CHAPTER-4
CHILDREN AND NATURE IN SHORT STORIES

Throughout the history, the children were free to play and their first choice was often flee to the nearest wildplaces whether it was a big tree or bushy area in the yard or a water course or woodland nearby. By the late twentieth century, many children environments had become urbanized. Children spent their recreation time outdoors, using the sidewalks, streets, playgrounds, parks, greenways, the fields, forests and streams. Children had the freedom to play, explore and interact with the natural world. Now the culture of playing outside has gone and children’s life has shifted to the indoors. As a result their opportunity for direct and spontaneous contact with nature is a vanishing experience of childhood. The short stories of Bond provide an opportunity for the children to have the attraction towards the natural environment. White and Stoecklin list out the basic components of a naturalized environment for young children. It includes water, plentiful indigenous vegetation including trees, bushes, flowers, creatures in ponds bugs, butterflies, experiencing the change of seasons, wind, light, sounds and weather and natural places to sit in, on, under, lean against, climb and provide shelter and shade. The readers can observe all these naturalized places which are abundant in Bond’s stories which magnetizes the children with the magical wonders of nature. It inspires them, injects them with optimism, prepares them to face the world courageously, creates awareness to protect the environment as a sign of gratitude and to have love and concern for the adults who helped them in their childhood.

Ruskin Bond is considered a pioneer of children literature in India. Bond liked his boyhood very much therefore all his children stories whether autobiographical or semi-autobiographical expressed his longing for a happy childhood. He likes children because they are more frank, open minded and emotional. Through writing children’s stories he also fulfilled his own unfulfilled wishes and longings as a child. Bond focuses on entertaining
young readers. Bond’s pleasant attitude towards childhood is strongly influenced by his adolescent reading of the British and Indian Romantic poets; as poetry of Rabindranath Tagore; simple attitude of Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand; and depiction of an Indian childhood in the major works of Sudhin Goshe. He sees dignity in the daily experience and in the understated lifestyle of the people who live in the hilly Garhwal’s villages.

Bond got success as a writer for adults and then he became interested in writing stories about children. In his introduction to The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories he writes that in the 1970’s when he was facing all kinds of problems his stories relating to children coped with the difficult situation. Earlier he had written few stories for children. After shifting to his new home “Ivy Cottage”, he started writing more frequently for children as he played the role of grandfather to Prem Singh’s kids. His innovation was to make children protagonist in his stories. These stories satisfied his own urge and desire to write about his lost childhood. Fortunately his trauma was channelized towards children’s classics, which gave an outlet to his agonies.

Bond is India’s one of the most loved authors of children. Many of the children have grown up reading his simple narrative stories and novels. He portrays India the way Indian children know about their country, where nature has a great role to play. Children stories are interesting informative and imaginative. They become powerful mode of shaping the mindset of children. Children literature and ecocriticism have been separate issues till now. Bond’s stories acknowledge the efforts to bring these two fields together. It is a perception that the relationship between children and nature is twofold. On the one hand, children are presumed to have a privileged relationship to nature where they have the hope of enjoying the pleasures. On the other hand, the child has no necessary connection with nature, no experience or understanding of it, so it is presumed that the onus lies on elders to make the children aware of their natural surroundings.
Educational Research distributed a pamphlet which argues that environmental education should begin during the formative years of life. The writers of the pamphlet believe that such experiences play a crucial role in shaping life long attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour towards natural environments. This belief is based on two premises. First is the assumption that children who are not exposed to the natural environment and its concern at an early age can never acquire the respect and value of nature. Second is the more fundamental notion that interaction with the environment is an important part of healthy child development. Bond shows his serious concern for nature. Reading his stories, children are introduced to the world of nature and gain awareness of the protection of the environment which paves way for healthy child development.

The first short story “The Funeral” is a moving account of Bond’s father’s death and it is a pathetic narration of Bond’s miserable loneliness. Through the fictitious child, Bond articulates his own sorrow, his own prayer to get his dead father revived in some or the other way. Bond confronts the pangs of the loss of his father by writing “The Funeral”. Bond, in this short story exposes the intensity of adults who decide what is good for the orphan child. The child protagonist was shattered when his dear father suddenly died. The protagonist of the story, like Bond is unable to understand the words of the missionary ‘God has need of your father’ (Bond, Treasury of Stories for Children “The Funeral”. 231).

