

Chapter III

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TREATMENT OF THE JUVENILE IN BOND

“Growing up has always been a difficult process for me and I gave up trying many years ago. I decided that there was little point in becoming an adult if I could remain a child and make a living.

I think I have remained young because I have always had children around me. Not just children in my own family but other children too. I love to watch them grow. Adolescence is a fascinating period and I keep going back to it again and again in my fiction.”--- Ruskin Bond in *The Rain In The Mountains*.

Popular aphorisms like “ The child is the father of man” document our belief in the importance of childhood experiences to the personality development and behavioural pattern of mature individuals. George G. Thompson has rightly remarked, “The principles of psychoanalysis, criminology and psychosomatic medicine emphasize the importance of childhood experiences”.¹

Ruskin Bond is among the few Anglo-Indian writers who has delved deep into the child psychology and has taken childhood and adolescent experiences as the essence and theme of most of his moving short stories. Therefore the objective of this chapter is to examine how childhood figures in Bond. It specially aims at highlighting the traumas of his beleaguered children for whom childhood becomes a curse, who grow surmounting terrible adversities but gaining valuable experience.

Bond's children are spontaneous, natural and trusting. But with "earthly freight", their childhood innocence wanes. Their journey from innocence to awareness is often so rapid that it leaves them baffled and bewildered.

In his proletarian stories like "The Dust In The Mountains" and "The Untouchable", Bond dwells on the predicament of children belonging to the underprivileged and working class. Caught in the fierce struggle to eke out a living for themselves and for their impoverished families, his harassed youngsters are cheated out of their childhood and catapulted to premature adulthood. These miniature adults when subjected to inhuman labour remind us of Dick in Dickens's "Oliver Twist". Like him they acquire "limbs like those of an old man". Unwittingly they become victims of a deplorable nexus of our capitalistic society. Their innocence and naivety are exploited and they are made to work for a pittance for long hours under inhuman conditions. Their trauma reminds us of similar ordeals faced by Dickens' child protagonists, for whom the factory whistle was as horrific as death itself. These children, like Lamb's little "chimney sweepers", are often forced into sub-human existence. Their childhood is lost in the oppressive soot and fumes of their workplace, where they are engaged in a terrible tussle to earn their livelihood.

"The Dust In The Mountains" is a comprehensive account of pain, suffering and struggle punctuated by rare moments of hope and relief. The focal point of the story is young Bishnu and the pathos of his situation is sustained by Bond's

emphasis on the young lad's utter helplessness against the merciless rhythm of society.

Besides Bishnu, the story also narrates the harrowing experiences of two other young boys in the hands of different exploiters. The oppressors change but the oppressed remain the same till Bishnu meets a saviour in Pritam Singh, an old truck driver and his outlook towards life changes.

Bishnu's nightmare begins when acute poverty compels him to abandon his native hills and seek employment at a tea-stall in a cinema hall in Mussoorie. His subsequent experiences turn the tea-stall into a veritable hell where he is condemned to a sub-human existence. He becomes the butt of vulgar jokes and horrid humiliations by unsympathetic customers. His misery is accentuated when he is assaulted by a college student on whose shoes he accidentally spills some tea. Complaining brings no redressal. His employer only remarks , "The customer is always right. You should have got out of the way in time".²

Bali and Chitru, the other two youngsters working at the tea-stall fare no better. Bali tries to supplement his meagre earnings by sticking posters all over the city at night, after the closure of the tea-stall. Homeless, the young lads take shelter in the foyer of the cinema hall , where they are exposed to the inclement weather of the hills. The utter hopelessness of their situation is evident in the lines :

"The cinema hall is carefully locked up after the last show so that they (the young lads) could not settle down in the expensive seats as they would have liked !

They had to sleep in the foyer, near the ticket office, where they were at the mercy of the icy Himalayan winds.”³

Their deplorable plight is reminiscent of the homeless labourer lying huddled on the pavement in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie*, “pillowing his head on his arm, shrinking into himself as if he were afraid to occupy too much space”.⁴

These young boys also live under constant threat of losing their jobs. The month of September finds them without employment as the cinema hall closes down for the winter.

