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**RUSKIN BOND'S *THE PARROT WHO WOULDN'T TALK AND OTHER STORIES*: A STUDY
INTO WORLD OF CHILDREN**

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Abstract:

Bond is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the vanished sights and scenes of boyhood. These stories are autobiographical or semiautobiographical in tone. Through these heartwarming, funny and delightful stories Bond introduces his gentle readers (children) to some of the most endearing and adorable characters he has ever written about – his grandfather, a man of many gifts and good company for a growing boy; with his unusual ability to disguise himself as the street-vendor, carpenter and sometimes the washer man; granny, who made great gooseberry jam and looked after everyone, and loved bargaining with shopkeepers and vendors of all kinds; the eccentric and ubiquitous uncle Ken with his knack for trouble and disastrous escapades and who always get into some strange situations and need his nephew's help in getting out of them; the station master Mr. Ghosh and his amazing family comprising a dozen mice; and the unforgettable Aunt Ruby, whose encounter with a parrot who wouldn't talk makes the reader burst with laughter. Aunt Ruby is afraid of flowers, especially snapdragons and sunflowers. Wisteria gave her hysteria. A magic-spell and a blissful period of his childhood always enchant Bond. He delves deep into his own life for the creation of his characters. The autobiographical element is so dominant in his portrayal of the child characters that his own childhood can easily be reconstructed. The world of his children literature is filled with ingredients of faith, love courage and joy.

Keywords: *Mood of Nostalgia, Autobiographical, World of Children, Healthy Human Values, etc.*

The Parrot who wouldn't talk and other stories (2008) is a collection of fourteen refreshingly new stories written exclusively for children. Through these heartwarming, funny and delightful stories Bond introduces his gentle readers (children) to some of the most endearing and adorable characters he has ever written about – his grandfather, a man of many gifts and good company for a growing boy; with his unusual ability to disguise himself as the street-vendor, carpenter and sometimes the washer man; granny, who made great gooseberry jam and looked after everyone, and loved bargaining with shopkeepers and vendors of all kinds; the eccentric and ubiquitous uncle Ken with his knack for trouble and disastrous escapades and who always get into some strange situations and need his nephew's help in getting out of them; the station master Mr. Ghosh and his amazing family comprising a dozen mice; and the unforgettable Aunt Ruby, whose encounter with a parrot who wouldn't talk makes the reader burst with laughter. Aunt Ruby is afraid of flowers, especially snapdragons and sunflowers. Wisteria gave her hysteria.

Bond wrote most of these stories in Mussoorie early the year 2008. They centre on 'the ghosts of long-gone relatives.' In a very delightful manner Bond has pointed out their eccentric behavior. In this context he writes: I think everyone has at least one eccentric aunt or uncle in the family. I had

more than one my boyhood days were enlivened by their presence strong, unforgettable characters, all of them. I hope you'll enjoy their antics – and mine too! (2008, viii).

In these stories, Bond is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the vanished sights and scenes of boyhood. These stories are autobiographical or semiautobiographical in tone. In "Grandfather's many faces", Bond talks about fun loving grandfather and about doting grandmother. In this story he speaks about his grandfather's unusual ability to disguise himself and take on the persona of another person as a child, he enjoys his grandfather's eccentricities- disguising himself into a *sabziwalla*, a Tonga rider, or a smart- looking Englishman with a military bearing. The story points out how their relationship survives on the basis of give and take. Actually, children share their loneliness and give them an opportunity to revive their childhood. A magic-spell and a blissful period of his childhood always enchant Bond. He delves deep into his own life for the creation of his characters. The autobiographical element is so dominant in his portrayal of the child characters that his own childhood can easily be reconstructed. The world of his children literature is filled with ingredients of faith, love courage and joy. The story "Owls in the Family" is the best example of it. The reader finds a loving portrayal of doting grandparents in this story. In this context Bandana Bal Chandnani's observation is significant. She says, "Bond's fiction reverberates with touching relationship between a child and a grown-up" (Chandnani, 82).

