

Encapsulating the Nuances of Child Demeanor in the short stories of Ruskin Bond

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Accepted 04 March 2014, Available online 01 April 2014, Vol.2 (March/April 2014 issue)

Abstract

Bond's meticulous observation of a child's deep abnormal psychological behaviour finds expression in his short story, A Job Well Done, an eight year old boy is unfazed by the murder of his step-father rather psychologically it delights him to get rid of him. Another fitting example of abnormality is well articulated in Bond's short story Most Beautiful, the protagonist is a twelve-year old boy, Suresh who is physically deformed having problem with his speech, disposition and action. The apathy of his father aggravates his demeanour which sharply hinders the normal growth of the child. The portrayal of extravagance conceit of the imagination and indulgence in to several nuances of emotions are well diagnosed and illustrated by Ruskin Bond in his short stories. In The Great Train Journey, he invariably depicts the fantasy of little boy, Suresh, who unintentionally enters goods train carrying apples. Bond has candidly expressed dynamics of emotions in his short stories. In Chachi's Funeral, Madhu replaces the wrath of her cousin Sunil by giving adequate vent through the fake murder of his own Chachi and in The Blue Umbrella, the sympathetic portrayal of the innocent pride and innate generosity of the young girl Binya, consequently brings the inner transformation in Ram Bharosa. Bond's stories contain the flavour of Mark Twin's subtleness. Bond's art of storytelling reminds us of Mark Twin's great characters Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

Keywords: Child Demeanor etc.

In the 19th century, psychologists realized the importance of studying child psyche which is essential to understand psychological principles, difficulties and problems involved in various stages and various facets of the child development.

There is at least a tinge of abnormality in most of us including children. Abnormality means a significant deviation from common accepted patterns of behavior emotion or thought. In this approach, behavior is considered abnormal if it produces a sense of personal distress, anxiety, or guilt in an individual or if it harmful to others in some way. According to this view of abnormality people who are unable to function effectively and to adapt to the demands of society are considered abnormal. Psychologists typically define abnormal behavior broadly as behavior that causes people to experience distress and prevents them from functioning in their daily lives.

Bond's meticulous observation of a child's deep abnormal psychological behavior finds expression in his short story, *A Job Well Done*, an eight year old boy witnesses the liquidation of his step-father Major Summerskill by his own gardener "Dukhi". He is unfazed by the death of his step-father rather psychologically it delights him to get rid of him. This mishap remains a

secret between the boy and Dukhi. The boy feels liberated and better as his step-father was very strict and did not give him any freedom which he deserved. The abusing words of his step-father have a profound impact on the child psyche; the dialogue between Major and Dukhi reveals the Major's odious attitude:

"Ah, so there you are, you old scoundrel" exclaimed the Major, trying to sound friendly and jocular. "More jungle than garden, from what I can see. You are getting too old for this sort of work, Dukhi, Time to retire!

And where's the memsahib"

"Gone to the bazaar" said Dukhi

"And the boy?"

Dukhi shrugged, "I have not seen the boy today, Sahib."

"Damn!" said the Major. "A fine homecoming, this. Well, wake up the Cook-boy and tell

him to get some sodas"

(*The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*, p.126)

Major Summerskills was even a hurdle between the boy and his real mother because he never allowed his wife to spend much time with her son. This story emphasizes how the factor of *rejection* might lead to such abnormal

behavior of a child and also focuses on faulty child-parent relationship.

There are some disorders which usually appear during infancy, childhood or adolescence. The main disorder in this category is infantile autism, bulimia, depression, substance-use disorders, anxiety disorder etc. Autistic children have lack of responsibilities to other people. They often seem to have to have a world of their own. They often fail to show normal signs of attachment to their parents when they are upset. They are unable to understand other children's feeling and play cooperative games. They usually do not form close relationship. They frequently show unusual, repetitive body movements and bizarre responses to their environment.