While Bali goes to Delhi to seek his fortune, Bishnu and Chittru try to find work at a limestone quarry. Chittru, being bigger and older is immediately employed as a labourer at the quarry. Bishnu becomes aware of his terrible predicament when he is rejected by the quarry foreman on account of his puny size. Dismissing his pleas for employment, the foreman contemptuously remarks:

“You’re too small. You won’t be able to break stones or lift those heavy rocks and load them into the trucks. Be off boy. Find something else to do”.⁵

Totally disillusioned, he turns back towards Mussoorie rejecting the job in the labourer’s canteen. He feels the washing and cleaning he did during his previous job is enough to last him a lifetime. In this state of utter dejection he encounters his Messiah in Pritam Singh, an elderly truck driver who offers him the job of his truck cleaner.

By now Bishnu is acutely conscious of the sinister workings of the class system. He realizes the root cause of his misery and humiliation is his poverty. He is overwhelmed by the humanity of the old Sikh who transcends the master-servant divide and treats him as his equal. For the first time in his life, Bishnu comes in contact with a compassionate employer. It fills him with a new gusto for work. His buoyant juvenile spirit now being reawakened, he mocks at the miserly contractor, who apprehending payment, stops him from helping Chittru load the truck.

“Don’t expect to be paid for helping”, said the contractor for whom every rupee spent was a rupee off his profits. ‘Don’t worry’ said Bishnu, ‘I don’t work for contractors. I work for friends’.⁶

From Bishnu’s behaviour it is apparent that dignity and nobility are not the monopoly of the rich. The poor have their greatness as well. By making a poor, deprived child like Bishnu the hero of his story, Bond has proved conclusively that the struggles of a poor waif can be as engrossing a subject as any great epic.

In the Indian social scene class consciousness is inextricably linked with caste consciousness. Bond’s children often become the victims of this hydra-headed monster. It vitiates their childhood and eats into the very fibre of our society. Despite innumerable legislations for its removal, the caste system still continues to hold our people in its vicious grip, resulting in the segregation and subjugation of the lower castes.

“The Untouchable” written when Bond was only sixteen years old, records a day in the life of a young sweeper boy, vividly projecting the pathos of his situation. It presents the picture of degradation and helplessness while emphasizing on the need for redemption and change.

The sprightly sweeper boy is rebuffed by other children as he belongs to the inferior caste. He is treated as the scum of the earth. His very proximity defiles them.

For the ten year old Bond, cocooned in his shell of loneliness due to his father’s hospitalization, “solitude is no bliss”. Yet he does not dare to flout the social norms and seek the companionship of the sweeper boy. The warnings of his neighbours ring loud and clear in his ears : “Don’t play with the sweeper boy. He is unclean. Don’t touch him. Remember he is a servant”.⁷

Due to the terrible mental bias afflicting our caste-ridden society no amount of cleanliness can rid the poor sweeper boy of the taboo of untouchability. Bond brilliantly grasps the irony of his situation when he remarks :

“The sweeper boy all day he pattered up and down between the house and the water tank with the bucket clanging against his knees. Back and forth with a wide, friendly smile..... At every trip to the water tank he bathed and returned dripping and glistening from head to toe.

I (Bond) dripped in sweat. It was below my station to bathe in the tank where the gardener, water-carrier, cooks, ayahs, sweepers and their children

collected. I was the son of a 'sahib' and convention ruled that I did not play with a servant child".⁸

Here Bond stresses not only on casteism but also on the pronounced class consciousness of the Indian society which has been influenced by values inherited from its colonial past and also those brought in by the forces of materialism. Thus the affluent classes take a snobbish pride in segregating themselves from the less fortunate working class. So despite his friendly overtures, the sweeper boy bearing the cross of a servant and an outcaste, finds himself totally isolated. In many ways he reminds us of Bakha, the young sweeper boy in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, before the reality of his situation overtakes him. Like Bakha he is unresentful and duty-conscious, never shirking his work. Despite being repeatedly snubbed by Bond, he ungrudgingly comes to guard his house at night.