Bond projects his personal life without hesitation. It makes his story authentic. Bond is an autobiographer who gives out his own feelings, life and lost things in his works. His stories are not only the narration of events but give out his own experiences. Ruskin’s father compensated for the vacuum caused by the absence of mother. He bestowed his sole love and concern on Bond despite his failing health. His rejuvenating and friendly company and his affection never made Bond realize the absence of his mother. The comforting company of his beloved father helped him to overcome the loss of his mother. He was deeply attached to his
father and lovingly created and recreated him in his stories. Ruskin was enjoying a good time but for his father it was a trying period. Frequent bouts of malaria had undermined his constitution and a severe attack of jaundice killed him. The blissful period of Bond’s life received a jolt with the death of his dear father. The untimely death of his indulging father, his emotional anchor was the shattering and traumatic episode of his childhood is reflected in this story “The Funeral”. The childhood memory is associated with the episodes and images in his stories.

Bond came to know about the death of his father when he was in his school. Mr. Murtough, a kind but inept teacher broke the news of his father’s death that made the matter worse to handle. No one has made an arrangement for Bond to attend the funeral of his father who was everything for him. This made it difficult for him to reconcile with this irreparable loss which Bond renders in this story. Even after years he failed to accept the death of his father. Secretly he wished his return;

“As there was no evidence of my fathers death, it was, for me, not a death but a vanishing, and to this day, I subconsciously expect him to turn up and deliver one from bad situations” (Saili, Ruskin Our Enduring Bond. 38).

Hence the moving story “The Funeral” brings us close to the irretrievable loss that Bond faced at a very young age. Bond renders his deeply felt nostalgia in this story.

When the story begins, there is a discussion, to take the boy along with the funeral procession of his dead father. The coffin lies in the next room. The clergyman does not like to have children at funerals. The boy speaks nothing, sits in the darkest corner of the darkened room. His face does not reveal what he thinks and feels. Nobody seems to consider this boy, neither uncles nor aunts. His mother was hundreds of miles away with another husband and he had not seen her since he was four, and he does not remember her now. The house is full of friends, relatives and neighbours. The condolence words passed back and forth like dragon
flies on the wind. Everyone was present and it is the first time they had the run of the house, for his father had not been a sociable man. (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Funeral”. 229-230).

A small hearse, drawn by a hill pony is arranged and several able-bodied men lifted the coffin and manoeuvred it into the carriage. The cemetery was a mile down the road and those who did not have cars would have to walk the distance. The boy stared through a window, waited until everyone had gone and then he left the room and went out on the veranda. He slipped out of the house by a back door, reached the main road and followed the procession of mourners at a distance. As he was walking, he recollects his days of walking with father during their evening. It was the same road he had often taken with his father. The boy knew the name of almost every plant and wild flower, various birds and insects which had been described and pointed out to him by his father.

The gardener of the house looking aggrieved not for the death of his father but, because of the damage done to the flower beds by the mourners and the thought of losing a job. The house would pass into other hands, the boy would go to an orphanage and there were no people who kept gardeners and the cook would be out of job soon and he was always in demand (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Funeral”. 230).

Young Bond was fond of gardener who fostered Bond’s love for nature by teaching him about the different flowers their names and their cultivation. An elderly gardener of his grandmother Dukhi is a good companion of Bond during the troubled period. The spoiled garden represents the loss of life, loss of protection and security, his father provided the boy. Garden signifies the boy’s life. The well maintained garden soothes an agitated mind and it is feast for eyes and soul but now it is damaged by the relatives and neighbour who came to attend his father’s funeral. As the garden without plants and flowers, the boy lost his essence of life, slipped out of the house to join his father’s funeral.
The boy walked to the cemetery. He viewed the higher ranges of the Himalayas and the eternal snows. He recalled his excursions with his father in the slopes of Dehra. These excursions nurtured him a great naturalist and environmentalist. After his father’s death, the trees and plants around him assumed the role of a guardian spirit.

