

Bonding and Relations with Strangers in the Short Stories of Ruskin Bond

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ABSTRACT

The short stories of Ruskin Bond are the examples of his ideology and philosophy of the human relationships. Bond studies and comprehends the human psychology and takes advantage of it for creating a chain of multiple kinds of relations through various characters. Apart from other themes like the description of nature, tension between past and present, city versus rural life, crisis of values in society, preservation of the environment, living in harmony with nature, Bond establishes one more theme and it is known as the theme of bonding and relationship with strangers. In the delineation of the human relations, Ruskin Bond is accredited as a writer of strange characters because a major section of his short stories deals with such characters and presents such themes that are very interesting to children and adolescents as well. The strangers of the short stories of Bond are created in such a way that they create a good bonding with the familiar characters. The bonding of the strange characters is found with children, adolescents, and young men and women. Some of the strange characters created by Bond have become indispensable part of the particular story.

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Ruskin Bond crops up as an extraordinary analyzer and explorer of the human relations along with its all distinctiveness's. He has a different style of portraying the human relations through his short stories. By choosing his characters from hilly areas around Dehradun, Bond conveys his belief that people living in the lap of nature are simple, innocent and free from ill-will. The characters of his short stories are free from the feelings of hatred, conspiracy, and crookedness. The short stories of Ruskin Bond are the examples of his of his

ideology and philosophy of the human relationship. Bond studies and comprehends the human psychology and takes advantage of it for creating a chain of multiple kinds of relations through various characters. Apart from other themes like the description of nature, tension between past and present, city versus rural life, crisis of values in society, preservation of the environment, living in harmony with nature, Bond establishes one more theme and it is known as the theme of bonding and relationship with strangers. He seems to carve a kind of human relation in almost each of his story.

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Bond designs a mosaic of human relationship with a set ideology and decided features. The most appealing feature of Bond's short stories is that no two characters are alike. There may be some kind of identical qualities between both of them, but they will not be a replica of each other in any way. The exclusive qualities of the characters like way of talking, personality, manner, way of persuasion, sense of humour, thought, experience, etc. keep on changing. (2003: 165)

Almost all the relations are developed on the basis of love and friendliness. We find a kind of bonding element among the relations; it may be love, affection, commitment, dedication or anything else. As the child grows older the primary ties are cut off and s/he craves for his/her own identity, individuality, freedom and place in society. The process of growing individuation, however, decides the fate of this quest. The child goes on his quest in his own way and he grows stronger physically, emotionally, and mentally. During the process of his development s/he comes across many persons including strangers. Hence it can be said that a child develops relationship with strangers to meet the needs of one's individuation.

According to the psychologists, the child has a feeling of self-respect, and self-recognition. He does such activities that are noticeable to the elders of the family. S/he motivates himself for the development of the relations with the peers and the strangers even. All sort of relationships, which a child develops in the universe, are a step towards the attainment or fulfillment of his/her basic physiological and psychological needs. Ruskin Bond highlights this aspect of child psychology through a cobweb of relationship in his short stories. The relationship that Bond presents in his stories is in fact, a projection of his own personal experience, the people that he envisions around him, and even at times his own self. He says in his book *Scenes from a Writer's Life*,

I felt distanced from family and could find happiness only in the homes of friends or between the covers of books. (Ruskin Bond, 1997: 2)

Bond develops the stranger-child relationship in his stories in an amicable way. His memorable short story *The Women on Platform No.8* is of a twelve year old boy Arun who waits for his train at Ambala station and in the process of waiting he comes in contact with a woman who is a complete stranger to him. He not only goes into a deep conversation with the lady but also accepts sweets and *samosas* (a small triangular pastry case containing spiced vegetables or meat and served fried) offered by her. Arun becomes so friendly with the lady that he does not even say anything when the lady introduces herself as his mother while introducing to the mother of his friend Satish. Satish's mother continues passing instructions whereas the lady keeps on watching Arun till the train is out of her sight; Arun kisses the stranger lady and bids her good-bye from the window of the train and the lady, too, reciprocates.