The terrible storm that breaks out in the middle of the night is purgatorial. It purges young Bond's mind of all misconceptions and misapprehensions. Alone in his bedroom with the fierce storm raging outside, Bond starts hallucinating. In the darkness terrible phantoms swim across his eyes, till soaked in cold sweat he rushes towards the kitchen, seeking solace in the sweeper boy's company. He finds the young outcaste sitting quietly in a corner of the dark room. Conditioned by circumstances, this young boy has learned to passively accept everything--be it physical storm or mental upheaval caused by abuses and insults. His plight is touchingly described in the lines :

“The boy sat on the bare floor. ‘What is happening ?’ he asked. The lightning flashed, and his teeth and eyes flashed with it. Then he was a blur in the darkness.

‘I am afraid’, I said. I moved towards 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..... And the thunder and lightning ceased, and the rain came down, swishing and drumming on the corrugated roof. ‘The rainy season has started’, observed the sweeper boy, turning to me. His smile played with the darkness, and then he laughed. And I laughed too, but feebly. But I was happy and safe ”.⁹

In the young pariah’s company, Bond realizes that though the world is cold, unfriendly and often a hostile place, there is warmth and comfort in trusting companionship. He now understands that beneath the veneer of maturity, the sweeper boy is a child like him, with similar feelings and emotions. His heart reaches out in sympathy for this unfortunate outcaste. He accepts the untouchable as his companion in loneliness, thereby negating the class and caste distinctions embittering human relations.

Bond’s children contend not only with the malaise of class and caste consciousness but they also become victims of the gender bias that holds the Indian society in its mesmerizing spell. Bond’s basic nativity makes him dwell on the plight of the ‘girl child’ in our male dominated society, where she is grudgingly accorded a secondary status from the moment of her birth. Thus from her

childhood, she is conditioned to a life of servitude. Her entire life is a monotonous drudgery. She is only a temporary member of the family to be disposed of at the earliest through marriage. Her entire childhood is zealously devoted to training her for a life of greater servility in her husband's house. Her family becomes the worst offender, as conditioned by generations of male domination, they often deny her the basic minimum rights like healthy food, education and normal childhood.

Puja in "The Panther's Moon" helps her mother in the house and fields while her younger brother Bishnu is allowed to attend school. While he hurries to school in the morning, she goes to the field for ploughing. He is given breakfast before leaving and carries packed lunch. Puja has to take her meals later with her mother. After her domestic chores in the evening, she tries to learn from her younger brother a little of what he has learnt during the day at school. For young Puja school is only a distant dream.

Similarly in "The Blue Umbrella", Bijju goes to school while his younger sister Binya cannot be spared by the family to do the same. She is entrusted with the task of grazing cows in the mountains. Her predicament is clear in the lines :

"If the cows didn't come home at the right time, Binya would be sent to fetch them. Sometimes her brother went with her, but as he was busy preparing for his exams, he didn't have much time to help her".¹⁰

Her dress is a cumbersome sari that greatly hinders her movements as she runs about the hillside in search of fuel and fodder. The pathos of her situation lies

in her family's unwillingness to allow her to behave like a normal little child. The lines in "Binya Passes By" makes this amply clear :

"Her dhoti, a rough homespun sari—was faded and torn; an impractical garment for running about in the hillside, but the village folk put their girls into dhotis before they were twelve".¹¹

More distressing than this is the Indian system of arranged marriages where a young girl is condemned to a life with a man chosen for her by others. In "A Love Of Long Ago", adolescent Kamla is married to a forty year old widower. Her marriage is not a union of hearts but a game of convenience played by her opportunistic parents. All attempts by her young suitor to stop this disastrous marriage is resisted by her parents. They happily sacrifice her at the altar of greed and conventions. This is evident from the young suitor's pathetic remarks:

