

# Chapter I

## *Chapter I*

### *THE WORLD OF RUSKIN BOND – HIS LIFE AND ITS*

#### *INFLUENCE ON HIS WORKS*

“.....We don't become writers in the school of creative writing. We become writers before we learn to write”--- Ruskin Bond in *Scenes From The Writer's Life : A Memoir*.

Few writers have been as overwhelmingly and consistently autobiographical as Ruskin Owen Bond. Accordingly, a biographical literature has been produced about him, as without a fair knowledge of the artist himself, his creative being cannot be understood. In this chapter my aim is to highlight three important areas of Bond's development as a writer—

- (a) His life and its influence on his works.
- (b) His obsession with childhood.
- (c) The role of women in shaping his life and his works.

#### *(a) Ruskin Bond's Life And Its Influence On His Work.*

One of the most popular writers of Indo-Anglian fiction, Ruskin Bond's works are distinguished by their immense variety and their alluring simplicity. They project a lively image of India coupled with an abiding love for the underdogs of our society. A multi-splendoured personality, Bond began writing very early in

life. His journey from a struggling amateur to a highly acclaimed author was fraught with great hardships and disappointments. His stories, poems and articles were repeatedly rejected by editors, some of whom even “scribbled little notes of encouragement on the rejection slips”<sup>1</sup>. These early rebuffs had a catalytic effect on his literary genius. They whetted his creative appetite and strengthened his resolve to pursue his self chosen vocation. Like all great writers, Bond drew inspiration from his own life, which was not a run of the mill one.

Born in 1934, in Kasauli, a little town in Himachal Pradesh, India, Ruskin Owen Bond was named after John Ruskin, the famous Victorian essayist, for whom his father had great respect and admiration. From a tender age he witnessed a strained and volatile relationship between his parents. His mother was only eighteen when she married Aubrey Alexander Bond, her senior by fifteen years. A fun loving extrovert, she loved parties and outdoor life. Her husband, a sedate introvert, enjoyed domesticity and was most comfortable when engaged in domestic chores at home. With such diametrically opposing temperaments, their marriage was doomed from the beginning. Their enormous age difference only heightened their incompatibility.

Ruskin was only eight when his childhood was marred by his parent’s acrimonious separation. His mother walked out of their house, one day, never to return. She deserted her children in pursuit of her own personal happiness. She was by then already involved with a Punjabi gentleman whom she later married.

This domestic upheaval left a deep scar on young Ruskin's sensitive mind. It gave birth to a feeling of insecurity and helplessness in him. In *Scenes From A Writer's Life- A Memoir*, he remarked "That early feeling of insecurity was never to leave me, and in adult life, when I witnessed quarrels between people who were close to me, I was always deeply disturbed—more for the children, whose lives were bound to be affected by such emotional discords".<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin held his mother singularly responsible for breaking up his home and disrupting his childhood. He could not share his frustrations with his siblings as Ellen, his younger sister was mentally retarded and William, his brother was only a baby.

But he could not reconcile himself to his parent's estrangement. Later in "A Room Of Many Colours" he gave expression to his pent up grief and frustration when he remarked: "Most other children had their mothers with them, and I found it a bit strange that mine couldn't stay. Whenever I asked my father why she'd gone, he'd say 'You'll understand when you grow up'. And if I asked him where she'd gone, he'd look troubled and say, 'I really don't know'. This was the only question of mine to which he didn't have an answer".<sup>3</sup> His father's helplessness in the face of his incessant queries only heightened young Ruskin's confusion.

Aubrey Bond earned his livelihood teaching the children of Ram Vilas Palace in Jamnagar. Here Ruskin spent the first six years of his life, with his parents, in the Tennis Bunglow near the Palace, happily playing with his sister in

its sprawling lawns. But this was a highly transient phase in Ruskin's life. Within the next two years his parents' marriage collapsed and his happy family life broke up forever.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, his father left Jamnagar and joined the Royal Air Force in 1941. He was then over forty years old. He was posted in the cipher section of the Air Headquarters in Delhi. Weighed down both by the failure of his marriage and by his work, Aubrey Bond found it difficult to look after the needs of his growing son. So perforce, Ruskin had to be sent to a boarding school at Mussoorie.

Panic-stricken at the thought of separation from his only emotional anchor in life, Ruskin tried to persuade his father not to send him away. Though still very young, he realized his father's emotional dependence on him and was reluctant to leave him alone. Like Anil in "The Prospect of Flowers", he sensed his father's acute loneliness. This loneliness later became an integral part of his own life. It recurs again and again in different forms in almost all his works.

But Ruskin had to attend school any way. Separated from his father for the first time in his life, he took an aversion for the school and suffered from bouts of homesickness. The discipline and the monotonous routine of the convent made him feel stifled and he longed to escape from this terrible existence. The letters and postcards which he regularly received from his father, were his only relief holding the promise of books, toys and stamps awaiting his return home.

However, in the middle of the term, his mother unexpectedly arrived, one day, and abruptly withdrew him from the school. Ebullient by this sudden respite, he did not question this unconventional step. But her subsequent behaviour left him puzzled and perplexed. Without halting at her mother's place at Dehra, as Ruskin had expected, she took him straight to the railway station and put him on a night train bound for Delhi. His initial euphoria having subsided, apprehension now took its place. He was greatly relieved when at the end of his long and lonely journey, he found his father waiting for him at the Delhi railway station.

From the conversation between his father and his uncle Fred Clark, he gathered that his parents' marriage had been legally terminated. Though shocked by the news, Ruskin was thankful to have been put under his father's custody. He was confident that unlike his mother, his father would "stand by him, no matter how difficult the circumstances".<sup>4</sup>

Thus, while his regard for his mother reached its nadir, his love and admiration for his father steadily grew until it almost verged on hero worship. For Aubrey Bond, looking after his minor son was a period of great "trial and tribulation." Father and son together led an almost nomadic existence, changing lodgings from tent house and brick hutment to a small flat and finally an apartment in the Scindia House.

Aubrey Bond optimistically hoped the war would end soon. He wanted to leave his painful memories behind and start life afresh with his son in England. He had great dreams for Ruskin. He planned to give him a head start in life by sending

him to a reputed school in England. Blissfully happy in his father's company, Ruskin, however, did not miss school at all and "would have been quite happy never to have gone to school again".<sup>5</sup>

By nature a loner, Aubrey Bond had few friends. So on weekdays while he was away at work, Ruskin remained alone in the house. But he was never lonely. His father's books, stamps, postcards, his scrapbook and album and old gramophone records were company enough for him.

In retrospect, he recalled the two years he spent with his father were the happiest period of his life. "He did his best for me, dear man. He gave me his time, his companionship and his complete attention".<sup>6</sup> Bond immortalized this idyllic phase of his life in his highly nostalgic work "Life At My Own Pace".