Similarly, in *The Window*, Koki develops a friendly tie with the narrator of the story because she has no other companion and is desperately in need of a friend to spend her time. Both the narrator and Koki are unknown to each other, one thing they have in common is the 'window' through which they develop their friendship. There after they put in many nights looking through the window. There seems no romantic rapport between the narrator and Koki, they share a very strong bonding of a mysterious relationship. The end of the story offers a kind of pessimistic note as Koki is going back and won't be back for a year. It is the time when reader comes to know the intimacy of the relationship between both of them

because the narrator decides to close the window till Koki comes back. This kind of special bonding and relationship with strangers can be found among the characters of Ruskin Bond.

One of the most memorable stories *Time Stops at Shamli* deals with many strangers like Miss Deeds, a drunkard, Mr. Lin the piano player, Satish Dayal; the hotel owner, the servant Dayaram and a ten-year old girl called Kiran who lives nearby. The author is the narrator and gets down at Shamli as he was very curious about this town and he wanted to see a strange figure called Koki whom he loved very much but she couldn't marry him. The narrator gets interested in the two persons very much-the Tonga driver and Kiran. The narrator finds that time really stops at *Shamli* and the people are tied up with this place. He recollects the words of the Tonga driver who said 'if you stay here one more day, you will not be able to leave this place forever.' (Ruskin Bond, 2016: 85) Kiran also accepts the narrator as a friend because she needs a friend to push her swing. The bonding between the narrator and Kiran is very touching and praiseworthy.

There are some short stories of Bond that replicate more intimate bonding between a strange character and the children. Sometimes the bonding is so intimate that the child neglects his own people. The examples of such stories are *The Coral Tree*, *A Case for Inspector Lal*, *A Job Well Done*, *The Story of Madhu* and *Most Beautiful* and *Dust on the Mountain*. In each of these stories, the stranger- child relationship is of a different shade, and more intimate.

It is very evident from the analysis of the short stories of Ruskin Bond that he projects the diversified facets of relationship. He highlights the relationship between adolescents and strangers and the bonding between them. The adolescents are called the 'adults with sense' and their behaviour, sometimes, is very erratic. It can be said without doubt that Bond had an experienced adolescence hence he is a veteran to write short stories on the psychology on adolescents' behaviour. An adolescent deserves proper attention and care. If an adolescent is not provided with his/her basic demands and needs from time to time, then s/he develops a sort of unassertive temperament, which coaxes him/her to develop ties with strangers, other than the family members.

The stories like *Panther's Moon*, *Sita and the River*, *The Blue Umbrella*, *The Fight*, *The Thief* and *The Eyes have it* reveal the struggle of adolescents to survive in the world

because their age is very transitional. One the famous stories of Bond *Sita and the River* has all the ingredients of classic adventure story along with varied narrations, a touch of fear, the collection of tension, a touch of fantasy and eventually a happy ending. The adolescent girl faces many problems because the river around the island is surging, the lonely girl who looks after her hens and small vegetable patch, has to endure the anger of flood all on her own. Then she develops a companionship with strange people and this is how tries to save her and her belonging. The story is very suggestive of the worldly wisdom of an adolescent girl and her ability to deal with strangers in an adverse situation.

Bond's short story *Panther's Moon*, is yet another example of the vivacity and courage expressed in the young adolescents. The presence of a man-eater panther in the jungle becomes a question of life and death for an adolescent boy Bishnu. The panther appears as his personal problem because he is not able to attend the school and there is every possibility of his failing in the final exams. Bishnu is committed to continue his studies and ultimately triumphs in forcing the panther to change its territory. Bond has narrated the issue in such a way that it establishes the real harmony of adolescents with strangers and the nature also. The heroic aptitude of Bishnu touches the heart and soul of the readers.