"When I discovered that plans were afoot to marry her to a widower of forty, I plucked up enough courage to declare that I would marry her myself. But my youth was no consideration. The widower had land and a generous gift of money for Kamla's parents. Not only was this offer attractive, it was customary. What had I to offer ? A small rented room, a typewriter and a precious income of two to three hundred rupees a month from freelancing".¹²

Like Kamla, fifteen years old Sushila too (in "Love Is A Sad Song") passively accepts the wealthy elderly man her family selects as her groom. Even at that young age she becomes reconciled to the compromise, that is her marriage. It

is significant that like typical Indian girls, Bond's female characters do not revolt against the injustice meted out to them by their parents and society. They meekly accept what life has to offer and are resigned to their fate.

However, twelve year old Kusum is a case in exception and behaves in a manner radically different from Bond's other female characters. She is the unluckiest of them all as at a very young age she confronts experience in the most sordid incident a child can face. Unwittingly she becomes a victim of that evil in our society where young girls are forced into prostitution from a tender age to gratify libidinous men. Though she fights hard to preserve her chastity, she has to pay a heavy price for it.

Kusum does not anticipate the horror that engulfs her as she innocently walks into the Rani's house. The Rani acting as a procuress, introduces her to Mr. Kapoor, a wealthy elderly businessman. His lewd advances fill her with dread and as she resists, the infuriated Rani tries to force the old man on her. Panic-stricken, the desperate girl hacks the Rani with the axe lying in the corner of the room.

Thus in trying to save herself from physical degradation, little Kusum becomes a murderer. The Rani's betrayal becomes synonymous with the betrayal of implicit faith and trust placed on the adults by innocent children. Kusum no longer dares to trust anyone any more. When questioned by the Inspector as to why she is always on her own, her cynicism comes forth in her caustic remark : "It is safer when I am alone".¹³

Most of Bond's children remain in fruitless pursuit of happiness and the ideal world remains out of their reach. From a very early age they become aware that life is not a bed of roses but founded on recurrent adversities. Poverty and diabolical social norms are not the only cause of their sufferings.

Death becomes the major catalyst that precipitates the crisis in the life of his juvenile protagonists. Like Thomas Hardy, Bond has also projected the malevolent fate in the garb of death working against his children, wrecking their lives and happiness.

In "The Funeral", it chooses a ten year old to cruelly sport with and leaves him bewildered and devastated. The sudden death of his father, who had been the center of his little world grips him with a sense of hopelessness and solitariness. His sense of abandonment and his loneliness are reflected in the lines :

"He sat in the darkest corner of the darkened room, his face revealing nothing of what he thought and felt. His father's coffin lay in the next room, the lid fastened forever over the tired, wistful countenance of the man who had meant so much to the boy. Nobody else had mattered – neither uncles nor aunts nor fond grandparents. Least of all the mother who was hundreds of miles away with another husband."¹⁴

Too young to comprehend the sinister workings of fate, the young boy wonders at the words of the well meaning missionary who consoles him saying that

God has taken his father because he needs him. Unconvinced, he questions himself with pathetic naivety :

“ Of what use are we to God when we are dead ?”¹⁵

In “The Guardian Angel” too the shadows of death looms large over the young protagonist. It orphans him before his sixth birthday and leaves him lonely and disconsolate. However as already mentioned in Chapter I of this dissertation, his aunt Mariam arrives like the proverbial effectual angel. She provides him with emotional succour and soon becomes a “mother substitute”. But fate intervenes to cut short his brief interlude with happiness. Forced to a life of prostitution on account of her illiteracy, Mariam worries about the effect of her unconventional profession on the boy. To enable him to grow up in a normal healthy atmosphere, she sends him to a boarding school in Simla despite his protests.

His Utopian existence comes to an end with his departure for the school for he never sees his aunt again. She becomes entangled in a litigation with her relatives who take away from her the custodial rights over the child on account of her unethical profession. Thus the psuedo moralistic society again comes between the young child and his happiness.