This unconventional lifestyle had a lasting effect on young Ruskin's psyche. He developed a type of eating disorder almost verging on bulimia nervosa.

Once, when left alone in the house for ten days, while his father was hospitalized for malaria, he ate a whole tin of jam in one sitting. In his *Scenes From a Writer's Life : A Memoir*, he himself confessed, "This tendency to over indulge has been with me all my life."<sup>7</sup>

Pulled down by recurrent attacks of malaria and his frequent transfers, Aubrey Bond found it difficult to provide stability and companionship to his growing son. So Ruskin had to leave for a boarding school for the second time in

his life. This time he was admitted to the Bishop Cotton Prep School in Simla. Thus began another uncertain phase in the young boy's turbulent life.

In school, Ruskin became an instant celebrity as word spread that his father was a pilot who flew bombers and fighter planes. The awe and admiration his father's profession evoked among the school boys, enhanced Ruskin's self-confidence and made him very proud of his father. He basked in the reflected glory and did nothing to dispel the rumours. He could not bear to see his father crash from the pedestal in which he had been placed. So he refrained from divulging the truth. After all, he knew "there wasn't much glamour in codes and cipher although they were probably just as important".<sup>8</sup>

Ruskin settled down in his new school "without much fuss".<sup>9</sup> But his holidays were always spent with his father helping him "with his stamp collection, accompanying him to pictures, dropping in at Wenger's for tea and muffins, and bringing home a book or a record".<sup>10</sup> He treasured every moment spent with his father.

He gave a moving account of those happy times and the values he imbibed from his father in "My Father's Trees In Dehra". For this impressive work, he was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992 for English writing in India. His father too found in his young son "someone to come back to; someone for whom things could be planned; someone who could learn from him".<sup>11</sup>

In 1944 Aubrey Bond was transferred to Calcutta. He was happy to have finally got the opportunity to look after his aging mother and his retarded daughter. But little did he then realize that Calcutta was to be his final destination. Weakened by previous bouts of malaria, he succumbed to a severe attack of cerebral malaria that very year. He was then only forty-six.

His father's death was a crushing blow to young Ruskin. His world crumbled around him and he felt orphaned and lost. Engulfed in grief and self-pity, the dazed ten year old questioned the working of the Almighty God: "If God were love, why did He have to break up the only loving relationship I'd known so far?"<sup>12</sup> Buckling under this personal tragedy, young Bond broke down and had to be confined to the school infirmary for a few days.

Engrossed in her own life, his mother did not come forward to lend a comforting shoulder to her disconsolate son. Nor did she deem it necessary to mourn the death of her estranged husband. By then, she had ceased to exist for her eldest son. Ruskin did not think she could replace his father in his life or fill the emotional void left by his untimely demise.

His intense grief found expression through the young protagonist in "The Funeral". The distraught child became a pen portrait of Bond himself as he struggled to cope with his irrevocable loss. Like him he had none whom he could turn to in his hour of grief

In “Going Home To Dehra” Bond recalled the trepidation with which he went. Little did he then suspect what was in store for him.

On reaching Dehra railway station, he got his first shock when he found there was none to receive him at the station. The poor boy had expected that like his father, his mother too would eagerly await his arrival at the railway station.

Despite a long wait when no one turned up, he slowly collected his baggage and made his way towards an uncertain future. For the second time in his life he was overcome by a feeling of terrible insecurity, “A feeling of insecurity began to creep over me—feeling that was to recur from time to time and which was to become part of my mental luggage for the rest of my life”.<sup>13</sup>

In his mother’s house, Ruskin felt like an unwelcome guest. Her unenthusiastic welcome only increased his discomfort and distress. “My mother gave me a perfunctory kiss.....I was accustomed to more intimate caress from my father, and the strange reception I received made me realize the extent of my loss”.<sup>14</sup>

Ruskin took an instant dislike for his stepfather from the moment he met him. He held him responsible for alienating his mother from her family when they needed her most. This is apparent from his remark : “I hated him and did not think much about my mother for marrying him”.<sup>15</sup>

Mr. Hari, his stepfather has been brilliantly represented by Major Summerskill in "A Job Well Done". By pushing the Major unobtrusively into a deep well, Bond imaginatively terminated his mother's relationship with him.

But reality was far removed from the world of imagination. His parents had a highly frivolous lifestyle, fun and entertainment being their main concern. They went out every night and returned home only in the wee hours of the morning. They were oblivious of the distress it caused to their children, especially young Ruskin. Racked by worry he remained awake the whole night awaiting their return home. His anxiety is evident in the lines :

"I would often wonder how I would cope if they had a fatal accident coming home, or if some avenging tigress got her own back in the jungle. Would I have to look after my sister, baby brother and two half-brothers? And where would the money come from ?" <sup>16</sup> This mental agony continued night after night and he was powerless to do anything about it.

"Hari had little or no time for a boy of ten who was dumped on him". <sup>17</sup> His irresponsible conduct coupled with his erratic lifestyle and his total indifference towards Ruskin widened the rift between them. Ruskin was glad his stepfather ignored him because he felt he " hadn't the sensitivity to make a 'go' of being a father". <sup>18</sup>

Mr. Hari was a businessman without any business acumen. A spendthrift, he lived beyond his means and was never able to make timely payments. Before

long, due to outstanding arrears in house-rent, he was forcibly evicted from his house along with his family. While he went to live with his first wife, Ruskin with his mother and her large family had to suffer the ignominy of seeking shelter in their grandmother's house.

Totally disillusioned, Bond turned away in utter disgust from the world of reality in which he had become so acutely uncomfortable and sought refuge in the world of books. "I began to read whatever books came my way,.....It provided me with an escape from the reality of my situation. And it was during those first winter holidays in Dehra that I became a bookworm, and ultimately, a book lover and a writer in the embryo".<sup>19</sup>

Thus at the tender age of ten, when reality seemed to sink its talons on him, Ruskin sought comfort in reading and in books. In an interview to Anindita Ramaswamy he remarked, "As a boy, reading was my religion, it still is. It has helped me discover my soul. Later, writing helped me record its journey".<sup>20</sup> So the young boy who became a writer had reasons like insecurity, loneliness and fear that goaded him on to writing.

Among the authors who left their indelible mark on Bond were M.R.James and Algernon Blackwood, whose works became the inspiration for his ghost stories, along with William Sarsyan, the American short story writer, P.G.Woodhouse, A.A.Milne, Pauline Smith, Owen Wester, Hugh Walpole, Andre' Gide and Walter de la mare. But it was Charles Dickens who enthralled him, as he could identify many of his beleaguered child protagonists especially with David

Copperfield. *The Diary of A Nobody* --was another special book that influenced him throughout his life.