Bond comments on the graves in the cemetery laid out that their incumbents happened to rise one day, the first thing they would see, would be the glint of the sun of those snow-covered peaks. The site had been chosen like that. The boy did not seem as if anyone would be able to thrust aside the massive tombstones and rise from their grave to enjoy the view. Bond draws out the similarity that the rest of the dead seemed as eternal as the snows even the earth quake could not burst those stones asunder and thrust the coffins up from the earth. The boy wondered that why people had not made easy for the dead to rise.

That evening, the mist laid low on the mountains so that sometime one could hardly see the familiar peaks. Sometimes the stars too were all covered. It seemed as if the mountains were going to be lost in the mist, the higher peaks pushed out, dimmer stars were veiled and the brighter one shone through. It seemed as if nature itself paid her condolence for the death of his father, she was hidden in the mist as the day of mourning. Even supposing the clouds had covered the face of the mountain, the mountains would still have stood steadfast. These mountains render the boy comfort and hope that the mist of sadness may blow up from the eternal mountain. The strength of hill lies in him. Just like mists, the feelings of joy and sorrow go and come but the human beings like hills and stars abide for ever. Bond fantastically reveals the eternal force of hill here.

The boy saw the coffin being lowered and some of them throwing handful of earth over the coffin before moving away. The grave is almost covered. The missionary consoled him by saying that ‘God has need of your father’. There are series of surprising questions arise in the boy’s mind; Had God laid claim to the thousands of men, women and children
who had been put to rest here in these neat and serried rows; what could he have wanted them for? Of what use are we to God when we are dead? Was that other, better world down in the depth of the earth? How could anyone, even Samson, push his way back to the surface again? Superman did it in comics? (Bond, TOSFC “The Funeral”. 231).

The children always want to extend the realm of their experience and knowledge by questioning about the things around them. They have countless questions about life. They love to inquire about each and every sight they see and questions that often put grown-ups in a tight spot. This inquisitiveness of children emanates from their innocence, their curiosity to know the world and their snoop nature. Bond projects very vividly and forcibly this insatiable curiosity of children. The boy, protagonist of this story “The Funeral” asked series of questions to himself, did not expect some one to answer him. The reader can notice the same questioning attitude of the child in another Bond’s short story “The Room of Many Colours” (Bond, TOSFC “Room of Many Colours”. 192-193) where the child asks his father number of questions. Like the boy protagonist of the story “The Funeral”, the child in “The Room of Many Colours” asks his father many questions. The series of questions started from where the insect has come and the chain of questions finds no terminal till his father loses patience: where does the sea go? Does it go to the end of the world? Have you been around the world? And my grandmother in India likes England; what does ‘different’ mean? Will we always be in India? Can we take Ayah with us? How long have we been here?

The outstanding characteristic of children which differentiates them from adults is that they are not grown and they are growing. When the child grows he tries to master both an outer world and an inner world of emotions. In both of these realms there are many experiences to be fathomed from the questions asked above by the boy. As the child fathoms them he gains strength from doing so. There are external demands for the boy in “The Funeral” that he has to live alone and he has to take care of himself. He understands the real
situation and tries to fulfill these demands and needs, he grows stronger. It helps the child cope with and master those problems of importance in his life. The questioning attitude is one of the psychological significances which help the child know and understand his emotion that has been disturbed by the demise of his affectionate father. Bond experiences the same in his childhood. Jacquelyn Sandeers quotes in “Psychological Significance of Children Literature” each work of literature has its own psychological significance. Life and experience of Bond have psychological impact on his children characters. This short story is one among them.

The boy in “The Funeral” also asked questions of that sort to himself and does not have interest in the logical explanation. If his father answers one, he raises the other. The children love to ask questions but they prefer imaginative answers to logic one. In Structures of Authenticity in Ruskin Bond’s Fiction, Bandana Bal Chandnani states that it is because their mind is generally rich in imagination. They do not care for logic and reason as much as for enchantment and fancies. They build up their own picture of things as they want not as they are being told (101).

When the coffin was lowered, the boy was surprised at how far down it seemed to go. Super man could push his way back to the surface as did it in comics but his father was a gentle soul who wouldn’t fight too hard against the earth and the grass and the roots of tiny trees. He compromised himself that his father would grow into a tree and escape that way. He could unite himself with his father when he is put away like this, thought the boy he will get into the root of a plant and then he will become a flower and then may be a bird will come and carry his seed away and in this way he will get out some how (Bond, TOSFC “The Funeral”. 232).