Much later as a young man he tries to pursue the mirage of happiness so briefly glimpsed during childhood. But he finds the opportunity is lost forever. Death intervenes to take his aunt away from him. The sorrow that grips him when he discovers his aunt’s grave rings clear in the lines:

“I found her grave in the little cemetery on the town’s outskirts. One of her more devoted admirers had provided a handsome gravestone surmounted by a sculptured angel. One of the wings had broken off and the face was chipped which gave the angel a slightly crooked smile.

But inspite of the broken wing and the smile, it was a very ordinary stone angel and could not hold a candle to my Aunt Mariam, the very special guardian angel of my childhood”.¹⁶

Most of Bond’s child protagonists find it difficult to accept the terrible finality of death. But Madhu (in “The Death Of Madhu”) accepts the inevitability of death and faces it with calm stoicism. She meets death even before she is properly acquainted with life. She realizes the fruitlessness of fighting death. She accepts it as her destiny and ungrudgingly gives herself up to it.

Abandoned as a baby, she is found by an old washerwoman who takes pity on her and adopts her. She grows amidst terrible deprivation, with hardly any chance of experiencing the joys of childhood. As in the case of Bond’s other children, for a brief period, her dismal life brightens up when she meets a young man who takes a paternal interest in her. She searches for and tries to find in him the father whom she never saw. She lavishes him with unremitted love and affection. She appears like a whiff of fresh air and changes his entire outlook towards life. She fills him with a new sense of purpose. This is evident from the lines :

“My interest in Madhu deepened, and my life so empty till then became imbued with a new purpose. As she sat on the grass beside me, reading aloud or listening to me with a look of complete trust and belief, all the love that had been lying dormant in me during my years of self-exile surfaced in a sudden surge of tenderness”.¹⁷

But like Bond’s other children, Madhu’s encounter with love and happiness turns out to be highly transitory. The young man decides to equip her with formal education to enable her to carve a niche for herself in the society. He makes arrangements to send her to a mission school in the next district. But here too fate intervenes in the guise of a fatal illness to cut short her dreams of a bright and beautiful future. Just before leaving for school, she falls terribly ill. Visiting her for the first time in her squalid hut, the protagonist is shocked to find life ebbing away from the little girl. His anguish rings loud in his words:

“She didn’t seem to hear me. I think she knew she was dying, but did not resent it happening.

‘Who will read to you under the tree?’ she went on. ‘Who will look after you?’ she asked, with the solitude of a grown woman.

‘You will Madhu. You are grown up now. There will be no one else to look after me.’

The old woman was standing at my shoulder. A hundred years – and little Madhu was slipping away. The woman took Madhu’s hand from mine and laid it gently down.

I sat by the cot a little longer and then I rose to go, all the loneliness in the world pressing upon my heart.”¹⁸

Significantly, in Bond’s hands the father becomes the pivot round whom the entire life of his children revolves. The mother is only a distant, hazy figure lurking in the background. The father becomes an epitome of virtue and goodness. Unlike Paul in D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons And Lovers*, his children do not have any mother fixation. Like Bond, they are closely attached to the father and shower him with unremitted love and affection. For them, he becomes a mini divinity whom they place on a pedestal. They revere him and worship the very ground he treads on.

The stepfather, on the other hand, is the very antithesis of the father. He is an apathetic individual, devoid of finer feelings and sentiments. He is unimaginative, and heartless. He is responsible for separating a mother from her child and wrecking their home and happiness. He pales into insignificance when compared with the benign and benevolent father.

This antipathy for the stepfather is evident in “A Job Well Done”. Forced to stay with his mother and stepfather after his father’s death, the young protagonist observes:

“He was quite unlike my father. My father had always given me books to read. The Major said I would become a dreamer if I read too much and took my books away.