Mr Hari's perpetual financial problems would have certainly disrupted Bond's education. But fortunately, after his father's death, the Royal Air Force began to sponsor his school education. The school that he had once joined with utter reluctance now became his only sanctuary. He no longer looked forward to going home during vacation. He felt much safer in the secure haven of his boarding school in Simla.

Afraid of expanding the horizon of known faces, Bond became a loner. Books were his only company. His passion for reading led him to the large lending library of Ideal Book Depot. A considerable part of his education was derived from this lending library.

Suffering and pain are an integral part of life and growth. By the time Bond was sixteen, the adversities of life had transformed him from a docile youngster into a rebellious teenager. His last year in school was spent in perpetual revolt against everything -- traditions, conventions, authority and rules. His rebellion stemmed from his frustration at the mindless monotony of school life. He felt he was wasting his precious time in school. Catapulted by circumstances resulting in pre-mature adulthood, he was impatient to begin life afresh. Now his only ambition was to become a writer for which he felt he required no formal education. Fortunately, he was put in charge of Anderson Library and soon it became his "retreat and private academy".<sup>21</sup>

In December 1950 Bond passed out of Bishop Cotton School. But he did not get himself enrolled in any educational institution for higher studies. He had no further plans of pursuing formal education. From then on his education was wholly derived not from classroom lectures, but from libraries and second hand bookstores.

By the time Bond was seventeen he had written a large number of articles, stories, essays and poems. He sent his works to different publishing houses, but they were all rejected when the publishers discovered how young their author was. In desperation he began writing as an old man, recalling the experiences of youth. Ironically, the ploy worked and his writings were published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *The Sunday Statesman* .

Despite this early success, Bond could not rid himself of a strong feeling of restlessness. England, the hub of literary world seemed to beckon him. He felt it was the right place for a young writer like him. He visualized establishing personal contacts with renowned writers in England. He dreamt of great opportunities coming his way. He aspired to have his works published and acclaimed by the greatest literary critics of the world.

Thus exuberantly the young lad sailed for England. Little did he then foresee the disappointments that awaited him.

When he landed in the Channel Island where his aunt lived, Bond's dreams died a quick death. He found England very different from the Utopia of his dreams.

Here he hardly met anyone who had time or sympathy for a struggling writer. To make both ends meet, he was compelled to take up one mundane job after another. Thus he drifted aimlessly for more than a year, working for three months as a junior clerk in a solicitor's office, then as an assistant in a travel agency and finally as a junior clerk in the Public Health Department. By then frustration had begun to overpower his psyche. He realized the utter futility of his stay in Jersey. He felt to be a writer he had to move to London.

The three years Bond spent in London were the most restless period of his life. He took up the first job that came his way. In his *Scenes From A Writer's Life : A Memoir* he confessed, "it didn't seem to matter what I did, provided it gave me enough to pay for my board and lodgings and left me free to write on holidays and in the evenings".<sup>22</sup>

He led a nomadic existence, constantly moving from one cheap lodging to another, eating scanty meals at snack bars and small cafes. His irregular lifestyle coupled with his inadequate meals resulted in severe malnutrition and he was afflicted with the Eale's Disease — a rare form of tuberculosis of the eye.

He found pleasure in pain at the thought that he could now count himself "among the 'greats' who had also suffered from this disease in some form or another—Keats, the Brontes, Stevenson, Katherine Mansfield, Ernest Dowson".<sup>23</sup> He felt that if tuberculosis could inspire him to write like them, he would be quite "happy to live with a consumptive eye".<sup>24</sup>

His hopes were belied when a month's treatment at Hampstead General Hospital completely cured him. He no longer had an excuse for not going back to his dreary job of selling photographic parts at Photax. But he devoted his evenings to completing the draft of his first novel *The Room On The Roof* that he had begun in 1952. This novel written under such trying circumstances won him the prestigious John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize in 1957. Also written in his teens was another brilliant novella *Vagrants Of The Valley* which was a continuation of the thought expressed in his first novel.

While in London, Bond met Thanh, a Vietnamese student with whom he developed close friendship. It was Thanh's sudden tragic death that prompted him to write "A Tribute To A Dead Friend", where he paid moving tribute to his dear friend.

Thanh introduced him to Vu-Phuong, a soft-spoken, demure Vietnamese girl. He was enthralled by her delicate manners and captivated by her subtle charms. For the first time in life, he was madly in love and did not feel ashamed of betraying his conscience.

Though Vu-Phuong did not turn down his proposal of marriage, she left the country and he never heard from her again. Dejected by her rejection, Bond sadly remarked: "At twenty-one, we all aspire to be romantic heroes (or heroines), often with disastrous results. It is an awkward age, you either need money or a beautiful figure to get away with it, and I had neither".<sup>25</sup>

He never again asked any other woman to marry him. Like a swift, fleeting shadow, Vu-Phuong entered and departed from his life. But he could never forget her. She appeared again and again in several of his autobiographical works like “Girl From Copenhagen” and “A Tribute To A Dead Friend”. “The Night Train At Deoli” is another work inspired by his highly transient relationship with this elusive and enigmatic girl.

Vu-Phuong’s departure left a great void in his life. Disillusioned by the turn of events, he lost interest in London and began to yearn for familiar environment in India. This is apparent from his remark :“The affection, the camaraderie, the easy-going pleasures of my Dehra friendships, the colour and atmosphere of India, the feeling of belonging—these things I missed”.<sup>26</sup> So, on a cold March morning in 1955, he bade adieu to the land of his forefathers and started back for India.

On reaching his home in Dehra, Bond decided he had “enough of doing uncongenial work and henceforth would make a living from freelance writing”.<sup>27</sup> Thus began the most productive phase in the young writer’s life. Though he received a pittance for his literary works, and lived in great penury, he did not despair or abandon writing. However, in the Seventies the wheel of fortune turned when *The Christian Science Monitor* in Boston, *The Blackwoods* in Edinburgh and *The Asia Magazine* in Hongkong began publishing his articles and stories. His children’s stories too were published and received worldwide acclaim.

In 1986, the Penguin Books published his first novel. In 1996, this publishing company published a special Omnibus edition of his *Complete Short*

*Stories And Novels*, thereby placing him among the ten great Indo-Anglian writers. But the crowning glory of his literary career came in 1999 when he was awarded the *Padma Shri*—a high civilian honour of India for his outstanding writings in English. A twenty-six episode serial based on his short stories was also televised and aired by the Doordarshan throughout India. His novel *A Flight Of Pigeons* was made into a highly acclaimed Hindi film *Junoon* by the reputed director Shyam Benegal. Thus came to fruition Bond's dreams of becoming a writer.

Bond never allowed himself to be led into marital shackles of life. His disenchantment with the institution of marriage stemmed from his parents' disastrous union and their acrimonious separation.

