure. Ruskin Bond holds a supreme place among them. The picture of childhood in his novels and short stories is very real and life like. It has been rightly said that Bond does not merely describe a child but he himself become a child for the time being. He is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the vanished right and scenes of childhood of the pathos of the inexorable march of time. He says,

I have the temper of a child, and a tendency to be mischievous. And still retain a child like trust in grownups ... I think, I have remained young because I have always had children around me. ...I love to watch them grow. Adolescence is fascinating period and I keep going back to it in my fiction.

(Bond: *Rain in the Mountains*, 251)

Bond's view of childhood is quite different from the harsh reality portrayed in his adolescent novels, where the protagonists are victims of adult failure, economic and social problems, the fictive world of the child is a time of summer, a carefree age of mischief and fun. Mukesh, Koki, Suraj, Rajni and Amir are the youngsters we meet in the sixteen short stories in *The Road to the Bazaar* and together they create for us a world of fun and enchantment which brings out the hidden child in the reader. In this world of neck to neck competition where most friendships are false, Bond's world is truly a paradise. A little flicker of smile bonds the two strangers together. As happens in the story *The Window*, "Out of the window ...offer some time she turned and smiled at me, and we were friends" (Bond: *The Road to the Bazaar*, 58). When Amir gets a room on his own on the roof, he tries to study but finds that "there was much more to learn from looking out of his window" (Bond: *The Road to the Bazaar*, 58).

In the same story Bond also creates purely humorous accounts of children's little cunning, which is also a part of their innocent world. Koki imitates her elders which pursuing her innovative

ideas- sowing pumpkins and making flower-beds on the roof. The story *The Fight* also recounts the delight experiences at having discovered a pool in the forest at the height of summer. Anil had been than a month in Dehra, when he discovered the pool in the forest. Having as yet made no friends in the small town in the foothills, he wondered about a good deal by himself into the hills and forest that stretched a way on all sides on the town.

Sometime friends emerges out rivalry as happens in the story *The Fight*, Vijay and Anil who fight for the right of bathing first in the river, realize that fighting is of no use so they shake hands and become good friends. They evolve a formula of compromise Anil who is a good diver would teach his rival Vijay some tricks of diving and in return, Vijay would train his opponent in martial art. They display more common sense than any grown up by reconciling their respective egos,

Be my friend, I will make you a pahelwan like me! I know if you teach me to dive and swim under water, I will make you pahelwan! That's fair isn't it? ...They looked at each other with honest, unflinching eyes, and in that moment love and understanding were born.

(Bond: *The Road to the Bazaar*, 54)

Their achievement becomes the achievement of mankind. Bond wants to tell us that man can attain great heights with the help of his intelligence, labour and goodness. Thus goodness influences all. The writer has the common good of humanity in mind. In the story titled *The Big Race* is described the race among beetles belonging to three children. All the seriousness attached to the event by the children is brought out wonder by the winter when he says, Bhim's beetle was the favourite for the race. It was a large bamboo beetle with a slim body and long, slender legs, rather like its mother's. It was called 2001. Rajni's beetle was a stone carrier with what looked like a very long pair of whiskers. It was appropriately named Moocha (Moustaches). Koki's beetle was not half as big as the other two.

(Bond: *The Road to the Bazaar*, 11)

Yet she has full faith on her Moocha and says, "Just wait till next Sunday. Then watch my Moocha leave the rest of you standing!" (Bond: *The Road to the Bazaar*, 12). The subsequent description of the race has been accomplished in a manner which shows us how completely

Bond immerses himself in the world of the child and allows no adult perceptions to tamper with its dream-like quality.

So it is clear that childhood always charms him, enchants him and holds him in its magic spell. Not a single impression is left out, not a single memory is forgotten. Everything appears fresh and lively. Hence the actuality and poignancy of these pictures of childhood always impresses upon the readers. He writes in *The India I Love* writing. For me is the simplest and greatest pleasure in the world. Putting a mood or an idea into world is an occupation, I truly love” (Bond: *The Indian I Love*, 128). When he writes about the familiar atmosphere and Indian life for native children, he becomes unquestionably, the best living writer of children stories and books in Indian English Literature. His sensibility and observation of the young world is amazing, He is in fact, pioneer of modern children literature in India.

Beneath this sheltered world of indulged childhood there is a hint of something that extends beyond simple pleasures, and of which the protagonists simply unaware. For instance, the poor vendor of knick-knacks in *The Visitor* knows if he wants to escape the harsh realities of life, he must pass high school, yet he constantly fails his exams. Likewise Nathu, sweeper boy, unwittingly perpetuates financial crisis in town by telling a friend that the local bank does not pay him regularly. Even Suraj, the dreamer enjoys only the surface beauty of nature, and lacks the vision and depth to appreciate the railway watchman’s philosophy of nature.

The fiction of Bond brings us back to the world of children, the world of innocence simplicity, grandeur and friendship. He has made use of psychology in his delineation of children and has opened the territory of the child’s dream and fears, his heart and soul and his vision and view. His stories for children bring freshness, imagination and because of his Anglo-Indian children’s literature. Bond’s main object of writing is to amuse the reader, make them delighted not to instruct them. He aims to spread love and understanding among all creature of the world and children are the most active recipients of his vision.

Social distinctions among children are irrelevant in this mellow atmosphere: British and Indian, rich and poor, Christian and Hindu, Brahmin and low-caste mingle as equals. His idyllic attitude towards childhood was strongly influenced by his teenage reading of the British Romantic poets: Tagore; social realism of Mulk Raj Anand and depiction of an Indian Childhood in R.K. Narayana’s *Swami and Friends* and Sudhin Ghose’s *And Gazells Leaping*. He shares

Wordsworth's romantic view that nature has a beneficent and formative effect on people who live in its midst, and Tagore's nostalgic rendering of childhood as an unspoiled and magical time. He sees dignity in the daily experiences and in the unpretentious life style of the children who live in the small Himalayan towns and villages. Children are instinctive having strong imagination. They have both a sensitive and sensational nature. They see life with no logic or philosophy. They view it blindly and passionately with curiosity and suspense. They are as beautiful as the blooming flowers. So are the child heroes of Bond. When we read Bond, we feel that his books have been written by a child. He is superb while dealing with the psychology of children. It appears he lives permanently in their mental atmosphere as he depicts their inner and outer world dearly. He is regarded as goodie-goodie writer who creates a dreamy world for children. By reading the fiction of Bond we come to know that Bond tries to retain the liveliness of all individuals through his innocent world of children. Far from the hectic tenor of mechanized society where violence, eroticism and competition kill a child in us his fiction takes us to soothing environs of hills which reflect the bright disarming smile of children. His fiction is a clarion call for the establishment of a human society. He tells the truth of life but silently. Therefore he needs to be read more closely and attentively.

WORKS CITED

Ruskin Bond. *The Road to the Bazaar*. New Delhi: Penguin books India Pvt. Ltd. 1993.

1. *Rain in the Mountains: Notes from the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Penguin books India Pvt. Ltd. 1993.
2. *The India I Love*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2004.