I hated him and did not think much about my mother for marrying him.”¹⁹

The child’s unsalubrious attitude towards his stepfather manifests itself in a highly strange and unconventional behaviour. His pent up frustration is converted into a kind of unholy glee as he watches Dhuki the gardener push his loathsome stepfather into a deep well.

His mother’s new suitor does not perturb him any more. He has found a unique way of getting rid of tiresome stepfathers. This is evident from his conversation with Dhuki:

“A good sahib,” observed Dhuki ‘ See how well he wears his sola topi ! It covers his head completely.’

‘He is bald underneath ,’ I said.

‘No matter. I think he will be alright.’

‘And if he isn’t,’ I said, ‘we can always open up the well again.’²⁰

Dispirited and alienated, the young child finds himself incapable of normal human sympathy. Displaced from a carefree and idyllic atmosphere following his father’s death, his transformation is startling and tragic.

Bond's love for the mountains and his aversion for city life has already been discussed in the previous chapter. His dislike for urban life stems from his inherent distrust of urban values. He holds them responsible for corrupting the normal simplicity of human beings, especially the highly impressionable children.

Sunil's delinquency in "Death Of A Familiar" is the result of urban culture. It is the result of his being a product of "Anglo-Indian Public Schools, of films, Indian and American,..... Of hippies, drugs, sex magazines and the sub-tropical terai".²¹

A typical urban adolescent, Sunil is "forever in search of new adventures and sensations"²² to alleviate his boredom. Having grown up on perverted values, he regards women as mere objects of sex to be trifled with for one's own pleasure.

"Both he and the other boys of Shahganj had grown up to look upon girls as strange exotic animals, who must be seized at the first opportunity. Experimenting in sex was like playing a surreptitious game of marble".²³

Caught in no man's land between childhood and adulthood, his entire perspective towards life becomes distorted. The big dons of the underground mafia become his heroes. He dreams of emulating them and gaining power through terrorizing the masses. Thus he remarks, "I'll be a big crook one day, and the people will be scared of me."²⁴

Expelled from numerous schools for stealing and womanizing, his intemperate habits finally get the better of him. He meets his nemesis in Maureen, a

school teacher, with whom he falls madly in love. For him she represents the “remote and romantic” beauty that he has seen in films.

An unusual relationship develops between this young boy and the older woman. For Maureen it is just a diversion from her dreary school routine. When she is finally tired of him and rejects him, he is totally shattered. Like the heroes of numerous films he has seen, he gives vent to his pent up frustration by “hitting the bottle”, and this ultimately destroys him. His self destruction becomes apparent in the lines :

“He was finding a panacea for lovesickness in rum and sometimes cheap country spirit. The money that he now borrowed was used not to pay his debts, or to incur new ones, but to drink himself silly. I (the protagonist) regretted having been the first person to have offered him a drink. I should have known that Sunil was a person who could do nothing in moderation”.²⁵

Thus when the protagonist meets him after a considerable lapse of time, he is shocked by Sunil’s physical transformation.

“He was completely different person from the handsome, cocksure youth I had met at the wrestling match. His cheeks were hollowed and he had not shaved for days. I knew when I first met him that he was without scruples, a shallow youth, the product of many circumstances. He was no longer so shallow and had stumbled upon love but his character was too weak to sustain the weight of disillusionment”.²⁶

Sunil's final attempt to resurrect himself from ruination ends in a pathetic failure. He tries to attain respectability by seeking employment in a paper factory. He is optimistic of salvaging his life, for he remarks :

"I'm not going to think. I'm going to work in a paper factory. I shall become respectable. What an adventure that will be !"²⁷

But this becomes Sunil's final adventure in the series of adventures in his short life. Even before he can start working, he meets a pitiable end, when he is murdered in a dark alley one night. A product of urban culture, he is ultimately destroyed by the urban values that he had nourished.

The old man in "The Dust In The Mountains," aware of the hazards of urban existence, warns the rustic Bishnu of the perils of city life. Lured by the dreams of "easy money" in the cities, young village boys often become pawns of the unscrupulous sophisticates who employ them for their illicit activities. The nightmare starts when they fall into the dragnet of law-enforcing authorities. No one comes to the rescue of these unfortunate youngsters. They are condemned to a life of imprisonment, forgotten by everyone except their dear ones in the distant villages, who soon give them up as lost forever.