Immunized by his painful childhood, he grew up independent and in full command of his life and emotions. "I think I have always been pretty much in charge of my own life (made easier by the fact of not having any expectations from family of relatives)".<sup>28</sup>

Ironically, the love and affection that he had craved for all his life, came to him not from his own relatives but from a young domestic help with whom he had no blood links. Prem not only took care of his house but also provided him with the emotional anchorage he had so desperately sought from his own people.

Like the family of the recluse, Bond's family expanded as Prem married and brought home his young wife. They had three children. Bond's ties with the family deepened and strengthened with the arrival of each child and before he

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realized it, they had become an indispensable part of his own life. He indulgently watched the children grow under his loving care and attention. For him it was sheer bliss to have found people he could at last call his own. They brought “love and laughter” into his lonely life. He did not “want to be away from them even for a day.”<sup>29</sup> His emotional dependence on this unique family especially the children is apparent from his own confession: “ Raki, Muki, Dolly..... they have grown up under my roof, they are with me now, and God willing, they and their children will be with me when I die. If I finally close this window and leave this town for another place, they will go with me. If they grow up and go away, I will stay near them. That is what love is all about. Staying there prepared to render service”.<sup>30</sup>

Thus Bond lives a quiet life in his cottage in the mountains with his large adopted family. Having weathered the stormy turbulence of his childhood and his early life, he has finally found happiness and contentment in life. Grateful to what life has ultimately given him, he remarks: “Life hasn’t been a bed of roses. And yet, quite often I’ve had roses out of season”.<sup>31</sup>

### *(b) Bond’s Obsession With Childhood.*

Bond recurrently turned to childhood as a treasure trove for his works. Childhood, in fact, became an objective correlative for him. Though “years bring the philosophic mind”,<sup>32</sup> the mature mind cannot deny its roots in childhood. In Bond’s case, childhood was the most sorrowful period of his life. Earlier in this chapter an account has been given of the vicissitudes of the writer’s childhood

days. In this section, I have attempted to analyse how Bond's childhood has stimulated his creative oeuvre.

Relegated to the care of an 'ayah', Ruskin was deprived of healthy emotional interaction and sympathetic concern of his mother from a very early age. His parents' incompatibility added to his woes. Their rancorous relationship and open hostility created such stress in his young mind that every time he witnessed their quarrels, he was filled with terrible apprehension and dread.

As has been already mentioned, by the time he was eight years old, his household disintegrated on account of his mother deserting them. The disconsolate child helplessly watched his home crumbling like the proverbial house of cards, and he was powerless to do anything about it.

He was hardly ten years old, when he received the biggest shock of his life, a shock greater than even his mother's desertion. It came upon him as a bolt from the blue, the devastating news of his father's sudden death. The unexpectedness and the finality of this terrible incident brought him almost to the brink of physical and mental breakdown. It was the darkest period of his life. Of this highly traumatic period and his heart-rending uncertainties, Bond has given bitter abbreviation in "The Funeral". The young protagonist became a facsimile of the writer himself as "he sat in the darkest corner of the room, his face revealing nothing of what he thought and felt. .... Nobody else mattered – neither uncle, nor aunts nor fond grandparents, least of all the mother who was hundreds of miles away with another husband".<sup>33</sup>

His father's death made Bond realize the futility of life. Death, for him became the most horrendous reality of childhood. It unexpectedly terminated the only loving relationship he had known in his young turbulent life. The fragility of life and death with its associated tragedy thus became a recurrent theme in his writings.

Young Madhu in "The Story Of Madhu", fell prey to the hydra-headed monster as she was just blossoming into a young maid. Oblivious of the dreams and aspirations of this little orphan, death heartlessly ended her life at a time when it had just been irradiated by the warmth and affection of the protagonist in whom she found the father she had never known. Powerless to withstand death, she helplessly watched herself being sucked into its demonic jaws. It concluded her short life with a finality that left the distraught protagonist wishing that he had met her earlier.

Death again wrought havoc in the lives of the youngsters in "The Guardian Angel" and "The Funeral". It snatched away their parents when they were least expecting it. The protagonist of "The Guardian Angel" was hardly six years old, when death intervened to change his life forever. He woke up one morning to discover to his horror that death had stealthily crept in at night and had taken his mother away from him. Benumbed by this unexpected turn of events, he felt abandoned and lost.

Having endured this soul-shattering experience himself, Bond understood the fears and uncertainties of the young child, and gave heart-rending expression to the little orphan's grief in the lines:

“My mother had married an Englishman who died while I was still a baby. She herself was not a strong woman and fought a losing battle with tuberculosis while bringing me up.

My sixth birthday was approaching when she died, in the middle of the night, without my being aware of it. And I woke up to experience all the terrors of abandonment”.<sup>34</sup>

His parents’ separation followed by his father’s untimely death convinced young Bond that loving relationships do not endure in this world. Like Hardy’s protagonists, he discovered that whenever he “pursued a loved one, that person proved elusive”.<sup>35</sup>

His mother’s insensitivity and tactlessness only heightened this belief. He bitterly resented her indifference to his father’s death. For he had seen, how, despite their estrangement, Aubrey Bond had never ceased to love her.

In a way, Ruskin held his mother solely responsible for his father’s death. This is apparent from his dialogue with her;

“.....your father didn’t know how to enjoy himself. That’s why we quarreled so much. And finally separated. You’ve always blamed me for leaving him, haven’t you ?

I was very small at the time. You left us suddenly. My father had to look after me, and it wasn’t easy for him. He was very sick”.<sup>36</sup>

But young Bond was storing up much more than unhappiness. He developed an uncanny alertness to derive inspiration from his adversities. By the time he went to live with his mother and his stepfather, he was no longer a normal young child. He had by then acquired a maturity beyond his years. This is apparent from his own confession:

“Had I grown up with other children I might have developed a taste for schoolboy anarchy, but, in sharing my father’s loneliness after his separation from my mother, I had turned into a pre-mature adult”.<sup>37</sup>

As already mentioned in the previous section, his mother’s indifference coupled with his stepfather’s coldness made Ruskin feel totally unloved and unwanted in his new home. A highly sensitive lad, he could not rid himself of the feeling that he was alone in the world. He “felt distanced from the family and could find happiness only in the homes of friends or between the covers of books”.<sup>38</sup>

This early disaffection encouraged him to become independent. He remembered his father’s saying that “the strongest man in the world is he who stands alone”.<sup>39</sup> He felt he too was capable of standing up without any support. His feelings are clear from his candid statement:

“Although at times I have tottered, or come down with a loud thump, I think I have managed to maintain my independence..... both as a writer and as an individual”.<sup>40</sup>

Though youth is a period of frivolity and irresponsibility, Bond, deprived of the guidance of his parents, appeared in many ways to be highly responsible. Yet he could not develop an insular attitude towards his own kith and kin. While commenting on his stepfather's indifference towards him, he sadly remarked, "He never had a harsh word for me. Sometimes I wish he had!"<sup>41</sup>

Lonely and hurt, he withdrew further into himself. One cannot but agree with R. Atteth's remarks that, "very few writers understand the fear of childhood the way Ruskin Bond does, their insecurity with the dark, their eagerness for the familiar".<sup>42</sup>

As has been already mentioned before, his stepfather's unstable financial status coupled with his reckless lifestyle often brought the family to the very brink of financial bankruptcy. On one occasion when the entire family was evicted from their rented house, young Bond was aghast and mortified. This was totally a new experience for him. He could never have dreamt of a similar situation when his father was alive. Humiliated and hurt, he sought to escape from this bleakness by taking refuge within the secure walls of his boarding school in Simla.

