



Bond's Escalation to Twainian Heights in the Portrayal of Young Minds

KEYWORDS

Dr. Usha Jain

Asst. Professor, S.A.B.V. Govt. Arts and Commerce College Indore, M.P

Rajendra Singh Chouhan

Lecturer, I.P.S Academy, Indore, M.P.

ABSTRACT

It may appear to be an overwhelming task to draw parallel between the American iconic novelist, Mark Twain and the benevolent Indian hill writer, Ruskin Bond of the present time. Yet while reading the short story of Ruskin Bond, it is impossible to ignore the conspicuous undertones of Mark Twain amazing encapsulation of the child demeanor that brings the twain together.

Ruskin Bond's short stories remind one of Mark Twain who was a master of delineating delicate human relationships. The undertones of Twain's uncanny observation of child psyche resonate and manifests in the stories of Bond too. The short stories of Ruskin Bond dealing with children are worthy of comparison with the works of Mark Twain as they both exploit the relationship involving children with the same intensity of child's playful and philosophical level. Bond's characters are benevolent and tend to compromise where as Twain's character can be more hostile and uncompromising under the same situation. Bond like Twain enjoys using childish pranks that are mischievous and full of energy. An idyllic snapshot of childhood is the landmark of the works of both, Ruskin Bond and Mark Twain. The characters of Twain and Bond have also strong faith in the oneness of human race. Thus Bond like Twain achieves universality while articulating with accuracy the common characteristics of his child protagonists. Their close observation of children behavior endows their persona with convincing authenticity.

It may appear to be an overwhelming task to draw the parallel between the American iconic novelist Mark Twain and the benevolent Indian hill writer Ruskin Bond of the present time. Yet while reading the short story of Ruskin Bond, it is impossible to ignore the conspicuous undertones of Mark Twain amazing encapsulation of the child demeanor that brings the twain together. Mark is the funniest of all American writers and Ruskin is also known for his subtle humor.

Ruskin Bond's short stories remind one of Mark Twain who was a master of delineating delicate human relationships. The undertones of Twain uncanny observation of child psyche resonates and manifests in the stories of Bond too. The short stories of Ruskin Bond dealing with children are worthy of comparison with the works of Mark Twain as they both exploit the relationship involving children with the same intensity of child's playful and philosophical level. The prodigious strength of Bond's works lie in the preservation of childhood outlook throughout the story. Bond like Twain comprehended the world through the eyes and ears of a child. Bondian use of child's perspective gives the story a quality of naivety, honesty and charm. Ruskin Bond and Mark Twain had not only been consistently and naturally funny but also they could shift from his comic mode to serious matters instantly and be completely convincing at all registers.

In the short story The Flight, Ruskin Bond like Mark Twain, endows his story with different nuance of child-child relationship which creates purely humorous accounts of children's simple cunningness which is also a part of their innocent world. The very freshness and charm of youth flows in Tom and Huck also finds expression in Bond's stories. Bond's characters are also embodiment of adventure and innocence.

Anil and Vijay, the two main characters of The Flight are initially depicted as hostile to each other, but through series of events they bond with each other gradually. During the summer vocation Anil discovers a pool in the forest and being unable to resist the temptation of the clean water, he decides to swim. He takes off his clothes and dives into the pool. A little later Vijay arrives at the pool and asks Anil to leave the pool as it belongs to him and he does not like him to make use of his personal things. Anil's denial of Vijay exclusive rights to

swim in the forest pool leads to a quarrel between the two. But soon they realize that they can be good friends. They come out with a formula of compromise, Anil whose ability to dive and swim underwater would train his rival, Vijay. And in return Vijay would coach his opponent to be a good wrestler. The conversation between the two captures that essence of childhood innocence:

"Are my friend, and I will make you a real pahlwan like me! I know if you teach me to dive and swim underwater..."

Vijay put his arm around the younger boy's shoulder and said "We are friends now, yes"

They looked at each other with unflinching eyes, and in that moment a friend was born.

(Bond, Ruskin The Road to the Bazaar, illustrated by Valerie Littlewood, Rupa & Com New Delhi, 2007, pp54-55)

The very lines speak volumes about the childhood innocence and eagerness to befriend a rival is a fine example of human behavior in situational needs. Likewise in "The Adventure of Tom Sawyer" Twain overwhelms us with his profound observation of teenage world. It was due to this work that Mark Twain was recognized for the first time as a great fictionist. The fight between Tom and stranger boy followed by the uncanny conversation and reflection of psychology of teenagers are at play in different situations:

'I can lick you'
'I'd like to see you try it.'
'Well, I can do it.'

