

## Edification of Young minds in Ruskin Bond's Children's Stories

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Ruskin Bond is perhaps the lone writer who has answered the reading need of children and established himself as a children's writer. He has captivated his young readers by the charm and freshness of his narration which is traditional as well as modern. He has adapted his stories to the ancient tradition of bed-time tales though their delineation is modern. Bond writes his children stories against the familiar Indian atmosphere and naturally takes the Indian children's fancy and they become fond of his stories. Thus Bond has become the most favorite writer of the children who have so far been neglected by the Indian English writers and kept half-fed owing to the paucity of entertaining contemporary literature for them.

Ancient Indian literature, oral as well as written, has been overtly didactic in tone and content and intended to give moral teaching to the young children. Besides, much of Indian literature since ancient times has perceived children as passive receptors with no identity apart from their family or community, As Sudhir Kakar observed.

In Sanskrit literature, children rarely figure as individuals in their own right with activities, reactions and feelings separate from those of their all-powerful parent (P.18).

Ruskin Bond changed the tone and content in tune with the global trends seeking to minimize didacticism and focus on entertaining literature for children. He has thus pioneered contemporary children's literature in India. His stories do not preach; instead, they present a world where the children act independently, free from the diktats of adults. His stories, in fact, present a world seen through the eyes of a child and are replete with the simplest of things, Bond says :

I have the temper of a child, and a  
tendency to be mischievous and I  
still retain a child-like trust in

grown ups,.... think I have remained young  
because I have always had children around me.....  
I love to watch them grow. Adolescence is a  
fascinating period and I keep going back to it in my fiction  
(Rain in the Mountains, P.251).

Bond evinces little concern with any ideology, be it the East-West encounter or the need to valorize commitment to the community. He dwells on the liberal notions of individual freedom and self-assertion. As such, there is abundance of personal liberty, absence of child abuse (except in A case for Inspector Lal) and gender inequalities. His children as well as adults live with their folklore and tradition and true to the hill people's friendliness they welcome all. The bonds are based on caring and sharing, and dissent or rebellion is only when there is oppression of any sort.

The children in the age group of ten to fifteen years love reading adventure and mystery stories most because such stories provide them with day dreams of independence and enable them to establish a rapport with the child protagonists. In 1991-92, Prema Srinivasan conducted a survey of reading habits among children between 10 and 15 years in seven metropolitan cities and concluded that the children of this age group preferred reading adventure fiction {PP 134-36}. Her finding was further corroborated by a survey conducted by the National Centre for Children's Literature in 1996 among the children of public and government schools in Delhi. Ruskin Bond excels as a writer of adventure stories full of the elements of mystery and romance but not remote from real experience. A distinct feature of his stories is that the reader can identify himself with his characters and share in their experience and responses. Bond thus satisfies the children's taste for adventure and mystery stories.

When Ruskin Bond was hardly eight, his 'un-loving' mother deserted his father leaving him in the latter's care, and his loving father died when he was only ten years old. So he had to put up with his indifferent mother and step father and later with unsympathetic guardians and relatives. Thus Bond's own woeful childhood prompted him to develop an attachment for children. Even after growing up he could not rid himself of those early impressions and the child in him remained transfixed to that very stage. He says:

I don't suppose I would have written so much about childhood or even about other children if my own childhood had been all happiness and light (Scenes from a Writer's life, P.4).

Bond started writing for children in his late thirties though his first prize winning novella, *The Room on the Roof* was written when he was only seventeen. He says :

My early stories, written when I was in my 20's were about my own childhood in India and some of the people I knew as I grew up. They were written for adults. Then in my 30's,

I began writing for children. By then I probably had a better perspective on my own childhood and more insight into the lives of other Indian Children (Bond's Comments, P.115).

Bond relishes the company of children. His observation of two generations of his adopted family of Prem has helped him to comprehend the spirit of Indian family. He seems to have closely observed the day-to-day experience of the boys and girls around him. Therefore, he crafts his stories around such themes as discovery, adventure, nature, pets and ghosts all that may hold a child's imagination. Appreciating his stories, Robert Marquand says:

Bond's own stories, reprinted in school texts throughout India, are always of discovery, adventures, exploring train tunnels, climbing guava tree, making a zoo of rabbits and lizards, learning to get along. Yet, there is a shrewdness and innocence in his work (*The Christian Monitor*).

Some of Bond's stories are autobiographical or semi autobiographical in tone and contents. In such stories he articulates his deep sense of loss and unfulfilled passions. Side by side, these stories depict Bond's love of trees and pets and the town Dehra. His emotional attachment to the place where he spent his childhood makes these stories nostalgic, vividly bringing alive the quaint charming little places, colonial bungalows and green and fruit-laden orchards where he wandered as a boy. Just as a story seems to be getting too sentimental, Bond introduces a streak of realism in his plot and makes the story highly perceptive.

Children love reading Bond's stories because he writes about nature and human relations. They feel very close to the characters and events as depicted in his stories and relate themselves with his fiction, Bond feels one with the children when he says, "I am just a sixty year old boy without any pretensions to being a sage", and talking about his

passion for children he says:

.... in writing about children one has to adopt a less subjective approach; things must happen, for boys and girls have no time for mood pieces. So this kind of writing helps me to get away from myself. At the same time because I have so strong an empathy with children I can enter into their minds (Introduction, *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*, P.9-11).

Bond has never departed from his love for the primal, the ordinary, the physical, the surface feature regarded as the solid ground of our existence. As Meena G Khorana observed,

Through his poems, essays, works of fiction and autobiographical writings for young children, Bond explores his own and his protagonists' changing relationship with the Himalayas from the freedom of childhood to a deep love and communion with various manifestations of nature (P.149)

And Saaz Kothare maintains: One Indian writer whose work indicates that he too writes not for children as future adults but instead considers adults to be grown up children is Ruskin Bond (P. 234).

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