

TREATMENT OF THE CHILD IN THE SHORT STORIES OF RUSKIN BOND

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A major producer of children's stories, Ruskin Bond has given a new garb to the Indian writing in English. With children, he is very extraordinary. His choice of subjects, the selection of situations, the projection of names and the delineation of child characters are very touchy and vigorous. A great observer of child psychology, he has created exotic scenes in his mellifluous poetic style. His description has a universal appeal. After reading several of his books, especially stories for children, one can draw a simple conclusion that Bond is child-like at heart and treats his children quite perfectly. The present paper is an attempt to show how Bond has treated children in his stories.

Children are the finest flowers in the garden of humanity. Without children, the garden of the earth will look very deserted, monotonous and cheerless. The unforgettable prattles of children, their childish nuances, sometimes give us an elixir of life. The young and the old feel a sense of ecstatic joy in the presence of children. It is only children who make the earth look extraordinarily beautiful. Their unalloyed hearts bubble with pleasure when the suavity of the writer brings out their modest thoughts. Unless one's mind is free from the tentacles of perfidy and profanity of vision, one cannot understand what a child thinks or feels. Tendulkar once said: "One who lives in a suave atmosphere, develops suave thoughts and aspirations, gets suavity in life." (qtd. Sahi 9)

Ruskin Bond's creative world is absolutely very exciting, because he has made a unique delineation of the innocence and eccentricity of children and transformed it into an earthly El do Rado. His true greatness lies in his sharp observation of things. His fiction, in all probabilities, is very akin to real life. Most of his characters – men, women and children of various age and class -- belong to the high hills and valleys of Garhwal. There are farmers, traders, vendors, teachers, rickshaw-pullers, chowkidars, students, vagrants and old men and women. Boys and girls of different age groups form the nucleus of his major stories. While estimating his creative talent, K.R.Srinivas Iyengar in his book *Indian writing in English* writes: "He is undoubtedly a writer with talent and he does understand the mind of young people." (512)

Ruskin Bond is basically a writer for children. Boys and girls play a dominant role in most of his writings. Their childhood prattles, adventurous zests, relentless spirit, indomitable courage and power of understanding captivate the writer. He dives deep into the subtle region of the children's minds and understands their childhood nuances. A writer with a difference, his grasp of the subject and the style of presentation are very thrilling. When he narrates his own experiences, he is very free and straightforward. He presents his childhood experiences very candidly. He does not hide anything. His heart is like an open book and he ventilates his feelings

without any procrastination. In the “Introduction” to his *Treasury of Stories for Children*, he has made a splendid analysis and candid confession of his artistic life (xvi). He tells a lot about his life, art, technique and creative career. In his essay “Bond’s Comments: Twentieth Century Children Writers,” he writes:

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. (Singh *Creative Contours* 27)

Bond has been inspired by many towering writers of the time. He has great respect for Dostoevsky, Gorky, Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, William Saroyan and A G Bates. The novels of Charles Dickens had great fascination for him. The book that shaped his life was *David Copperfield*. It has been the book of his choice. It inspired him to write and think about children. In his “Introduction” to *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*, Bond writes about the qualities a writer for children should possess:

In writing for 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 does help 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, when I am writing about them. As children, we are all individuals; it is only as we grow older that we acquire a certain grey similarity to each other. (11)

Ruskin Bond’s childhood painting is very exceptional. He shows his exceptional dexterity in this field. Stories that tell us about his exceptional narrative technique and exulting delineation of childhood are: “The Panther’s Moon,” “The Tunnel,” “A Rupee Goes a Long Way,” “A Long Walk with Granny,” “Riding through the Flames,” “The Flute Player,” “How Far is the River,” “The Wind on the Hunted Hill,” “The Great Train Journey,” “The Eyes of the Eagle,” “The Fight,” “The Visitor,” “Animals in the Track,” “Chachi’s Funeral” etc. Bond has great sympathy for the poor children. He treats them very lively. In “Panther’s Moon,” his treatment of Bisnu is very exemplary. Similarly, in “The Tiger in the Tunnel,” the role of Tembu is very thrilling. S.C.Dwivedi in his essay “Child Archetype in *The Eyes of the Eagle and Other Stories and Big Business*” writes:

When we read Ruskin Bond we feel that his books have been written by a child. That shows his strength. He has the capacity to peep into the heart of his characters drawn against the background of nature. He is superb while dealing with the psychology of children. It appears he lives permanently in their inner and outer weather dearly.....The world of children is the world of innocence, simplicity and grandeur. The world of elders is the world of profit and loss. The two worlds are opposed to each other. (156)

Ruskin Bond’s children are much more than children having common traits. They are not ordinary, but extraordinary. They can show their exceptional dexterity even during a terrible crisis. They do not break down. They are the embodiment of courage and fortitude, projected as heroic warriors against natural odds. Their pragmatism cannot be treated as premature. They can think and act like the adults. Though they live in the sylvan atmosphere of Dehra valley, they

have a passion to study. In addition to attending schools, they also help their parents in the field and tend cattle. They are not flat, but round. Vijay, Bisnu, Kishen. Suraj, Rusty, Arun, Satish, Mani, Rakesh, Tembu or even Kamala and Sunder Singh etc., are very beautifully drawn and delineated in his stories.

Bond's stories fall into two categories, i.e., personal and impersonal. The stories of the first category appear to be autobiographical or semi-autobiographical. Here he speaks about his dreams, frailties and unfulfilled visions. In the impersonal stories, Bond's vision is general and cosmopolitan. Here he is not subjective; rather he is inspired by an objective approach. Stories that belong to be first category are "The Tiger in the House," "The Playing Fields of Simla," "My Father's Trees in Dehra," "Life with Uncle Ken," "The Cherry Tree," "The Tree Lover" etc. In all these stories, Bond's narrative technique is very exquisite, lucid, and simple; but in his later works, there is a mark of reflectiveness. However, his characters are drawn with a warm humanity. Stories that belong to the impersonal category are "A Long Walk with Granny," "Chachi's Funeral," "Panther's Moon," "A Face in the Dark" etc.

Bond is a life-long lover of trees. He always feels their presence all around him. He acknowledges their presence by touching their trunks and has been doing this since his childhood days in Dehra. From the trees which grew in his grandma's garden, he became a lover of the trees and also a part of their existence. This is beautifully depicted in his very popular short story "The Cherry Tree." It is a very short, but didactic story bringing out the inquisitive thoughts of a six year old child named Rakesh.

Growing under the tender care of his grandpa, a retired forest ranger in Mussoorie, Rakesh was very much keen in developing closer contact with the flora and the fauna. He was interested in watching the changing panorama of the metamorphic world. His parents were poor men tilling the soil and living in the Himalayan foothills about fifty miles away from Mussoorie. They grew maize and rice and barley in narrow terraced fields on the lower slopes of the mountains. Like all other parents, Rakesh's parents too wanted to provide their son with proper education. As there were no schools in their vicinity, Rakesh's poor parents sent him to maternal grandfather's residence in Mussoorie, when he became a boy of school-going age.

Children are fond of flowers and fruits. They take great interest in the nature around them. Rakesh also did just that. Unfortunately, in the Himalayan foothills where Rakesh lived, there were not many fruit trees. The soil was rocky and the dry cold wind stunted the growth of most plants. However, on the more sheltered slopes, people used to plant different types of Oak and Deodar plants.

One day Rakesh bought a bunch of sweet cherry fruit from the Mussoorie market by paying just fifty *paise*. When he reached home, he had almost finished the bunch of little sweet-sour and bright-red cherries, leaving only three on the bunch. When he offered one cherry to his grandfather and ate the rest to their last tang, a new idea crept into his mind. After keeping the cherry seed in his palm, he wanted to know from his grandfather if cherry trees were lucky. His grandfather said: "Nothing is lucky if you put it away. If you want luck, you must put it to some use." (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 100)