For the first time in his life Bond was confronted with poverty and want. While childhood is the most carefree period of life, Bond's childhood was a period of stress, trauma, deprivation and unhappiness. Though his childhood was the most difficult period of his life, these early years proved to be of immense value to him as a writer. It brought him in close contact with the harsh realities and gave him a first hand knowledge of life. This early exposure to reality provided him with

inspiration for many of his haunting stories like, “The Story Of Madhu”, “The Untouchable”, “The Woman On Platform No 8”, “The Guardian Angel” and “The Funeral”.

In Bond’s works, the train became a vibrant symbol, wrecking and building human relationship, educating and disillusioning men as it sped on towards its destination. In “The Eyes Have It”, the blind protagonist bewitched by the voice of his companion travelling in the same compartment tried to cement his friendship with her. Afraid that his physical deformity may come between him and the girl, he made a “pretence of studying the landscape”. ‘Have you noticed’, I ventured, ‘that the trees seem to be moving while we seem to be standing still?’

‘That always happens’, she said. ‘Do you see any animals?’

‘No’, I answered quite confidently. I knew that there were hardly any animals left in the forests near Dehra. I turned from the window and faced the girl and for a while set in silence.

‘You have an interesting face’ I remarked. I was becoming quite daring and it was a safe remark. Few girls can resist flattery”.<sup>43</sup>

Oblivious to his feelings, the train sped on and soon brought to a close the memorable encounter with this beautiful girl. “ ‘Goodbye’, the girl said. She was standing very close to me. So close that the perfume from her hair was tantalizing. I wanted to raise my hand and touch her hair but she moved away. Only the scent of perfume still lingered where she stood”.<sup>44</sup>

She alighted from the train and was soon lost in the milling crowd. He knew he would never meet her again but her memory would continue to haunt him for many days to come.

While the speeding train withered relationships in the bud, the railway platform became the womb that gave birth to many beautiful and memorable associations. In "The Woman On Platform No 8", young Arun, in the course of one of his numerous solitary sojourns from boarding school to his home, met a kind stranger on the railway platform. Seeing the lonely little boy, she came to him, and showered him with such maternal love and affection that momentarily she alleviated his misery and desolation. He forgot his loneliness and began to confide in her. She gave him a patient hearing. Soon an unbreakable bond of friendship and mutual trust was established between the benevolent stranger and the young boy.

Through Arun, Bond reflected his own desolation and desperate yearning for company in the course of his long and lonely train journeys from the boarding school to his home in Dehra. In this connection it is difficult to resist the temptation of quoting R. Atteth once again: "The night train was once real which hooted its lonely cry and streamed into the empty night of a railway station with a lonely school boy on it".<sup>45</sup>

Young Bond was so intensely lonely that he turned to nature for companionship and emotional succour. Unlike Wordsworth, who in his early years felt threatened by the menacing presence of nature, Ruskin thrived in nature's

benevolent company. He made nature the sole custodian of his conscience and his soul.

“The trees stand watch over my day to day life.....I have no one else to answer. So I live and work under the generous and highly principled supervision of the trees..... ‘What would they think?’ I ask myself on many occasion. ‘What would they like me to do?’ And I do what I think they would approve of most!

Well, its nice to have someone to turn to.....”<sup>46</sup>

So from a tender age, Bond developed a unique rapport with nature. He discovered the trees gave him “ a feeling of security, as well as privacy and a calm heaven”.<sup>47</sup> His works are permeated by his great love and admiration for nature . He found it easier to establish camaraderie with nature than with human beings. While totally uninhibited in the midst of nature, he was extremely shy in his dealings with man.

His own reserved nature together with the social ostracism he faced from European and Anglo-Indian communities on account of his mother, made it difficult for him to acquire friends from identical background.

Isolated and alone, he turned to the servants for companionship. The poor simple workers were only too willing to be his friends. Dhuki, the gardener in “A Job Well Done” and “The Room Of Many Colours”, Bansi, the tonga-driver in “My First Love”, the young sweeper boy in “The Untouchable” and numerous other characters like them that one comes across in Bond’s short stories have all

been inspired by his early memories and association with this lower class of society.

His close contact with the underprivileged and exploited class made him feel their deprivation, suffering and hardships beneath their veneer of placidity. He observed how poverty and want robbed the beleaguered children of their most precious possession---their childhood. Often forced to earn their livelihood from a very early age, these unfortunate youngsters were jettisoned from babyhood to premature adulthood. Bond's sympathy for these oppressed and under privileged children is apparent in his brilliant portrayal of young Bisnu in "The Dust In The Mountain", Mohan in "The Visitor", the sweeper-boy in "The Untouchable" and numerous other characters like them.

Like him, these children waged an unequal battle with fate, which wrecked their childhood happiness and often pushed them to the very brink of nervous breakdown. They fought valiantly against this malevolent destiny. Endowed with Bond's basic optimism, they were confident that the dark clouds which cast long shadows over their lives, would soon disperse and the benevolent and life sustaining sun would shine upon them again.

As mentioned previously, Bond was a loner and had hardly any friends, Omar was the only boy in school with whom he could establish mental rapport. Perhaps their similar nature and identical backgrounds drew them close to each other.

Like him, Omar was a quiet and withdrawn child, who had lost his father in a tribal conflict in the Frontier beyond Peshawar. But the partition of India following Independence brought to a close his friendship with this young boy. The communal riots that flared up all over the country after the partition of Bengal and Punjab had its effect in this remote Public school in Simla. For security reasons, all the Muslim boys studying in the school had to leave for their home in Pakistan. Omar was among them.