The second story, "Battles Long Ago" is about a small boy Ruskin and his grandparents. As a boy, he starts digging in the garden imitating the gardener to have a patch of his own to cultivate. While digging a patch of wasteland near the old wall behind the bungalow he finds an old musket ball, a small piece of metal with some lettering on it, a soap dish and a broken chamber pot – all the things of a hundred years long time. Ruskin learns an interesting history of the battle of Gurkhas for the town, learns something about archaeology, gardening, even about owning a museum.

Bond has very artistically presented the world of children through the activities of Ruskin. Encouraged by his exploration, he begins to excavate different parts of the garden and compound. He finds belt buckle and card are of a Gurkha Lieutenant and imagines that he could be buried in the garden. As a curiosity, he put on to display the musket ball, the belt buckle and the card case. Unknowingly, he learns certain qualities too – inquisitiveness, perseverance and going to the root of the things, etc. Even he understands that physical exercise give one a good appetite. He likes the idea of digging up the soil and planting something in the good earth. For Ruskin, the boy, even the boyish game proves to be a fruitful exercise.

The Parrot Who Wouldn't Talk is much funny and delightful story. It presents a very funny incident of Bond's boyish days. His Aunt Ruby is an unforgettable character among the area of eccentric relatives. Once she buys a parrot from a bird-catcher and tries to teach it to talk, but the bird takes an instant dislike to Aunt and resists all her blandishments. Meanwhile, she gives up her endearments and becomes quite hostile towards the poor bird. Now Ruskin has to feed the parrot – green chilies, ripe tomatoes and slices of mango. His mischievous behavior is pointed out the author "This gave me an opportunity to consume a couple of mangoes while feeding the parrot!" (17). Boys are mischievous at certain age. (Ruskin was ten years old). He then deliberately leaves the cage door open and lets the bird its freedom. As a child, he enjoys the fun of his mischief. At the same time, the incident hints at child psychology – children no more like any kind of confinement. A kind of love relationship develops between Ruskin and the parrot as the parrot becomes a frequent visitor to their garden and veranda and Ruskin used to give the parrot half of his eatables. Bond has pointed out here the eccentricities of elders on the one hand, and the world of child on the other.

"White Mice" describes Ruskin's journey back to his parents in Delhi from Dhera. He was nine or ten at that time. His uncle Ken puts him on the wrong train to Lucknow. Ruskin discovers to his horror that now he was over 300 mile in the opposite direction. Next morning he was taken to the station master Mr. Ghosh. The station master takes Ruskin to his house, where he encounters his amazing family comprising a dozen mice. The station master thrusts a cardboard box into Ruskin's hand as a present for Ruskin and his grandfather. Ruskin lifts the Lid of the box and surprisingly enough finds two white mice sleep on a bed of a cotton wool. Back in Dehra, thirsty for revenge Ruskin slips into Uncle Ken's room and releases the mice under his bed sheet. An hour later, Uncle Ken dashes out of his room "screaming that something soft and furry was running about his pyjamas" (33). Thus, little Ruskin makes Uncle Ken to do a tap dance, who further grows hysterical, locks himself into the store room and sleeps on an old sofa.

Bond's skill as the writer of ghost stories is unsurpassable. Since his stories are set in the hills, ghosts also belong to the hills. Bond reverentially accepts their existence as an integral part of the hill life. Though, he never happens to see them, he loves to visualize their mysterious world with childlike curiosity. The story "We capture a Ghost" is mischievous, funny and amusing. In this story, we find Prets, the special kind of Ghost, who can make themselves felt, and sometimes heard but remains invisible to human eye. The Pret is friendly with the boy and his grandfather because they are generous souls accepting his invisible presence in the home like any visible member in the family. But his cousin Percy is skeptical about ghost's existence. Enraged by his disrespectful attitude, the Pret plays mischief upon him. In this context Bond writes: "The ghost clung to him and followed him everywhere. Percy sailed for the coast of Africa. But there was no escape. He was last seen on a beach in Zanzibar,...holding an animated conversation with an invisible companion, presumably the ever present Pret" (39).