Thus Bond's children while trying to find a foothold in a world where cruelty is the main key are ruthlessly put down time and again. But despite their adversities, they never allow their vision to be eclipsed by pessimism or cynicism. This is because Ruskin Bond never allows his vision to be clouded even for a

moment by morbidity. He recognizes the pervasiveness of evil in our world but at the same time he does not allow his children to lose their goodness, innocence or their basic optimism.

His young thief in "The Thief" is a case in point. Misled by urban values to a life of pilfering, this young delinquent undergoes a radical change when he comes in contact with Arun. Arun represents the goodness so rarely encountered in this world. A simple minded young man, he teaches the youngster not only to cook but also to read and write. However despite his kindness, the young lad waits for an opportunity to swindle him and then escape. The opportunity soon presents itself, when one evening, Arun brings home a bundle of notes and keeps it under his mattress. With deft hands the thief steals the money at night and runs away to the railway station. But before long he is overcome by a tremendous sense of remorse. He cannot reconcile himself to the fact that he has robbed the man who not only gave him shelter and employment, but had placed implicit trust on him. Tormented by the thought of this betrayal of trust, he retraces his steps back to Arun's house to return the stolen money. His inherent goodness triumphs over his baser instincts. His naivety rings through his words :

"I was fond of Arun. My affection for him, my sense of sympathy but most of all my desire to write whole sentences drew me back to the room".²⁸

A study of Bond's juvenile characters cannot be complete without reference to those adults who despite being grown-ups do not lose their fundamental innocence, goodness or their childlike traits. As a result, they find themselves

hopelessly inadequate to cope with the intricacies of the world. A typical case in point is Inspector Keemat Lal in "A Case For Inspector Lal". When he establishes the identity of the Rani's murderer, he behaves in a manner totally unbecoming of a policeman. He suppresses facts of the case so that young Kusum does not face trial and stigmatization.

Even when Kusum tries to kill him on realizing that he has discovered her deadly secret, he does not ruthlessly suppress her. Instead, he behaves in a manner that is totally unthinkable in this deadly world of crime and lawlessness. This is clear from his confession :

"Instead of being furious and outraged, instead of seizing the girl and marching her off to the nearest police station, I stroked her head and said silly comforting things".²⁹

Keemat Lal realizes that Kusum's act of killing the Rani was not pre-meditated. It was an impulsive act, the result of fear and desperation. So his final intuitive judgment is fair to the culprit. It exemplifies a victory of goodness and childlike instincts over his professionalism. It costs him his promotion in the police hierarchy. This unsuccessful policeman realizes that his naivety makes him a misfit in his profession and he sadly confides to anyone who cares to listen to him. "I should never have been a policeman".³⁰

However he raises a very significant and pertinent question at the end of the story.

“Tell me Mr.Bond, what would you have done if you had been in my place?”

I considered his question carefully for a moment or two, then said, ‘I suppose it would have depended on how much sympathy the girl evoked in me. She had killed in innocence.....’

‘Then you would have put your personal feelings above your duty to uphold the law?’

‘Yes. But I would not have made a very good policeman.’³¹

In this story too, as in his other works, Bond’s idealism comes to the fore.

His children never lose their innocence, goodness or their basic faith in life despite repeated batterings by fate. Surmounting adversities, they grow, enriched by their experiences, never resentful of what life has to offer but always optimistic of a bright future.

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- 27 Bond : *The Complete Short Stories And Novels*, p.73.
- 28 Bond : *The Complete Short Stories And Novels*, p.33.
- 29 Bond : *The Complete Short Stories And Novels*, p.305.
- 30 Bond : *The Complete Short Stories And Novels*, p.306.
- 31 Bond : *The Complete Short Stories And Novels*, p.94.

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