Significantly, the eight years Bond spent in The Bishop Cotton School in Simla remained only a cherished memory. It could hardly provide him with inspiration or materials for his creative works. This typically British Public School was in total discordance with the harsh Indian setting. It set such elevated standards that neither the teachers nor the students could uphold them. According to Bond, “the traditions even in prep school such as ragging and caning, compulsory games and daily chapel attendance, prefects larger than life, and Honours Boards for everything from School Captaincy to choir membership”<sup>48</sup> though aimed at inculcating leadership qualities, could hardly prepare the young boys for the tough practical battles of life. So it had “nothing to hide. Worse, from the writer’s point of view, there was nothing to reveal.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus it is hardly surprising that Bond’s few good friends like Ranbir, Bhim, Haripal, Dipi, Somi, Chotu and the Lals became acquainted with him after he had left school. While the Lals appeared as the Kapoors in “The Room On The Roof, and Haripal appeared in the guise of Suraj in “The Fight”, the others found their

way into the pages of his *Scenes From A Writer's Life : A Memoir* where he gave nostalgically sentimental accounts of them.

All through the traumatic early years of his life, Bond yearned for a normal and carefree childhood. In many of his children's stories, he gave a "free rein to his imagination" and projected the unremitted joys of childhood. He presented endearing pictures of homes teeming with people who loved and cared for each other. He portrayed dwellings vibrant with laughter and happiness.

In his "Grandfather's Stories" like "A Crow In The House", "The Conceited Python" and many other works, he created a home. he often wishfully dreamt of — a home with indulgent grandparents, doting parents, affectionate aunts and uncles, a home where a child was free to pursue his own interests and keep weird pets without the fear of punishment.

Of his own grandparents, he sadly remarked: "Calcutta Granny, I had seen only once. My maternal grandfather had died when I was just a year old. So I'd missed the companionship and attention that grandparents can often give".<sup>50</sup>

Yet, his stories are replete with affectionate and caring grandparents who thrived in their grandchildren's company and often became little children themselves as they indulged in childish intrigues and pranks for the amusement of their grandchildren. All his fictitious grandfathers have been modelled on his maternal grandfather, who from all accounts was a wonderful person. Everyone

who had known him had a kind word for him. Bond's regret at not having known this unique individual is apparent from his wishful remarks:

“Uncle Bertie told me that grandfather was a quiet, reclusive sort of person who never lost his temper with anyone. His favourite pastime was watching jugglers and street acrobats! I wish I had known him”.<sup>51</sup>

His maternal grandmother was the very antithesis of his grandfather. A quiet and reserved woman, she did not believe in any show of affection. She hardly had any special fondness for her grandchildren. She did not dote on them or crave their company. Her formidable nature prevented young Ruskin from developing any kinship with her.

It was Miss Kellner, her elderly tenant who became Bond's inspiration for portrayal of the loving and indulgent grandmothers that one comes across in “The Photograph”, “The Angry River” and numerous other stories.

These idyllic pictures acquire special significance when viewed in the context of the writer's deprivation of such filial love and affection from his grandparents during his early years. One cannot but be touched by the heart-rending pathos in his remarks: “In some of my children's stories I have written about fun-loving grandfathers and doting grandmothers, but this was just wishful thinking on my part”.<sup>52</sup>

Bond's unusual upbringing, his trials and tribulations, his struggles and sacrifices and the momentous events of childhood that altered his life and his

thinking, became an inexhaustible fund from which he drew materials for his works that have almost become classics in modern times. One cannot but agree with his remarks : “..... those who have had normal childhoods seldom remember much about them; nor do they have much insight into the world of children. Some of us are born sensitive. And if, on top of that we are pulled about in different directions (both emotionally and physically) we might just end up becoming writers.”<sup>53</sup>

Bond’s works which took their colours from the personal events of his life, especially his childhood became inseparable from the circumstances in which they came into being.

As in Dickens and Lamb, in Bond’s case too the biographical incidents, especially of his early years have been closely interwoven in his prose and poetry. His writings are therefore influenced by his remembrance of the past – a past marked by the presence of sorrow and tragedy but beautified by a high human affection and sympathy and a spirit of endurance that has given Ruskin Bond a special place among the Indo – Anglian writers.

### ***( c ) Role Of Women In Bond’s Life And His Works.***

Women have played a very important role in shaping Bond’s life and his works. Deserted by his mother at a very early age and divested of his father’s company shortly afterwards, on account of latter’s death, he was deprived of meaningful human relationships during the most crucial period of his growth and development.

Psychoanalysts are of the opinion that the foundation of the child's personality, behaviour and attitudes have their genesis in the early parent-child interaction within the home. A child being separated from the father has difficulty in establishing satisfactory social relationships and experiences high levels of anxiety. He lacks warmth and affection except for his mother.

But what happens to the child who is denied the love and sympathetic concern of his mother?

Bowlbey and his associate psychologists are of the view that "maternal coldness" or maternal separation based upon family conflicts or child rejection has a damaging effect on the child's psychological growth and adjustment. Such a child becomes socially withdrawn and depressed.

It is obvious that the insecurity, loneliness and the sense of isolation that Bond experienced as a child was a manifestation of his psychological frustration on account of parental deprivation. The "minimum mothering"<sup>55</sup> he received as an infant made him instinctively turn to his 'ayah' for emotional support. He made her his surrogate mother and sought from her the tender love and affectionate companionship he failed to find from his own mother. So great was his loyalty and devotion to his governess that he found virtue in every thing she did and became fiercely protective towards her. This is evident from his remarks:

“.....when one of my parent’s guests called her ugly without really taking a proper look at her, I would exclaim, ‘No, she is beautiful !’ The vehemence of my reply would disconcert the guests and embarrass my parents”.<sup>55</sup>

Though only a paid servant, the ayah, a sensitive individual understood the child’s dilemma. She adored him and was totally devoted to him. She treated him with such tenderness that it compensated for his mother’s aloofness. She shielded him from everyone including his parents. Happy and secure in her company, he thrived in her munificence. Like a doting mother she indulged him in every possible way. Sometimes, on his insistence, she even joined him in the bathtub when his parents were not in the vicinity. This close physical proximity worked wonders for the little child’s psyche as is evident from his own remarks :

“We would wallow together in the long marble bath tub ..... She scrubbed and soaped me, while I relaxed and enjoyed the sensation of her rough hands moving over my back and my tummy”.<sup>56</sup>

She often punished him for his errant behaviour and he welcomed her punishments. He knew her admonitions would be followed by remorseful tears. Overcome by a feeling of guilt, she would soon gather him in her arms and smother him with hugs and kisses. So, he did not mind being punished by her again and again. Her bounteous love made him feel very special indeed.

He lost her when she fell in love with Bansi, the local tonga-driver. Her subsequent marriage with the tonga-driver took her away from him forever.

Dismayed by the news of her departure, he could not understand why she wanted to stay with Bansi rather than with him. He was pained by the thought that she did not realize how much he needed her. Highly aggrieved he felt she had betrayed the faith and trust he had reposed on her. His frustration and grief at her departure is evident from his heart-rending abbreviation in "My First Love".