'No, you can't, either'

An uncomfortable pause. Then Tom said 'What's your name?'
'Isn't any of your business, may be'

'Well, I'll low I will make it my business'

(Mark Twain, The Adventure of Tom Sawyer, Hammersmith Londosn, Collins Classics Publisher, 2011 p-8)

Bond's characters are benevolent and tend to compromise where as Twains character can be more hostile and uncompromising under the same situation. Psychology and temperament of children in both the case differ as per the demand

of the situation, but at the end of the day they are simply boys with their hopes and fears, failures and inspirations. Although they are mischievous but retain the freshness and charm of their age.

Bond like Twain enjoys using childish pranks that are mischievous and full of energy. Both Bond's and Twain's characters may not be heroic all the time but simply the boys with ordinary traits. The conversation between Vijay and Anil has the similar reflection as between Tom and the stranger boy which tickles the readers and fills them with the sympathy for the boyish attitudes;

"You understand that I am a Punjabi?" repeated the stranger, uneasily aware that the other had not seemed sufficiently impressed.

"I have heard you say it three times," replied Anil.

"Then why don't you run off?"

"I am waiting for you to run."

"I shall have to thrash you," said the Punjabi boy, assuming an avoidant attitude and showing Anil the palm of his hand.

"Let me see you do it," said Anil.

(Bond Ruskin The Road to the Bazaar illustrated by Valerie Littlewood, New Delhi ,Rupa & Co ,1993 pp49-50)

An idyllic snapshot of childhood is the landmark of the works of both, Ruskin Bond and Mark Twain. Their stories highlight that the children are far away from the social evils like racial discrimination, racial prejudices etc. Bond's story Untouchable portrays the people belonging to the upper class of society or to higher castes prevents their children from intermingling with the children having lower caste termed as untouchables. The young protagonist of Untouchable is hesitant to develop a friendly tie with a sweeper of his quarter. The realization of humanism helps him to overcome his skepticism when it begins to storm outside and he felt safe and secure in his (sweeper boy) presence. He not only accepts the sweeper boy as his friend but also to sleep with him for a night when he is alone. The emotional trauma of the boy is well articulated in the following dialogue:

The boy sat on the bare floor, 'What is happening?' he asked.

'I am afraid,' I said

I moved toward him and my hand touched a cold shoulder.

'Stay here,' he said 'I too am afraid,'

I sat down, my back against the wall; beside the untouchable, the outcaste...

(Bond, Ruskin Our Trees Still Grow in Delra New Delhi, Penguin Books India, 1991, p-27.)

Twain's characters too have strong faith in the oneness of human race. They do not hesitate to mingle with the Negro slaves who were considered outcaste in America. Huckleberry Finn, eponymous character, sets in voyage down the Mississippi with a runaway black slave named Jim. In so doing, Finn a white boy incorporates a close relationship with black teenager, projecting that racial prejudices are the products of adults, for he does not have any reason to be prejudiced.

Ruskin Bond and Mark Twain are operating on different plains while Bond maintains the simple dignity of childhood demeanor whereas Mark Twain takes his character to extreme height and presents them in exaggerated form. He deploys every technique to exploit the child psyche. He has the capacity through which he can create comical situation which makes his reader to guffaw where Ruskin Bond incorporates the light hearted smile. Ruskin has keen sense to derive humor from mundane activities he can make his reader smile at the idiosyncrasies of the people around him he can find. Even the grimmest situation of life he can visualize the Mirth. The acumen of Bond could properly be noticed in his articulation of life-like portray at children characters. The young protagonists of Bond appeal significantly for their love, adventures and inquisitiveness to comprehend the things around them.

They annoy the adults, at time their comrades, with unending and mind boggling questions.

The child protagonists of Bond act and behave as young human beings do in any part of the world. In their demeanor and apparel, Bond's child characters could be unlike from the children of the world but similar in their attitude and temperament. Whether Tom Sawyer of Mark Twain pilfers jam from a pot in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Ranji, Koki and Teju of Ruskin Bond filch guava in When Guava are Ripe, a few lines of the conversation of Tom establishes the point :

Y-o-u-u Tom!

There was a slight noise behind her, and she turned just in time to seize a small boy by the slack of his roundabout and arrest his flight. 'There! I (Aunt Polly) might a thought of that closet .What you been doing in there?'