The stories, "A Bicycle Ride with Uncle Ken" and "At Sea with Uncle Ken" are highly comic narrations of the adventures of Uncle Ken. Misunderstanding in ordinary life and little cunning of Uncle Ken arouse good humour. The eccentric and ubiquitous Uncle Ken; with his knack for trouble and disastrous escapades makes the children (readers) burst with laughter. Tired and thirsty by cycle riding, Uncle Ken and Ruskin ride straight into 'Rest and Recuperation Centre' presuming it a hotel. There Uncle Ken is mistaken as a school Principal suffering from a persecution complex, and the doctor of the lunatic asylum and his staff tries to admit him in their rest centre. Uncle Ken anyhow escapes as an ambulance arrives with the real patient, and he escapes from the terrible situation. But the doctors comment, "I have a feeling we'll see you here again" makes us burst with laughter. As a child Ruskin faces a terrible situation. Hence, he writes: "With Uncle Ken, you had always to expect the unexpected. Even the most normal circumstances, something unusual would happen to him and to those around him. He was a catalyst for confusion" (57). During train journey, he misplaces his spectacles, wears someone else's and mistakes the station master for a porter and instructs him to look for their luggage. As an adolescent of sixteen, Ruskin enjoys all these mischievous acts of Uncle Ken.

In a vow to enjoy, but with a little budget, Uncle Ken takes Ruskin (16 years boy) to a rather seedy hotel, where they had to share a toilet with over twenty other people, they enjoy a dinner of curried prawns and scented rice that keeps Uncle Ken "running back and forth to that toilet, so that no one else had a chance to use it. Several dispirited travelers simply opened the windows and ejected into space, cursing Uncle Ken all the while." At Sea, he develops friendship with an attractive blonde, at Port Said goes ashore with her, gets separated in a busy market place and didn't get back in time and stays behind at Port Said, takes up various jobs – waiter, tutor and a guide and after four years comes back to India with a prospect of starting a poultry farm. Thus, troubleshooter Uncle, who was to deliver Ruskin safely to Ruskin's aunt in England, finds himself into unsafe condition. His every action makes the reader burst with laughter.

In Bond's stories the role of birds and animals is not secondary to man. In "The Regimental Myna" the bird Myna is the focal point of narration and acts as a protagonist. Bond peeps into the birds reserve zone with childlike curiosity. He reads its psychology through common activities, it indulges in. Bond simply visualizes its activities in terms of human emotions. It serves two purposes – firstly, it makes the whole account lively and interesting and secondly, it helps generating understanding of their nature. In this context, Amita Aggarwal's observation is significant. She writes: "Like Kipling his purpose is not to draw any didactic lesson but to reinforce the fact that animals, birds and insects are as significant and dignified as human beings" (Aggarwal, 55).

In the story, "Boy Scouts Forever" Bond is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the vanished sights and scenes of boyhood. His emotional relationship with the places and people, with whom he spent his childhood, makes this story nostalgic and brings liveliness in every detail. The story helps him to revive, all sweet-sour memories of his boyhood. The Scoutmaster takes the boys on a camping expedition, where the boys have to do everything including the cookery. Ruskin was asked to work as the troops cookery expert and he starts making a dish "everyone had a table, but the general opinion was that the dish lacked something" (26), so, he adds more salt, a cup of sugar, a bottle of tomato sauce, a cup of vinegar and then it tastes too sour, he empties a bottle of gooseberry jam. This could only be done by children and nobody else! Surprisingly enough: "The dish was a great success. Everyone enjoyed it including Mr. Oliver (Scoutmaster), who had no idea what went into it. "What is this called?" he asked. "It's an all-Indian sweet-and sour jam-potato curry", I ventured.

This is really an exclusively funny, delightful and heartwarming world of children one enjoys. The minute detail of the activity makes one to visualize it and automatically one becomes the part of the activity. A very sensitive and perceptible world of children is presented in "Here comes Oliver." The Scoutmaster, Oliver's pet dog, "that was devoted to Mr. Oliver and followed him everywhere... into town and home ... slept at the foot of Mr. Oliver's bed" (82-83), is made victim one day by a hungry panther and Mr. Oliver become lonely in the vast world as he "had no other friend, no other companion" (83). Mr. Oliver, now a broken man becomes indifferent to everyone. He forgets his evening walk, stays in his room, "playing cards with himself, playing with his food, pushing most of it aside" (84). Feeling a great pity for the Scoutmaster, five Boy scouts huddle together, contribute a rupee each and get a pup and push the pup inside Oliver's house. Now, Mr. Oliver sets out for his evening walk, accompanied by the pup. The sensitive and sensible boys unknowingly help Mr. Oliver to restore to his earlier lifestyle. In the times of personal loss, and when no factor was making any sense to Mr. Oliver, the sensitive minded Boy Scouts help him to come out of his predominant.