"Ayah tossed her bedding and a few belongings into the tonga, and then came to say goodbye to me. But I had hidden myself in the jasmine bushes, and though she called and looked for me, I would not emerge. Sadly, she climbed into the tonga ..... at last unable to bear my misery any longer, I came out from behind the bushes and ran after the tonga, waving to her. Bansi reined the horses, and Ayah got down and gathered me up in her arms; and when the tonga finally took her away, there was a dazzling smile on her sweet and gentle face --- the face of the lover whom I was never to see again".<sup>57</sup>

As already mentioned before, Bond's maternal grandmother, was a reticent woman, not given to any undue show of affection. An introvert, she lived alone and considered her grandchildren mere intruders into her privacy. She lived a quiet life on her own terms and did not enjoy the company of people, especially her own relatives. Describing her strange lifestyle, Bond remarked:

"She sat alone in the evenings playing Patience, a card game which does not require another person. Her tenant Miss Kellner, did the same but she was a cripple and could not move from her chair. It never occurred to either of them to play each

other at cards, though Miss Kellner did occasionally go out .....to bridge parties in other European or Anglo-Indian households".<sup>58</sup>

Grandmother's cold reserve discouraged any familiarity with her, so young Ruskin turned to the warm and humane Miss Kellner and found in her the ideal grandmother he often visualized in his imagination.

During his school vacations, on the pretext of visiting his grandmother, he often went to visit the lonely old Miss Kellner. Grateful for his company, she welcomed him, played card games with him and loaded him with 'goodies' from her well-stocked larder. A crippled spinster, she often unburdened herself to him. And he did not betray her trust. He visited her not only because he enjoyed her company but also because he sensed her terrible loneliness. In Miss Kellner, he found a friend and confidant to whom he could go whenever he was hungry, lonely or depressed. She never disappointed him.

It is ironical that despite his own bitter experiences, Bond does not display any trace of resentment or hostility towards women. On the contrary, he idealized women and presented quite endearing pictures of womanhood. Most of his female characters have been endowed with admirable qualities and sublime motherly tenderness. They are gentle, self-effacing and self-denying individuals. It is apparent that by creating such idealistic characters like Wang Chei's wife in "The Most Potent Medicine Of All", Aunt Mariam in "The Guardian Angel", the benevolent stranger in "The Woman On Platform No 8", Bond has subconsciously tried to obliterate the corrosive effect of the women in his own life.

Wang Chei's wife stands in sharp contrast to his own mother, whose relentless pursuit of her own happiness, impervious to the pain and suffering she thereby caused, not only unsettled her own life but also wrought havoc in the lives of her husband and her minor children. Unlike his mother, Wang Chei's wife is the epitome of unstinted love and selfless devotion. With a love that defies logic, she prepares a potion out of her own flesh and blood to cure her husband's illness. Confident this potion prescribed by Lu Fei, the renowned physician would relieve his suffering, she mutilates her own body to cure her husband.

A comparison between Bond's mother and this simple woman again becomes inevitable. His mother's love for his father could not withstand the test of time. She left him, according to her own admission, because "he did not know how to enjoy himself".<sup>59</sup> Wang Chei's wife, on the other hand, willingly sacrifices her life to cure her husband's simple disease. This rustic nameless woman totally subsumes her own identity with her husband's name and personality.

Her immense love for her husband had so clouded her logic that it had prompted her to make a potion out of her own blood. She voluntarily laid down her life for him because she loved him "with the same intensity as on the day they first fell in love, twenty years ago".<sup>60</sup> Through this simple Chinese woman, Bond gives expression to his idea of unparalleled love, fidelity and devotion that he looked for in his mother, but in vain.

In "The Guardian Angel", he pays glorious tribute to another form of love—maternal love. Here he shows how motherhood bestows a peculiar dignity on even a foster mother like Aunt Mariam. Like Wang Chei's wife, she too becomes an embodiment of matchless love.

Humiliated and disowned by her family on account of her dubious profession, Mariam arrives on the scene shortly after her sister's death and takes charge of her disconsolate son. She ungrudgingly takes the little orphan to her own house, cares for him and brings him up with such tender care that he soon forgets the trauma of his mother's death. Her "warmth, worldliness and carefree chatter"<sup>61</sup> restores his confidence and she fills the emotional void left by his parents' death.

So great was his attachment to his aunt that every night before he fell asleep, his aunt would kiss him, very softly, on his closed eyelids. He never fell asleep until he "had received this phantom kiss".<sup>62</sup> The little child loved sleeping with his aunt for it gave him a tremendous feeling of security, and well-being. He resented the nights when his aunt had male visitors and he had to sleep in the adjoining room. He knew she could not do without them for they were her only source of income.

He had implicit faith in her. Her lax morals and "nocturnal visitors" could not reduce even an iota of his regard for her. Beneath her veneer of worldliness the child had glimpsed his real aunt—a person full of warmth, tenderness and generosity.

A woman with a great soul, Aunt Mariam is one of Bond's most endearing characters. A spinster, without a family of her own, she provides a home to her orphaned nephew and brings him up as her own son. But when other relatives connive to deprive her of the custody of the child, she gives him up without a murmur of protest. Like a typical self-effacing mother, she realizes that in her company her "ladla" would have everything he desired, except respectability, which she could never give him. She snaps her links with him so that he can avail of the best chances in life. She is indeed an inspiring character.

It is interesting to note that in his works Bond presents a variety of women characters. Though he eulogizes matchless love and unparalleled devotion, he also portrays the different facets of passionate, erotic love.

In "Love Is A Sad Song", the protagonist's obsessive love for Sushila is reminiscent of Bond's similar love for Vu-Phuong. This love is characterized by the same ardency and fervour that characterized Bond's love for Vu-Phuong. But like Bond's love for the Vietnamese girl, the protagonist's love for Sushila, is not based on strong foundations and is therefore predestined to disappointment. Vu-Phuong married a rich American and drifted away from Bond's life. Sushila likewise marries the elderly Mr. Dayal, and the lovers lose contact till six years later they suddenly come face to face in a dilapidated hotel in Shamli. When the lovers meet again in "Time Stops At Shamli", they are both older and wiser not only in years but also in experience. When the protagonist meets Sushila's husband for the first time, he is shocked and appalled by her unbelievable compromise. This

is apparent from his remarks : “I could think of nothing she had in common with Mr. Dayal. I felt her charm and attractiveness and warmth could not have been appreciated, or even noticed by that curiously distracted man. He was much older than her..... He was obviously not her choice, but her parents, and so far they were childless.....Children could have made up for the absence of passion or was there passion in Satish Dayal ?”<sup>63</sup>