'Nothing,'

'Nothing! Look at your hands, and look at your mouth. What is that truck?'

'I don't know, aunt.'

'Well, I know. It's jam , that's what it is .Forty times I've said if you didn't let that jam alone I'd skin you. Hand me that switch.'

The old lady whirled round , and snatched her skirts out of danger ,and the lad fled on the instant, scrambled up the high board – fence, and disappeared over it .His Aunt Polly stood surprised a moment, and then broke into a gentle laugh.

(Mark Twain, The Adventure of Tom Sawyer, Hammersmith Londosn, Collins Classics Publisher, 2011 p-4)

While Ranji, Koki and Teju of Bond steal guava in the short story When Guava are Ripe. In the story Gopal the watchman and ex-wrestler who is lazy and always takes nap in the orchard during a sultry afternoon:

"Who is there?" he shouted, struggling to his feet.

There was a sudden silence in the trees. ...

"I must have been dreaming," he muttered and was preparing to lie down and take another nap when Teju, who had been watching him, burst into laughter.

"Ho!" shouted the watchman, coming to life again.

"Thieves! I'll settle you!"...

(Bond Ruskin The Road to the Bazaar illustrated by Valerie Littlewood, New Delhi ,Rupa & Co ,1993 pp37-38)

Both the stories are examples of healthy childhood pranks. Tom plays tricks Aunt Polly and so do the three children hoax on the ex-wrestler and the watchman of the guava orchard. In The Adventure of Sawyer, Aunt Polly gives punishment to Tom by assigning him to whitewash the fence against his will. Tom dexterously persuaded his comrade Ben to whitewash the fence. He puts the act of whitewashing in a new light for Ben by showing excessive interest and indulgence. Tom says to Ben "Like it? Well I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day" Further Tom applies reverse psychology by describing Ben that his whitewashing would not be approved by Aunt Polly;

"No-no- I reckon it wouldn't hardly do ,Ben .You see ,Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence-right here on the street ,you now- but if it was the back fence I wouldn't mind and she wouldn't. Yes ,she 's awful particular about this fence ;it's got to be done very careful ; I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, may be two thousand , that can do it the way it's got to be done." (Mark Twain, The Adventure of Tom Sawyer, Hammersmith London, Collins Classics Publisher,2011 p-16)

Teju, Koki and Ranji, the young protagonists flatter Gopal an ex-wrestler and the caretaker of a guava orchard. They fawn

over his prowess and physique listening his stupid stories of his courage with the particular interest of procuring guavas in return. The old and lonely Gopal was enormous influenced by children's flattery. He entertained them with the grand feast of guava from his orchard.

"Do you want to see my muscles?" he said.

"Yes, yes!" They cried. "Do show us!" ...

"You can touch them," he said generally.

Teju poked a finger into Gopal's biceps.

"Mister Universe!" he exclaimed...

Gopal hurried off and soon returned with a basket full of guavas.

(Bond, Ruskin illustrated by Valerie Littlewood *The Road to the Bazaar I*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi in 2007 pp39-41)

Laurie, Anil and Kamal of *The Hidden Pool* of Ruskin Bond's first novel for children, too get pleasure themselves from the secret pool on the mountain site. At the secret pool they enjoy fishing, building dams, taking midnight dips wrestling and riding buffaloes; "But the pool was secret known only to us, and it gave us a feeling of conspiracy and adventure to meet there after school. It was at the pool that we made our plans..." (Bond, Ruskin illustrated by Ranji Balmuchu *The Hidden Pool*, Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi in 2005 pp22-27.)

Tom, Huck and Joe enjoy childish pranks and adventures. They love hunting and fishing and go for expedition (they are fleeing away from their troubling parents) to Jackson's island in *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer*. For sometimes they have got the delightful experience in the isolated island; "They discovered that the island was about three miles long and a quarter of a mile wide, and that the shore it lay closest to was only separated from it by a swim about every hour ..." (Mark Twain, *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer*, Hammersmith London, Collins Classics Publisher, 2011 pp-102-103)

The act of stealing guava or jam, place of exploration on Pindari Glacier (*The Hidden Pool*) or Jackson's island, unraveling the workings of the minds of young protagonists a ten-year-old-boy and Huckleberry Finn (having unbiased opinions) or childhood innocence and eagerness to befriend a rival according to the situational needs are the common activities of Bond's and Twain's children. Thus Bond like Twain achieves universality while articulating with accuracy the common characteristics of his child protagonists. Their close observation of children behaviors endows their persona with convincing authenticity.

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