Grandfather suggested Rakesh to plant the seed in a shady corner of the field where it would not be disturbed. Rakesh, abided by the counsel, went forward with a spade to plant it. He did not exert much as it could be easily pressed into the soft soil with his thumb. After this, Rakesh completely forgot the seed. His life continued as usual. In winter cold wind blew down from the snow and Nature looked dry and bare. Rakesh adapted himself to the changing scenario

of Nature around him. He listened to heterogeneous stories from his grandfather who was a storehouse of fabrications. He spoke about “people who turned into animals and ghosts who lived in trees and bears that jumped and stones that wept.” (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 100)

One morning in early spring Rakesh was really surprised to discover a small twig well-rooted under the shade. He was so glad that he yelled at his grandpa in a state of glee and said that the cherry seed had sprouted up. The four inches tall cherry plant delighted Rakesh a lot. It also convinced him and developed his confidence. He realized that even small children like him could play an important role in the world of germination and evolution.

Grandfather was greatly impressed. He was glad at the sight of the sprouted seedling. He told Rakesh that honest labour and sincere effort do not go unrewarded. He further suggested to his grandson watering the tender plant for its luxuriant growth, but warned him against over-watering. He said the child that the plant might rot, if it is drowned. Rakesh was a quick learner. He did as his grandfather ordered him to do. He started sprinkling water on the plant. Bond here tells that a child is a good caretaker, a great benefactor of trees and a good environmentalist. He thinks of creation, not of destruction. He has romantic zest and lofty dreams. He is well aware of his assignments, his chores and responsibilities. He tries to discharge his duties sincerely for emotional satisfaction. He looked at his plant very frequently. He wanted that the tree should grow faster and quicker. It is a case, not only with Rakesh, but with children of his age everywhere.

Rakesh really became very glad to see the labour of his hand. He then looked at the plant several times every day. It gave him limitless pleasure. He knew that the plant was his own creation. The mother in him inspired him to look after the tender plant. He expected it to have a healthy growth and bear not only lovely flowers, but also delicious fruit. He developed emotional attachment for the tree, as a mother develops similar attachment for her newly born child. He used to keep the plant within his sight and mark its speedy growth through curious eyes.

Nature was favorable to the plant. During the next monsoon rains, the tree grew up very alarmingly. “When the ferns sprang up from the trunks of trees, strange looking lilies came in the long grass and when it was not raining, the tree dripped and mist came curling up the valley” (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 101). Monsoon rains gave the small cherry plant a very luxuriant growth. So within a couple of months, only the tender cherry plant grew up to two feet. But one day, while the plant was growing delicately under the sun and the shower and that of the cherry plant dreamt of seeing the rosy radiance of the day, a goat entered the garden in an unguarded moment and ate all the leaves, leaving only the main stem and a couple of two thin branches.

A child’s heart is quite naive and pure. It is full of dreams. Everybody knows that a child’s heart is the cockpit of delicacy and deportment. A child usually likes to see the grandeur of growth, but not of perdition or death. Damnation destroys his heart; despair wounds his tender soul. The destruction caused to the sweet leaves of the cherry plant made Rakesh terribly upset. It marred his morale and challenged his optimism. He felt despondent and defrauded. At such a critical moment, there came the soothing consolations of his grandpa. A man of wider experiences and aspiration, grandpa took the incarnation of a Lord Krishna and gossiped a despondent Rakesh not to break down, but to muster courage and watch the wound healing up. ““Never mind,” said grandfather seeing that Rakesh was upset. “It will grow again, cherry trees are tough.”” (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 102)

Rakesh recovered his old composure. He overcame his bereavement and developed a positive outlook. He waited and watched how towards the end of the rainy season, new leaves sprang up on the deserted cherry plant and it again looked like a blessed damsel waiting for her bridal knot. But no sooner did the plant get steady growth than a rustic woman came forward with a scythe and cut down the lovely cherry laden with delicate leaves and the monsoon foliage. Grandfather, no doubt, scolded the woman for her blunder and the inexorable offence but nothing, as we all know, could recover the loss.

“May be it will die now” said Rakesh.

