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CHILDREN'S PROPENSITY FOR GAMES IN RUSKIN BOND'S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract:

The talent of Ruskin Bond as writer is now universally acknowledged. India gets an exquisite reflection in his stories. This is not the sole point to entertain. His approach to his child characters, their activities, desire, feeling, and he like win our favour. Ruskin Bond is thus, in no way inferior to any of his contemporaries. His works are neither ambiguous nor theoretical. As a very simple and ordinary man he shares with us the most intimate moments of his life and lives of those he has come in close contact with. Ruskin Bond has well realized the nature and mentality of children. He has realistically presented the nature of children in his stories novels, and novellas.

INTRODUCTION :

In the story Chachi's Funeral Bond has projected a child character named Sunil. He is a boy of ten years. He is fond of making his Chachi angry and vexed by doing something that the woman does not like. "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 pyjamas when they were hung out to dry. On the evening of the 5th of April, he had been in particularly high spirits and feeling hungry entered the kitchen with the intention of helping himself to some honey."

Sunil often plays truant from school, as children generally do. Rusty another boy himself did so, as he confesses in *The Garlands on his Brow*:

"On those precarious days when I played truant from school I would sometimes make my way to the corner of the gardens to watch the wrestling pit."²

Another fine story by Bond is *The Kite Maker* Bond has projected a child character in the story, named Ali. He is a parentless poor child brought up by his old grandfather, Mehmood. Like most of the children he is fond of playing games. He is extremely fond of flying kites and gets immense enjoyment out of that. Losing his kite and not being able to fly one is unbearable to him. That is his world and he wants to be confined to that world only. Anything outside it is insignificant and meaningless to him. It is not only Ali, but most children give utmost importance to their games. Ali is just an instance of it. Apart from flying kites, Bond's children are fond of playing with toys and on swing. The little girl Sita in the story *Sita and the River* and Kiran in *Time stops at Shamli* are examples of it.

Ruskin Bond expresses in his works a deep fondness for nature. An important aspect of his works is that he depicts his child characters playing different games in close contact with nature. The story *The Meeting Pool* is a very good example of this. In the story, Rusty a small boy discovers a pool. Other friends of his age, Somi and Anil are united by the pool. They swim in the water of the pool, catch silver fish, build a dam across the stream, play wrestling and ride on buffaloes on the bank of the pool.

Fighting and quarreling are a general tendency of children. Most of the children are observed doing such mischief in their childhood. Children generally quarrel or fight when their self interest is affected and hindered. But anger and animosity are short-lived mental states for children. Fighting and then very soon forgetting is the nature of children. Such an event is narrated in one of the stories of Bond, *The*

Fight. Ranji and Suraj begin fighting over a trivial matter. Ranji discovers a pool in the forest and swims in it. Suraj, a village boy tending cows by the pool, does not tolerate Ranji's presence at the pool. He is very possessive about the pool and thinks it as his own. Ranji too claims the pool as his own, since he has 'discovered' it. This leads to an argument and they start fighting :

“Suraj slapped Ranji across the face with all the force he could muster. Ranji staggered, feeling quite dizzy. There 'were thick red finger marks on his cheek. There you are! exclaimed his assailant. Will you be off now! For answer, Ranji swung his arm up and pushed a hard, bony fist into the other's face.”³

But, at the end of the story both of them are seen making up with each other. They forget their animosity and become friends. Ruskin Bond also reflects on the basic qualities of children in his stories *The Playing Field of Shimla*, *A Rupee Goes a Long Way*, *The Flute Player* and *All Creatures Great and Small* and the like. In the story *The Playing Fields of Shimla*, we get a brief account of Rusty's schooldays in Shimla. He mentions about his football and hockey with his friends. There were some boys at school:

“Who carved their names on desks, and stuck chewing gum on the class teacher's chair.”⁴

The story *A Rupee Goes a Long Way* presents a child character named Ranji. The utter fickleness and shrewdness of the child is observed in the story. He is very much fond of sweets and in order to have them he exchanges a British silver coin with his friend Mohinder and gets a fishing rod. Then he exchanges the fishing rod for a flute, the flute for a necklace and finally the necklace for a one rupee coin. In this way, he is able to buy sweets with that one rupee coin.

The story *The Flute Player* gives a short account of the fickleness of a child named, Kamala. Children are naturally fond of playing, not sleeping. In the story Kamala, a small girl slips away from her grandmother's side in the afternoon. She meets a boy Rami in the nearby forest, who plays on a flute. They pluck mangoes, play in the water of the stream.

The story *All Creatures Great and Small* gives an account of Rusty's fickleness. When he was at school, he often slipped away from the custody of his grandmother. He followed after small creatures and swam in the water of the stream with a boy, Ramu, who kept buffaloes in the forest.

In the story *Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright*, two children Shyam and Ramu are found enjoying in their own world of make believe as children usually do. Careless of everything else, children like to lose themselves in their games. In the above story, Shyam and Ramu are careless of everything around them. They are forgetful of their past and future. They want to derive absolute pleasure out of the moment, when they play together in the forest by a pool :

“When Shyam and Ramu had finished gathering roots, they emerged from the water and passed the time wrestling with each other, slipping about in the soft mud which soon covered them from head to toe. To get rid of the mud, they dived into the water again and swam across to their buffaloes. Then, jumping onto their buffaloes. Then, jumping onto their backs and digging their heels into the thick hides, the boys raced them across the jheel, shouting and hollering so much that all the birds flew away in fright, and the monkeys set up a shrill chattering of their own in the dhak trees.”⁵

Stealing is one of the things children often do, without realizing its consequences. Rusty had often resorted to stealing and telling lies, as he narrates in *The Thief*. As a boy Rusty had met Arun and a friendship had grown between the two. They had lived together for sometime. But Rusty had introduced himself as Deepak to Arun. Not only did he tell such a lie but also attempted to steal Arun's money when they were sleeping at night :

“Arun was asleep. Moonlight came in from the verandah and fell across the bed. I sat up on the floor..... Slipping out of the blanket, I crept on all fours, through the door and upto the bed and peeped at Arun. He was sleeping peacefully with a soft and easy breathing..... My hand took on an identity of its own as it slid around the mattress, the fingers searching for the notes. They found them and I drew them out without a crackle.”⁶

Thus, Ruskin Bond's stories present children in their mischief, fickleness and games. But these qualities observed in them are not condemnable to a great extent. The above instincts seen in children are natural and the outcome of their innocence. They come into the right track in the process of getting maturity and wisdom. Unlike William Golding's child characters in *Lord of the Flies*, Bond's characters are cultured, positive and true to their nature. There is no artificiality in them. The critical adult mind is yet to touch them. They are the little flowers in the Garden of Eden. They are the temple of living God.

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