He urges Sushila to break away from this loveless bondage. He offers to take her away so that she can escape from this stifling relationship. But with wisdom beyond her years, Sushila rejects his plans outright:

“What happiness would we have living in the hiding from everyone we knew.....I am always here and you can come and see me, and nobody will be unhappy by it. But take me away and we will only have regrets”.<sup>64</sup>

The protagonist understands and appreciates the logic behind her statement and he leaves Shamli without Sushila. Gradually with the passage of time, Sushila, like Vu-Phuong becomes a distant dream. He realizes, like Bond, that such beautiful women are best left alone. This prompts him to remark : “unattainable, Sushila would always be more bewitching and beautiful than if she were mine”.<sup>65</sup>

One cannot help feeling that throughout the story of Sushila, Bond echoes his own sentiments about Vu-Phuong, the emotions so beautifully expressed in one of his poems :

“But I will wait until bright parrots bring  
 Shri!l portents of another spring;  
 And I will love you with the same sweet pain,  
 If you and summer care to come again”.<sup>66</sup>

Bond’s female characters stand out clear and distinct from one another. He shows a great power of differentiation in portraying them. Though he often idealizes woman, his portrayal of women is conditioned by his keen sense of the realities of life. He displays an amazing depth of understanding of the human nature on the whole and the feminine psyche in particular. Especially noteworthy is his portrayal of the complete facets of woman in general and the Indian woman in particular.

Bond’s women like Sushila (in ‘Love Is A Sad Song’) and Kamla (in ‘A Love Of Long Ago’) are no hardened logicians, nor are they frigid unemotional robots. They are young, sensitive and alive with emotions. Yet, they enter into loveless marriages arranged by their elders. Despite their incompatibility with their husbands, they are willing to withstand a lifetime enslavement rather than face the social ostracism that accompanies a woman following a failed marriage. Weighed down by their oppressive marriages, they grow old before their time. Like most women, they place the greatest importance on their economic security. They are unwilling to barter it even for their own personal happiness.

So seventeen years old Kamla resigns herself to spending her life with her aged husband chosen by her family. Similarly, ensconced in the cocoon of a secure marriage, Sushila refuses to elope with her former lover. She is ready to withstand a hopelessly ill-adjusted union as the natural "price of security".<sup>67</sup> With his deep insight into the Indian feminine psyche, Bond realizes that in the ultimate analysis a woman values security more than love.

While ill-matched arranged marriage is the fate that often awaits most Indian women, the situation is aggravated by the Joint Family system, so widely prevalent in India. Bond realizes that the joint family becomes an impediment to a couple's enjoying the fullness of each other's company and establishing a relationship based on dependence and reciprocity. Denied the requisite privacy, they hardly get to understand each other and remain virtual strangers for the greater part of their lives. The wife is reduced to a subservient position and has hardly any say in family matters. Thus he portrays Sushila's mother as a victim of this draconian family system. Suppressed by her mother-in-law's tyrannical ways, she is reduced to the position of an unpaid servant with a slightly superior status. She is totally marginalized. She is not allowed to have any say in the running of the family. She is even denied the right of deciding the welfare of her children. One cannot but sympathise with her when she pathetically remarks:

"..... I don't have much say in the family. I do not have any money, you see. It depends on others, especially her grandmother".<sup>68</sup>

Without income or any source of livelihood, Sushila's mother is totally dependent on the big joint family. She realizes her vulnerability and stoically accepts her subservient position in the family hierarchy. She hardly has any choice in the matter. Bond's sympathy for such unfortunate women is evident in the lines:

"I warmed towards her----towards that simple, straightforward, uneducated woman (she had never been to school, and could not read or write) who might still have been young and pretty had her circumstances been different".<sup>69</sup>

It is interesting to note that while Bond idealized the Indian woman, he often presented harsh details about the younger generation of Western women. While giving a realistic picture of their lifestyle in India, he has portrayed them as vain, shallow, frivolous, often sex-obsessed and given to alcoholism. He has depicted them as living in a closed world from which they refuse to come out. He has presented them as insensitive characters, who do not try to understand the problems in India or look at India from an Indian point of view. The world of these women revolves round parties and gossip, their main occupation being dancing, frivolity and flirting.

Thus, Miss Bun in "Miss Bun And Others" is the epitome of frivolity and opportunism. She falls in love with a professor and elopes with him. But her love for him wanes swiftly. She tires of him within two days of their elopement. Unlike Kamla and Sushila, who cling to a loveless marriage, Miss Bun deserts her professor the moment she realizes she does not love him anymore. By the third day

she is back in her house, after “having first made him buy her three dress pieces, two pairs of sandals, a bottle of scent and a satchel for her school books”.<sup>70</sup>

Equally shallow is Miss Deeds, the English school-teacher in “Time Stops At Shamli”. An alcoholic and in perpetual debt, she becomes a major liability for Satish Dayal and his hotel staff, on account of her drunken behaviour and non-payment of hotel bills. A woman of lax morals, she is not averse to spending her nights with strangers. This is apparent from the lines :

“Miss Deeds in the center of the room was executing a tango on her own. It was obvious that she had been drinking heavily. We took an arm each and helped Miss Deeds, feet dragging across the room. We got her to her room and onto her bed. When we were about to withdraw, she said ‘Don’t go my dear, stay with me.....’ With my hand on the door knob, I said, ‘which one of us?’..... You dance divinely, Mr. Writer. Do stay with me. Daya Ram can stay too if he likes.”<sup>71</sup>

Miss Deeds is the facsimile of a woman of similar name whom Bond had encountered while residing with his mother at Green Hotel. In his *Scenes From A Writer’s Life : A Memoir*, he contemptuously describes Mrs Deeds and her seventeen year old son as “ the flotsam of Empire, jettisoned by the very people who had brought them into existence”.<sup>72</sup>

Equally deprecatory is Bond’s delineation of the character of Charlotte Taylor in “The Good Old Days”. A vain and frivolous woman, she rejects many suitors in her youth. When she finally decides to settle down, she finds there is

none willing to marry a middle-aged spinster. Engulfed in a morass of self-pity, she starts drinking heavily. Like Miss Deeds, she becomes an alcoholic and loses all sense of propriety. Bond's disdain for such weak-willed women is apparent from his derisive remark :

“All over the place she was when she was drunk. Lost her powers of discrimination. She even took up with a barber !”<sup>73</sup>

Thus in his works, Bond has analysed various classes of women but from a purely subjective point of view. While ventilating his prejudice against certain women, he expresses his admiration for most of them. His own unfortunate experiences in life could not embitter his outlook on women mainly because of his compassionate nature, his cheerful disposition and his ability to take a sane and balanced view of things. There is an element of pathos in most of his female characters. He has portrayed them with such sympathy and tenderness that one cannot but infer that he has wilfully endowed them with qualities that he failed to find in women in his own life.

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