“May be” said grandfather. (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 102)

However, nothing could kill the tree. It resisted all kinds of onslaughts and gave a stubborn resistance to the external aggressions. It showed as though it had promised to survive and see the heyday of its life. By the advent of summer, the cherry tree sent out several new shoots with tender green leaves like Rakesh who had also grown taller. He was eight now, a sturdy boy with curly black hair and deep black eyes -- “blackberry eyes” as grandfather often called them. In “The Kite Maker” Bond writes: “There is a great affinity between trees and men. We grow as much the same pace, if we are not hurt or starved or cut down. In our youth we are resplendent creatures and in our declining years we stoop a little, we remember, we stretch our brittle limbs in the sun, and then with a sigh, we shed our last leaves.” (*Best of Ruskin Bond* 36)

During the monsoon season, Rakesh went home to help his parents in agricultural work. He was engaged in planting, ploughing and sowing. Though thinner physically, he was stronger and harder mentally. When he returned to his grandfather’s residence after the monsoon rains, he was surprised to find the cherry tree in new apparel. It had a burgeoning growth. The plant was tall up to his chest. He developed a sense of great attachment for it and spent more time in its bosom. He watered it regularly and started playing under its shade.

One day something curious happened to the tree. Rakesh happened to see a bright green praying *mantis* perching on the delicate branch of the little cherry. It was peering at him with bulging eyes. Rakesh liked to look up to the cherry tree’s maiden visitor. His heart danced and he got excited, but the sight of the second visitor pained him. It was a hairy caterpillar eating away the smooth cherry leaves. How could Rakesh endure the onslaught? It was quite intolerable for and revolting to him. He immediately removed the stranger harming the plant of his like. How could he have tolerated the sight of the stranger making a meal of the soft leaves of the cherry tree! “They are pretty leaves,” said Rakesh, “and they are always ready to dance, if there is a breeze” (Bond *Treasury of Stories*_104). Thus Bond demonstrates the love and reaction of Rakesh for the cherry tree.

Small children are fond of trees. They like their cool shade and delicate charm. They appreciate not only their sight, but also their sacrifice. Rakesh liked the tree so much that he started behaving as its guardian angel. He lay down on the green grass beneath the lovely tree and gazed at the star-studded sky. Very shortly, his grandfather also came and joined him. The grandfather and the grandson lay on the still grass and grasped the grandeur till they could hear the sweet music of the night-jar, the cricket, the cicadas and many others. There were so many trees in the garden, but why did that tree attract them? What was the special feature of that tree? To these questions of Rakesh, the grandfather retorted that that special factor was that they had planted that tree.

Rakesh felt at the top of his life. He was very much elated to know that the small seed could grow so tall, so thick and so green and attract so many birds to its bosom. He became very emotional and developed a feeling of sympathy for the small cherry tree. To quote from the story:

“Just one small seed!” said Rakesh, and he touched the smooth bark of the tree that had grown. He ran his hand along the trunk of the tree and put his finger on the tip of a leaf. “I wonder,” he whispered. “Is this what it feels to be God?” (Bond *Treasury of Stories*_104)

The story brings out Bond’s profound love for trees, birds, beasts and infinitesimal number of insects. His vision of establishing a green world is beautifully delineated in most of his other stories as well. The present story “The Cherry Tree” sends the message that if the tender concept of planting trees is injected in the minds of small children, we can definitely avert a great environmental catastrophe. As the story belongs to his personal category, Rakesh serves as the mouthpiece of Bond.

Inscrutable are the ways of a child’s heart. It is very difficult to know what they really are and what they really want. In his small but beautiful story “Little Girls Wiser than Men,” Tolstoy gives the message that small children forget their hostilities very soon and begin their friendship anew, whereas the adults take their ordinary frailties and hostilities very seriously and go to the extent of shedding much bad blood. A lot of people have fallen a victim to this adult rage and gone to the extent of jeopardizing their noble sense of understanding. They can establish a society of pleasure and peace, if they learn this noble attitude of modesty from their little children.