The mourners departed in twos and threes. They did not see the boy behind the wall as they were getting hungry. The boy stood there until all had gone. He noticed the gardeners and caretakers were filling the grave. He did not know where to go and he felt a little afraid
and he was late too. The grave was almost covered. He walked away from the cemetery. The road ahead of him, empty, swathed in mist. He was alone. He remembered his father’s words that the strongest man in the world is he who stands alone. But, now he was alone and he could not feel very strong. The authenticity of the word pains him and he longs to have his father’s amiable warm, comforting touch. He thought of his father was beside him that they were together on one of their long walks. Instinctively he put out his hand for his father’s warm touch. But there was nothing and no one. The moment he felt that his father is no more wrecks every heart in tears along with the boy. He stands alone. The mist comes to his rescue that it hides his crying. Though a small boy, he reacts as young man who is confident of himself, does not want to show his loneliness and depression, clenched his fists and pushed them deep down into his pockets. He sheds tears and lowers his head that no one would notice his tears. He consoles and comforts by saying that his father will find a way out of the grave and he will get out somehow. This unusual, heartfelt emotional experience of Bond’s childhood never allows him to forget those unhappy days of his life.

At the end, the boy thinks his father coming back to life through new shoots. Nature serves as a means of defying death and redeeming his sense of loss and loneliness. “The Funeral” mourners expressed stereotyped sympathy, priest’s cold voice, and the coffin going deep into the entrails of the earth and ghostly silence spread around, cast a depressing impact on the boy who could hardly understand it. The small boy relates all his queries in relation to nature and tries to clear him positively. This positive approach manures him in his upcoming life in spite of the sufferings and the hardships that he faces independently. In most of Bond’s stories, after depression and disappointment, there is hope lurking in the mind of the character which pulls him towards the future. In the story “The Funeral” the boy hopes to meet his father when he will find a way out. Even now, Bond, the boy after more than five decades is rummaging those loving hands and eyes. Through this story Bond pays homage to his
bibliophile father for introducing him into the wondrous world of nature and books, thus sowing the seed of his creative zeal.

Bond’s autobiographical mode of writing and nostalgic punctuations is the manner of Dickens and Charles Lamb. Bond is, no doubt a personal writer and has aptly called himself an ‘Indian Charles Lamb’. The books most influenced him were Charles Dickens’ *David Copper Field* and Hugh Walpole’s *Fortitude*. He felt in David’s story his own tale narrated. He empathized with David Copper Field – in loss of parents, sense of insecurity and struggle for a meaningful life. He identified with young David in his childhood and wanted to grow up to be a writer like him. Bond presents himself as a boy who lost both his parents in this story “The Funeral”. Bond narrates the emotional feeling of the boy over the death of his father in a melting way. The child’s thought of his father when he stands alone hurts the reader. In the beginning, the boy Bond seemed that he was not affected by the death of his father but after leaving him in the grave, the absence of his dear father pricks him and pangs him heavily. In spite of his childishness, he can understand and bury his longing as he thrusts his fists deep down into his pockets. Bond’s childhood appears to have stopped at the very juncture when he lost his father. Bond remembers the last day he met his father. He narrates in his story “Remember This Day” (Bond, *TOSFC*. 321). The short story “Remember This Day” Bond shares his last moment with his father, when he came to his school. Bond was in class 5, he had settled down quite well in the friendly atmosphere of the little school, Bishop Cotton Preparatory School in Simla. He did miss his father’s companionship and he was overjoyed when he came up to see him during the midsummer break, his father had leave for two days. They went to see cinemas in Rivoli in Delhi. After the picture both walked all the way to Chotta Simla, talking about winter holidays, bookshops, cinemas, Chinese restaurants, a buying gramophone records and stamp collection. That was the last walk and talk Bond has
with father which still green in his memory as fresh as yesterday. He never saw him, he heard after three months that he had passed away in military hospital in Calcutta.