Similarly *The Blue Umbrella* is also noted for its exciting and touching story. Bond creates this story around the basic human nature like greed, hatred, possession, desire, enmity, and compassion. A little and simple Garhwali girl Binya lives in a small village of hilly Himachal Pradesh, and she trades her old leopard claw necklace for a nice and attractive blue colour umbrella. Everybody likes her umbrella and they fulfill their desires by touching it. A shopkeeper named Ram Bharosa runs an old fashioned shop in the village and sells warm cold-drinks because of the unavailability of refrigerator he also sells rotten sweets to the school-going kids. This shopkeeper becomes very greedy for the umbrella and wants to possess it. He proposes to buy it but adolescent girl Binya refuses to sell it. Bond introduces some of the strangers here in the story like Rajaram, another adolescent boy who works for Ram Bharosa. Rajaram plans to steal but he is caught red-handed and discloses the name of Ram Bharosa. Now everybody hates Ram Bharosa and stops coming to his shop so he suffers a lot. Binya-considering her responsible for the miserable condition of Ram Bharosa-gives the umbrella to him. The story *The Thief* narrates a conversion of an adolescent thief into a good human being. The entire story goes into the first person narrative. It depicts the

conversion of a thief who, being compelled by his habitual instinct of theft, robs his friend, Anil. But to his great dismay, Anil doesn't bother about it. In that case, he finds himself being robbed of his own trust and confidence in Anil. The adolescents of Bond's stories have a sense of completeness and self-sufficiency. Unlike their elders, they have a style of carrying out their task and freedom of mind. They can surpass the limits as decided by their elders.

Along with the portrayal of the bonding and relations with the strangers, Ruskin Bond narrates fine relations with the elderly people in his short stories. In some of his stories, he points out loving grandparents whose main purpose is to shower love and affection. When parents are involved in their routine work grandparents share their age-long-experience with their grand children. This relationship between grandparents and grand children survives on the basis of mutual understanding. Children and adolescents share their problems and give them an opportunity to solve it this is how the grandparents recollect their childhood memories. The stories like *The Photograph*, *Long Walk with Granny*, *The Kite maker*, *The Cherry Tree*, and *Animals on the Track* offer an interesting account of mutual bonding between the generations of differences.

Children find a kind of mischievous thrill in the company of their grandparents. As in a short story *The Photograph* the boy enjoys a layer of blush in the wrinkles of grandmother's visage when she notices her age-old photograph. The girl in the photograph reminds her of the good old days when she would take bath in the village pool along with other village boys and enjoyed riding sitting on the back of buffaloes. Similarly, another touching short story entitled *A Long Walk with Granny* gives an account of the bonding of a boy Mani who takes her old granny to the town to buy a new pair of spectacles for her. The story gives a realistic sketch of the difficulties of people living in hill-areas. They have to come many miles on foot in order to catch a bus to the town. But all these problems have no meaning when the granny sees her grandson after having the new spectacles.

Bond aims to spread understanding and care among all creatures and thereby tries to establish a good bonding and relationship among different persons of different age-groups. His characters are also very fast in developing friendship with anybody even the strangers. There can be any small object like a flute, a coin, flower, a marble stone or some beads that can initiate their friendship. In a story *The Blue Umbrella*, the small girl Binya gives her umbrella to Ram Bharosa when she understands that he was dying to take that umbrella and

exhibits more common-sense than the elders. In another story *A Rupee Goes a Long Way* Ranji gives a pretty necklace of bright coloured stones to Koki and becomes his friend. In a story entitled *The Fight*, two boys Ranji and Suraj had a fight for the right of swimming. But soon they feel that they should not fight and they decide to help each other. Suraj promises to make Ranji a wrestler as he is a master of martial art and Ranji promises Suraj to teach him diving. Their behaviour sounds like the elderly people and displays more common sense.

Bond has created an extreme oneness of his characters with the strangers irrespective of their age and hobbies. He establishes a strong kind of faith and liking among the children and the strangers. It seems that Bond understands the psychology of children very well and it is for the same reason he says, 'I am just a sixty year old boy without any pretensions to being a sage'. (Ruskin Bond, 1997: 56) He celebrates the art of writing as if it is giving him some kind of boosting energy to vitalize him to explore the human world much more. He never bothers that he is creating children specific literature because he enjoys this aspect of his work. Bond creates a world of relations, children, and strangers and tries to make a fine amalgamation of all of them. He himself says in the introduction of his collection, *The Night Train at Deoli*,

...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 and their bonding with strangers I can enter into their minds. (Ruskin Bond, 1988:12)

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