“Chachi’s Funeral” is a short, but very meaningful story that reflects the purest thoughts of a small child named Sunil. He was a boy of only ten years having a handsome appearance and attractive gestures. He was disciplined and well-behaved, but his Chachi disliked him. She was a middle-aged woman, fairly tolerant and easy-going. She had a host of children, a family of many small sons, daughters, nephews and nieces. She loved them all and liked their childhood prattles, but she did not like Sunil, her ten year old nephew. The primary cause of her dislike and rancour for little Sunil was her great sense of jealousy. Bond narrates: “She was a simple woman and couldn’t understand Sunil.” (*Treasury of Stories* 169)

Sunil was a small child of good disposition. He was, to every purpose, quite guileless. He was also very free and without rancour. His mind was devoid of the perfidy of the adults. But Chachi was a woman of different quality and character. She could not tolerate Sunil’s handsome appearance. His smart outlook, fine gestures, and above all, his sociable attitude seemed to be quite intolerable to Chachi. When she knew that her children were not so handsome as Sunil, she became irritable and started intentionally tormenting him. To quote in this context:

He was a little brighter than her own sons, more sensitive and inclined to resent a scolding or a cuff across the head. He was better looking than her own children. All this in addition to the fact that she resented having to cook for the boy, while both his parents went out to office jobs, led her to grumble at him a little more than was really necessary. (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 169)

Chachi’s anger and repugnance for Sunil may be a natural quality, but it cannot be called an accident. She practically cannot understand him. The mother in her really reacts when she compares the physical appearance and intellectual talent of her own children with that of her

nephew. A true woman is practically above this kind of feeling. She embraces everybody in her vast bosom and tries to shower her benedictions on the head of all her children. Even a mother loves the children of her neighboring families, because she is a fountain of love and affection and her heart is a reservoir of everything good. We find several instances of motherly affection in the animal society, such as a bitch suckling some kittens, but Chachi is a woman of different nature. Her hatred for Sunil is quite explicit and the latter knows it well. Therefore, he also starts dinking his Chachi.

It is true that Sunil is quite immature and innocent, but he has powerful perception. He can easily recognize the heart that loves and the hand that serves. A child's heart is full of admiration for people with loving hearts. She/He does not like people who hurt them. Sunil's resentment for Chachi is automatic. He looks down upon her, because she looks down upon him for his good appearance and sweet smile. To quote: "Sunil sensed his aunt's jealousy and fanned its flames. He was a mischievous boy and did little things to annoy her like bursting paper bags behind her, while she dozed or commenting on the width of her pajamas, when they hung out to dry." (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 169)

All days do not pass alike. Some days are more poignant, more vibrant than others. They leave an indelible imprint in the minds of others. Such an incident occurred in Sunil's life. It was the 5th of April. Time was evening. Sunil was particularly in high spirits and feeling exceedingly hungry. Hunger, as everybody knows well, practically knows no law. To satiate his growing hunger, Sunil entered the kitchen with an intention of helping himself to some honey. But as it was on the top shelf and as he was a little short in height, he could not hold the jar properly. Yet he continued his effort till he tilted the jar towards him. But no sooner did he catch hold of the jar, than it fell off on the ground with a big crash and got shattered into hundreds of shreds. The little child became awe-stricken. He could not decide what to do and where to go. The crash frightened him. While he was gaping at the broken shreds of the bottle, his Chachi appeared on the spot and got terribly enraged with naughty Sunil. Blood went up to her head and she turned red in tooth and claw. Rightly in quest of such an opportunity for a long time and before Sunil could know what to do or how to escape, Chachi removed her slipper and thoroughly thrashed him on his head and shoulder. When she had already dealt him three or four furious blows, she rolled down on the floor and burst into tears. (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 170)

Sunil did not cry, because it was his own fault; but at such a situation, Chachi should not have lost her temper. She should have consoled the child and advised him not to do such an unpleasant act. She should have understood the reason as to why the child entered into the kitchen room and broke the honey jar. But without unraveling the truth and comforting the child, she severely thrashed the boy which hurt his sentiments. Thus Bond has shown the gap that exists between the younger and older generations.