It was dusk when boy Bond and his father walked down the path to the school gate and playing field. His father spoke to two of Bond’s friends and asked about their homes. ‘Remember this day, Ruskin’ said his father. He patted him gently on his head and walked away. He never saw him again. Three months later, the boy heard that his father had passed away in the military hospital in Calcutta. Bond still dreams of his father. In his dreams he is always the same, caring for him and leading him by the hand along old familiar roads. And of course, Bond remembers that day after sixty-five years have passed but it is as fresh as yesterday.

After his father’s tragic demise, he returned to Dehra to live with his mother and step father during his winter vacation. The first home coming after his father’s death was an agonizing experience for him. No one had come to receive him at the railway station and he had no idea about the new address of his mother. He was hoping to meet his mother but she was not there. So, he took a tonga to the only place he knew-Granny Clerk’s house. In “Coming Home to Dehra” Bond records the experience. This heart breaking story tells about the narrator’s return to Dehradun after the death of his father to find his mother and step father’s indifference glaring in the face. The memory of the father and the nostalgia weighed down him. The cold reception at the hands of his mother and step father made him feel more vacuum created by the absence of his father (Bond, TOSFC “Coming Home to Dehra”. 248-256). The state of emotional vacuums would have been disastrous, if he had not escaped to the world of books. It was his own sense of loneliness, which brought him nearer to book.

This unnatural childhood gave way to an introvert child, rather a premature adult, striving to understand the intricacies of love and affection. Bond’s obsession for children is obviously, a reflection of that stress and his relative sensitivity with the cause of innocents.
His yearning for the cuddles of a fond mother is visible in many of his stories “The Woman on Platform 8” is the manifestation of Bond’s ideal mother who understands, loves and cares the boy on the platform.

After his father’s tragic end, Bond found the hills kind enough to provide him a formidable sense of parental security as the trees seem to know him, whisper among themselves and beckon him nearer. The trees and plants around him assumed the role of a guardian spirit. They appeared to be shaping spirit of his dear father. In the stories like, “My Father’s Trees in Dehra”, “When You can’t Climb Trees Any More” “Coming Home to Dehra” and in “The Funeral” he imagines his father coming back to life through new shoots. Nature emerges as a great healing force to dissipate his gloom and loneliness. The innocent boy in “The Funeral” finds way to evade death with the help of nature. The story “The Funeral” ends with the optimism of the boy that as the plant is shooting out of the soil, the boy’s father also will be resurrected in the form of new shoots somewhere and he can be able to meet him one day in the same way.

The second short story “The Woman on Platform 8” illustrates how children instinctively recognize concern and love and how they react to over bearing persons. Arun, a twelve-year-old school boy, at a boarding school, is waiting on Platform No-8 at Ambala station for the northern-bound train. He arrived earlier at Ambala by bus and he has to wait till midnight for his train. He spends the time pacing up and down the platform, browsing at the bookstall and feeding broken biscuits to stray dogs. Whenever a train arrived, the quiet platform becomes a sea of human bodies which sweeps Arun out side the station. At last tired of all these, Arun sits down on his suitcase and gazes across the railway – tracks board and lonely, having lost interest in the passing trolleys, cry of the various vendors, the sweet-meat seller and the newspaper boy. (Bond, NTDOS “The Woman on Platform8”. 13).
The story deals with a boy, Arun and his encounter with a benevolent lady. It is the manifestation of Bond’s unfulfilled childhood. The boy Arun travels alone as his parents do not spare themselves for him. The stranger woman on railway platform compensates his want for a true mother. Arun plays a vital role who is sensitive, energetic curious and innocent. “The Woman on Platform 8” is Bond’s vision of an ideal mother who understands her kids, who patiently bears their tantrums and exerts lovingly for their healthy development. Bond achieves in his stories what he could not get in real. He admits in Scenes from Writer’s Life that he would not have written so much about childhood or even about other children, if his own childhood had been all happiness and light (4).