The story shows how the world of children is affected by the things around. The children are always innocent, ready to extend helping hand not only to peers but elders too.

Trees and children have some emotional bonds, they speak with them "beckon them nearer" (96), while flowers teach them 'the delight of smell, colour and touch" (98). *The Parrot who wouldn't talk and other stories* (2008), is an entertaining account of Ruskin's adolescence and coming of age period that is sure to captivate Ruskin's fans and win him a whole new generation of admirers.

The stories like "The Tunnel", "The Wind on Haunted Hill" demonstrate his exceptional knowledge about children and childhood. According to S. C Dwivedi "these stories show Ruskin Bond's power of entering into child's point of view. He is second only to Charles Dickens in this field" (Singh, 156). In "The Tunnel" we meet Suraj and Sunder Singh whose hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, emotions and feelings become our own. They live in a society which is not favorable to them. The tunnel ultimately becomes a fit symbol of life. Sunder Singh and Suraj go inside the tunnel to feel the life there. They have nothing to fear in the tunnel. They are not even afraid of the leopard. It seems the jungle has set them free.

"The Tunnel" presents a fictive world where there is a great concern both for human beings and animals. There is nothing to fear from anybody in this world. However, it is not an idealized world. It is the real world of the mountain region. There are hundreds of types of fear which trouble the man. But the life in jungle makes one fearless. For Suraj, a small boy, it is the life of friendship and healthy human values. In the story "The Canal" Bond presents a world of fun-loving children – Sushil, Raju, Pitamber and Bond himself- bathing in the Canal, eating at Chaat Shops or riding o bicycles into the tea gardens. The Canal near Miss Gamla's house was the best place for bathing. Miss Gamla was not her real name. The naughty children called her Miss Gamla because of "the large number of gamlas or flowerpots that surrounded her house" (129-30). She did not like the small children as they make a lot of noise, spoiling her afternoon siesta, and then she would emerge from her back veranda, waving a stick at the boys, and shouting at them to be off. Bond has given a very excellent world of children: "We would collect our clothes, and lurk behind a screen of lantana bushes, returning to the canal as soon as the lady and dog were back, in the house" (130). This is the most common picture found in worldwide about the boys and their mischief. The boys with animal spirits, mock battles, wrestling on the grassy banks of the canal before plunging into the water, flailing around with shouts of joy – makes the readers to visualize the merry making of the boys. The boys were not only disrespectful but wicked too. Raju, the wicked of the four of them, makes a jig in front of her, completely in nude that puts her in a sudden attack of convulsions. Thereupon Miss Gamla advances upon Raju with a raised stick, makes lunge at Raju: Ruskin catches the end of the stick and gives it a short, sharp pull and Miss Gamla tumbles into the canal, but anyhow survives. Feeling guilty and afraid of their deeds the boys stop going for bathe in canal and Miss Gamla wins the battle. The fun and their mischief might have made them murderers.

This true-to-life world of children one can encounter in any village or town of India. In these stories, the reader is exposed to many characters and situations described through the eyes of children. Ruskin Bond handles them successfully. He could achieve this by shifting the focus from one aspect to the other or the close view to a larger perspective of the life of a character. A gentle touch of humour pervades in most of these stories. Humour emerges from the innocent actions of the characters. Bond does not aim to contend against social foibles, evils or individual short comings.

Humour in these stories sprouts out of common deeds, words and gestures. Charms of all these characters lie in the empathy of their creator. He displays unique balance among them, in spite of their palpable differences of nature, dialect and attire. His search for the extraordinary in seemingly humdrum lives makes these commoners real heroes of life. Children enjoy their eccentricities and learn many things of life at the same time.

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