Children are actually good and obedient. They are the quick-learners. They respect new concepts and ideas. They accept them ungrudgingly. If Chachi had consoled Sunil and taken him to her bosom, he could have become a disciplined boy. But as Chachi physically tormented him, Sunil became reactive and revolutionary. So instead of shedding tears, he muttered something under his breath and stormed out of the room. He exactly went on to the roof where he had discovered a secret hiding place perfectly known to Madhu, his cousin, one of the daughters of his intolerant Chachi. Sunil hurriedly went to his secret hiding place to pick up his clasp-knife. He wanted an urgent retaliation. Fuming with anger and a feat of revenge, he opened his knife

and severely plunged it into the soft wood of the window's frame three times. "I'll kill her. I'll kill her. I'll kill her – he uttered these words fiercely." (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 170)

This shows the helpless reaction of a tender heart. Sunil was terribly upset. He was dangerously angry at his Chachi's nepotism and parochial temperament. Her harsh words and inhuman deportment had really wounded his sentiments. So he wanted to take revenge. Really speaking, a fissiparous sentiment of "do or die" had entered into his mind.

Amor Vincit Omnia -- Love Conquers. Small children are appeased by soothing words. Kind gestures, dainty demeanour, appeasing attitude and impartial love can definitely work miracles in them. Madhu, his cousin, knew it well. Though a dark-skinned slim girl herself of twelve years, she had a brighter conscience. She had studied Sunil's psychology better than her mother. Though small, she was more intelligent, more gentle and more comforting. Her sweet silken voice, appeasing consolations, and affectionate words touched Sunil. She had exerted a moral influence on the child on several occasions in the past. Today, when Sunil made a determination to kill his Chachi, her own mother, Madhu came forward as an angel. She was also a little aware of her mother's antipathy for the little child. So when her cousin made a mock-stabbing on the soft wooden frame of the window with his knife and determined to kill her mother, Madhu fondly asked whom he was going to kill. The bereaved Sunil instantly told that he would kill his Chachi, the old dame who not only hated him, but also thrashed him hard. He even told his cousin sister that he too hated his Chachi. (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 170)

Ruskin Bond had the perfect understanding of the psychology of children. He has succinctly revealed the reactionary attitude of the little boy. His feelings, his vengeance and his preparations for accomplishing his aim are very strange. They seem to be real and life-like. Through Madhu, the writer also shows how children can better understand the child psychology than the adults. When the girl wanted to know how he would accomplish his work, Sunil immediately showed her the knife and said that he would stab his aunt to death by piercing it into her chest three times. But Madhu reminded her cousin of the dreadful consequences of killing a person. She told the boy about CID and the dangerous punishment of sending him to a boarding school, at which Sunil started shuddering and thus he tried to change the way. Bond writes in this context:

"But you'll be caught. The CID is very clever. Do you want to go to jail?"

"Won't they hang me?"

"They don't hang small boys. They send them to a boarding school".

"I don't want to go to a boarding school".

"Then better not to kill your Chachi. At least not this way. I'll show you how." (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 170)

Madhu then suggested a new method that would not harm her mother, but the child would get mental peace. It was just to draw a sketch of his Chachi and stab it into its stomach. This idea was very imaginative and novel. It appealed to Sunil's mind and he immediately accepted the proposal. This new idea of accomplishing his dream was an excellent creation of Madhu's mind. She then drew a rough sketch of her mother who was Sunil's Chachi. When she had finished drawing the image of her mother, Sunil observed it with great excitement. His little eyes shone with glee and comfort. A ray of hope saturated through his brain. Then he held the image against the wood work, and like a hero, he pierced his clasp-knife thrice into his Chachi's pastel breast. Chachi was killed. Sunil killed her. He fulfilled his vengeance. Then Madhu suggested Sunil to cremate her dead body. Sunil immediately agreed to his cousin's new

proposal. She took the torn paper and crumpled it with her palm. After that she brought out a matchbox from Sunil's hiding and set the paper into ablaze. It burnt down beautifully and turned into a heap of ashes.