Another fitting example of abnormality is well articulated in Bond's short story *Most Beautiful*, the protagonist is a twelve-year old boy, Suresh who is physically deformed having problem with his speech, disposition and action. In spite of his ugliness, he was fondly loved by his mother but neglected by his father. Most of the time his father remains busy in his business affairs and pays no attention towards Suresh, and treats him with an attitude of indifference. The apathy of his father aggravates his demeanor which sharply hinders the normal growth of the child and it also crushes the little soul of the child. Once the narrator saves him (Suresh) from a group of uncivilized children who were pelting stones on at him, thus the author develops friendly relations with Suresh. The affectionate behavior of the narrator infuses him with instinct to live with self-esteem and positivity. Meeting with the boy frequently the narrator could observe a sea of change in his deportment. As he puts it:

After that, I went to the boy's house about twice a week, and we nearly always visited the stream. Before long Suresh was able to swim a short distance. Knowing how to swim-this was something the bazaar boys never learnt-gave him a certain confidence, made his life something more than a one-dimensional existence. The more I saw Suresh, the less conscious was I of his deformities. For me, he was fast becoming the norm. (Time Stops at Shamli and Other Stories, p.70)

This miraculous change emphasizes that it was his father's insensitive nature which was responsible for intensifying Suresh's abnormality. Even abnormal child can lead a happy normal life, if people around him, are compassionate. To understand the mental development of a child psyche, we need to comprehend a child's intellect, mental capabilities, imagination, thinking emotion, volition and other mental processes.

Fantasy or Daydreaming is a kind of withdrawal. Many of Children resort to it when they are faced with real problems. Instead of attempting to solve these problems in a realistic manner, they withdraw themselves into a world of fantasy where they need not face failure, where they succeed in every undertaking, where they are able to overcome all obstacles in the realization of their desires, where they are victors and conquerors and where they

are able to fulfill their ambitions which have been thwarted in the real world. In the childhood, a kid sometimes likes to live in a world of make-believe of which he himself is the creator.

Bond is endowed with the gift to observe multi dimensional psychological aspect of child psyche. He has a keen insight into the child psyche in his short story *The Great Train Journey* he invariably depicts the fantasy of little boy, In the same carriage a ragged hippy was also hiding who suddenly comes out. Suraj has interesting conversation with the hippy:

"I want to go everywhere," said Suraj. "I want to go to England and China and Africa and Greenland; I want to go all over the world!"

"Then you are on the right train," said the hippy man. "This train goes everywhere. First it will take you to the sea and there you will have to get on a ship if you want to go to China." (The Road to the Bazaar, p.111-112)

Now Suraj feels thrill of anticipation and indulges in reverie, where he would go now and what his parents would do when they would find him missing. There would be conjecture that he had run away or been kidnapped or been involved in an accident. Police parties would search him; he would be famous as a boy who disappeared suddenly. He would work as an errand boy. He would cook, scrub a deck or sail a ship and earn some money to start a business. One day he would become a successful businessman and after making fortune he would return home and then nobody would care anymore about his school reports and what he ate and why he came late. His friend, Ranji would be waiting for him at the station to receive him; he would give him presents –an African lion or a transistor –radio.

After few hours journey when next station comes Suraj is stunned to find that he has reached his hometown. He is shocked and realizes that hippy told him a lie. There is a perfect blend of shock and surprise in the short story of Bond. In fact that was just a local apple train which carried apples from home town to another then back to its home again. But he comforts himself by thinking that it was a free ride and he could enjoy many apples without payment.

Daydreaming is very common amongst the children and Suraj is not exception rather he is an iconic representation of child psyche. Every child has instinct to be hero wishing to perform. If he is unable to do so in his real life, he would create his make-believe world. This kind of reverie can even take the adults down to their own memory lane. It tries pleasantly to remind them of what they once were themselves, and how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in. Ruskin Bond's depiction of child psyche reaches to unprecedented height in the short story *The Great Train Journey*. His art of plot construction reminds us of Mark Twain and little Suraj's fantasizing about his journey to some extent can be compared to Twain's great characters Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer who also indulge in daydreaming. Like Tom and

Huckleberry, Suraj sitting in goods train dreams of visiting unknown and strange places where he enjoys various adventures, but ironically the train brings him back to his own village and his fantasy breaks. Undeniably, daydreaming is pleasant because it may help us to escape from the disagreeableness of everyday. It may relax and gain a new perspective on things. The plan that we make in fantasy may, sometimes, push us on to the greater effort in the real world.

Imagine what it would be like if we didn't experience emotion. We would have no depths of despair, no depression and no remorse, but at the same time we would also have no happiness, joy or love. Obviously, life would be considerably less satisfying and even dull if we lacked the capacity to sense and express emotion. Emotion prepares us for action, shape future behavior through learning and help us interact more effectively with others. It makes life pleasurable as well as miserable. Good, pleasant emotion contributes to good health intense and unpleasant emotions disturb us sometimes to great extent if they persist. There are special and specific situations which cause different emotional reactions in people. These situations are called emotional situation and cause fear, anger, joy.