Madhu then suggested putting the ashes into a river. Sunil could not understand anything. He simply gazed at what Madhu was doing. But the tragic death of his Chachi had moved his heart. Perhaps he should not have done it. He said with tears in his eyes. But as the work was already done, Madhu told him to follow up the next course of action: to purge his Chachi's soul by throwing the ashes into the river. When she collected the ashes and threw them down into the little drain downwards, the ashes fell into the water and were carried away. Of course, some of the ashes were stuck on the branches of the pomegranate tree near the roof.

Ruskin Bond's creative mind, imaginative outlook and intuitive faculty are beautifully reflected here. He has treated the sensitive topic in a very agreeable manner. We can presume that he is present there in Madhu's heart and Madhu actually speaks the language of the writer. He is the brain behind Madhu and she is only the writer's mouthpiece; speaking his language and doing his deeds. When Sunil saw the ashes of his Chachi being carried away by the kitchen water into the drain, Madhu found big tears rolling down on his cheeks. To quote:

"What are you crying for?" asked Madhu.

"Chachi, I didn't hate her so much."

"Then why did you want to kill her?"

"Oh, that was different." (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 172)

A child can study another child's thoughts. What Madhu did was absolutely right in this situation. Her soothing touch, comforting words and softening attitude practically brought a change in Sunil's mind. He was completely transformed. He was fully impressed. The real Sunil came out and forced him to atone. "I should not have killed my dear Chachi," he replied (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 172). How excellent! How beautifully has Ruskin Bond presented the transformation of a child's heart!

The moment Madhu saw this transformation in his heart, she brought him downstairs to have a real encounter with his Chachi. How strange! The moment Sunil saw his Chachi coming out of the kitchen room, he rushed at her with extended arms and clasping his dearest aunty in her ample waist, he said the real truth. It may be an emotional outburst, but it was real. It came not from his head, but from his heart. To quote:

"Oh Chachi! Shouted Sunil. He rushed to her and tried to get his arms around her ample waist." "Now what's up? Grumbled Chachi." "What is it this time?" "Nothing Chachi. I love you so much. Please don't leave us."

(Bond *Treasury of Stories* 172)

These words were like magic beads. They worked as miracles and moved the obdurate heart of Chachi into a spongy one. Though she was at first shocked and a little frowned at the boy, his tearful appeal and genuine affection brought a sea-change in her heart. When she realized the genuineness of the child's love, she patted him on his head and took him by the hand to the kitchen for some real food.

Really speaking, conquest of the sword is not the real conquest; conquest of one's heart is the real conquest. This truth explicated by Gautam Buddha is nicely depicted in the story "Chachi's Funeral."

If supernaturalism is an important phenomenon in Ruskin Bond's writings, we can say that "A Face in the Dark" is one of its brightest examples. It is a story of a boy and the watchman who have no eyes, no ears, no nose, and no mouth. The story falls into the genre of supernatural literature and has closer affinity with his other stories "From the Primeval Past," "The Overcoat," "Wilson Bridge," "The Night Train at Deoli" etc. All these stories create panicky in our minds. Their presentation style and technique of narration evoke a sense of fear in the minds of the readers.

"A Face in the Dark" successfully evokes fear in our minds, because it is, out and out, a successful ghost story. Quoting a statement of Montague Summers, the eminent supernaturalist in literature, Ruskin Bond says that the best way to appreciate a ghost story is to believe in ghosts. However, if we cannot believe in them, we should at least imitate the wittily truthful lady who, when asked "Do you believe in Ghosts?" replies "No, but I am afraid of them." ("Introduction" *Supernatural Omnibus* ix-x)

The story tells us about the bizarre experiences of Mr Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher who has been teaching in a school in the Himalayan Valley for several years. A bachelor, he is devoted to teaching and he has good affinity with his pupils. He has no fear at all. But Mr Oliver is not a nervous or imaginative man. He is serving in a public school about three miles away from Simla Bazaar. It is located in the outskirts of the city. Since Kipling's time, the public school has been imparting education to a lot of boys from well-to-do families. The boys wear the uniforms of blazers, caps and ties. The school has created a record of great laurels, of which the *Life Magazine* has extolled as the "Eton of the East." Being a bachelor, he lives in the school hostel, but every evening he visits the local market on foot and at night he returns to his hostel through a short-cut road in the Pine Forest.