Bond captured the essence of emotion of the child that has been painted on the white canvass with several nuances. He has candidly expressed emotion in his short story *Chachi's Funeral*, a ten year-old young boy, Sunil, lives in a joint family. His Chachi takes care of him as he has working parents. Chachi has a strong grudge against Sunil for he was more brilliant and attractive than her own children. Being an emotional boy, he could feel his aunt's strong dislike and would perform playful trick in order to arouse her anger

Once, feeling hungry, he goes in the kitchen to take some honey. But the jar lying on the top shelf, Sunil is unable to hold it, hence it falls and breaks. For this reason Chachi smacks him with her slipper. Being his self-respect hurt, Sunil dashed out of the room and climbing the roof, takes out a knife from his secret hiding place, Sunil thrusts it into the window frame deciding to kill Chachi. Madhu, his twelve year old cousin comes to know of his intention. She, cleverly acting as a benefactor, saves him from falling prey to his evil thought. She suggests him the idea of drawing rough sketch of Chachi on cardboard and stabbing her. Thrilling with this idea, he draws the rough sketch and thrusts the knife into it, pretending it as his aunt. Even both of them cremate the picture. When the whole act is over, he gets out of his delusion and he bursts into tear as he is overcome with repentance:

"What are you crying for?" asks Madhu

"Chachi, I didn't hate her so much..." He rushed to Chachi and

Tried to get his arms around her ample waist...

"...I love you so much. Please don't leave us "

(The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories, p.30)

Madhu even does not realize that her innocent idea has turned out to be cathartic experience for Sunil. It is like he

experiences a purgation of emotion, after which he comes back to his normal loving self. The incident bridges the gap between Sunil and his aunt, develops strong and healthy relationship between them. It also ceases Sunil committing grave evil act. The story presents with a better insight into child's psychology, a person can cause great harm in fit of bad temper, while once the moment has passed, at the beginning the greatness of the emotion is lost and so destructive element associated with it is also subsided. Madhu replaces the wrath of her cousin Sunil by giving adequate vent through the fake murder of his own Chachi.

A touch of compassion is also found in the well-known, prize-winning, regional story of Bond *The Blue Umbrella*. In the story, the protagonist is Binya a ten year old girl who gets an attractive blue umbrella from the rich picnicker in exchange for her lucky pendant. The umbrella becomes her first love and cynosure of village. The whole story centers on the blue umbrella. The umbrella incites to the concerned emotions like jealousy, pride, possession and isolation. Unlike their elders, children have great admiration for the pretty umbrella and the touch of it thrills them. She enjoys creating cause of despair in the eyes of postmaster's wife, pujari and the shopkeeper, Ram Bharosa. She is delighted to have raised status in the village but she also feels herself guilty for the pitiable condition of Ram Bharosa, the worst prey of cynicism. He madly tries to possess the umbrella by hook or by crook, brings to shameful turn of his name from *Ram the trust worthy* now he is called *trusty umbrella thief*.

He is confined to his house-shop because no one visits now. He is financially dwindled and socially alienated. He even loses his appetite and hardly looks like a man. Binya considers herself the root cause of his miseries and brings him back into the main stream of life. She even relinquishes the umbrella saying:

"I do not need it any more", "But it is such a pretty umbrella," protested

Ram Bharosa "it's the best umbrella in the village."

"I know" said Binya "but an umbrella is not everything" (The Blue Umbrella, p.52-53)

She feels relieved after giving the blue umbrella to Ram Bharosa and nothing is there between her and the blue sky. In the story *The Blue Umbrella* reflects Bond's keen understanding of the emotions and the sympathetic portrayal of the innocent pride and innate generosity of the young girl Binya, consequently bringing the transformation of Ram Bharosa.

The great strength of Bond's works lie in the preservation of childhood outlook throughout the story. Bond's stories contain the flavor of Twin's subtleness and remind us of his greatest works. Like Mark Twin Bond comprehended the world through the eyes and ears of a child. Bonds use of child's perspective gives the story a quality of naivety, honesty and charm. It's his nature to be philosophical, insightful and humorous in his work,

which gives him an air of wisdom and witness that appeals to the reader. His wise words and truisms resonate today as much as they did at the time he wrote them, securing place in the hearts of the reading public.

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