Everything goes on as usual. Life seems to be quite unchangeable. The same matter-of-fact style: going, coming, eating and drinking. Nothing changes and nothing remarkable happens in Simla. But everything changes on a cold windy night. Nature becomes quite horrible. Things look quite strange and somber. The pine trees produce a plaintive and eerie sound. People become a little afraid. They keep to the main road. Nobody follows the narrow foot track through the pine forest. But Mr Oliver who is a bit daring, braves the night and starts walking along the narrow short-cut road through the Pine Forest. Bond writes: "He carried a torch and its batteries were running down – moved fitfully down the narrow forest path. When its flickering light fell on the figure of a boy, who is sitting alone on a rock, Mr Oliver stopped. Boys are not supposed to be out after dark." (*Treasury of Stories* 189)

Parents are more caring than teachers. They see that their children are safe at home soon after their schools are over. Teachers also want this. They do not like to see their pupils loitering out after evening. When Mr Oliver notices a small child sitting alone on a lonely rock, he stops at once. He fails to understand anything. When the flickering light of the torch falls on the boy sitting on the rock with down cast face, he gets angry. Going near him, he asks:

"What are you doing out here, boy?" asked Mr. Oliver sharply, moving close so that he could recognize the miscreant. Mr. Oliver deduced that the child might have some problems. Something might have happened or gone wrong with him for which he was crying. The boy appeared to be crying. His head hung down. He held it in his hands and his body shook convulsively. It was a strange soundless weeping and Mr Oliver felt distinctly uneasy. (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 189-90)

Mr. Oliver is worried again. He simply thinks that the child may be suffering within .He might have been sad or shocked or somebody might have hurt his sentiment, for which he is unable to overcome his sorrow. Mr Oliver is not a foolish man. He is very much rational and wise. Any teacher in his place would have said or done so. To quote him:

“Well, what’s the matter? What are you crying for?” There was still no response. The child was still feeling sad and demonstrated convulsions of his body. “Come on, boy, you shouldn’t be out here at this hour .Tell me the trouble, look up!” Lo! When the boy looked up, Mr Oliver got stunned. He was at his wit’s end. He was dumb-founded. Never had he seen such a face in his life!” It had no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. It was just a round smooth head with a school cap on top of it.”(Bond *Treasury of Stories* 190-1)

This is enough .He then gets paralysed. His head starts reeling. The torch simply falls off his quivering hand. So out of utter nervousness he takes to his heels. He runs blindly forward amidst the Pine trees .He shouts for help and without losing any trice, he escapes at breakneck speed till he comes across a lantern swinging in the middle of the path. He stumbles upon the watchman while frantically running towards the hostel.

However bold and strong a man may be, the presence of a real ghost will make him as fearful as Mr Oliver. There is a great difference between saying and doing .One may speak hours about the factitious nature of ghosts, yet if one practically comes across such a gnome, his boldness and audacity disappears soon and he falls an easy prey to the world of supernaturalism. However, when he stumbles over the watchman, the latter asks:

“What is it, Sahib? asked the watchman.“Has there been an accident? Why are you running?

“I saw something – something horrible -- a boy weeping in the forest -- and he had no face!

“No face Sahib ?

“No eyes, nose, mouth-nothing.”

“Do you mean it was like this, Sahib? asked the watchman and raised the lamp to his own face.

The watchman had no eyes, no ears, and no features at all -- not even an eye-brow. (Bond *Treasury of Stories* 191)

The story is absolutely frightening. It is about supernaturalism. In every part of India, we have a common belief that when the wind blows violently and the night becomes dark, the evil spirits come out to frighten human beings. Suresh Dhoke evaluates in his essay “The Supernatural Characters and the Human Nature in Ruskin Bond’s Short Stories”:

The apparition of the boy and the watchman might appear frightening to the teacher, but one thing is certain. They are neither malevolent nor harment. We feel a kind of sympathy towards them ... Ruskin Bond might have heard about the boy and the watchman from one of his neighbors or acquaintances. (175)

Thus the last story reveals Bond’s powerful approach to his impersonal stories as well.

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