A soft voice close behind him asks him ‘are you all alone my son?’ Arun sees a woman with paleface and kind eyes. She is dressed very simply in a white saree. There was a dignity about her that commanded respect. So, standing up respectfully, Arun replied that he was going to school. She asks about his parents. Arun says that he has come from afar and can travel alone. The lady wins Arun by showing her confidence in Arun’s capacity of travelling alone. Arun told her that he could travel alone and she quickly agrees ‘I am sure you can. He liked her for saying that and he also liked her for the simplicity of her dress and for her deep, soft voice and the serenity of her face (Bond, NTDOS “The Woman in Platform8”. 14). Arun extremely got impressed by the simplicity and caring attitude of this lady. Hearing his name and about his waiting till midnight for his train, she invites him to eat. Telling a coolie to took after Arun’s suitcase, she takes him by hand and leads him to the station dinning –room. Arun thinks that she must be over thirty but seems ageless. The lady offers a treat of samosa, jalebi and tea to Arun. Being hungry, Arun eats well. She is pleased at watching him eating. The treat strengthened the bond between the strangers. Under the influence of the tea and sweets, Arun begins to talk quite freely about his school, friends, likes and dislikes. She asks few questions and not even one about his family or residency.
Arun is pleased in a way she had been to him, a quiet, kind and gentle woman who gives sweets to a lonely boy on a railway platform (Bond, *NTDOS* “The Woman on Platform 8”. 15).

When they reach the spot where his suitcase lies, Arun sees a school fellow named Satish, a boy of about his age, standing with this mother. Satish introduces Arun to his mother as one of his friends and the best bowler in the class. Arun dislikes his class-fellow Satish’s mother, an authoritative and over bearing lady. He gets infuriated even by her sound advice. He finds himself hating her with firm, unreasoning hate. Satish’s mother looks sternly at Arun through her spectacles. She complains about the lateness of the train and talks of the danger from suspicious characters and strangers. She begins to preach to Arun against such danger. Taking dislike to Satish’s mother, Arun retorts that he likes strangers. Satish enjoys this verbal fighting between his friend and his mother. He is on his friend’s side which reveals his dissent against his mother’s domination.

“Satish was standing behind his mother, grinning at me, and delighting in my clash with his mother. Apparently he was on my side” (Bond, *NTDOS* “The Woman on Platform8”. 16).

Arun’s dissent pleases the child readers as well. Children in general enjoy those stories where domineering adults are outwitted by children, where powerful or mischievous characters defy authority and break most of the conventional rules. The glimpse of selfless love between the pale faced kind woman in white saree and the lonely boy at the station suggests the victory of human bond.

The woman loves and helps the innocent boy in compensating his loneliness like the fairy God mother of Cinderella. The good-natured strange woman who gives treat to a lonely Arun, caring Aunt Mariam who takes care of an orphan nephew in “A Guardian Angel” are kind-hearted adults who by their positive attitude and loving approach take care of the
children and guide them during trouble. Bond’s short story “A Guardian Angel” invokes the loving bond between an aunt and her orphan nephew. Mariam is similar to that of a strange woman in “The Woman in Platform 8”. Just like Arun the orphan boy is cared and loved by Mariam. Mariam is an out caste for her family because of bringing disgrace to it by becoming a mistress but for the child she is an angel. It is only Mariam who comes to rescue the child with great readiness when his mother dies. Her tenderness and selfless approach fills the void in the life of the child. Aunt Mariam in “A Guardian Angel” assures six-year-old child by her warmth, worldliness and carefree chatter when his mother passes away. The child enjoys on being called ‘ladla’ (dear) by her. She fills the void in the child life by her tenderness and selfless approach.

Bond relieves his own childhood through his fictional incarnation. Characters like Arun, Rusty and Kishen embody Bond’s yearning for the cuddles of a fond mother. Bond achieves in his stories what he could not get in real. Bond’s relationship with his father is a mixture of love and adulation. His father profusely compensated the vacuum caused by his mother’s step. Senior Bond gave to young Bond all that is expected from loving parents. They shared their loneliness and hobbies together like, helping his father with his stamp collection, accompanying him to the pictures, dropping in at Wayner’s for tea and muffins, bringing home a book or record, a small boy asked for. When Bond was in boarding at Simla, he regularly got his letters and cards. It is natural for a child like Bond to get awfully attached to his father, his single parent who bestowed his old love and consideration to him. But, lack of wholesome parentage filled his tender mind with an intense sense of insecurity, which still haunts him. Bond unveils this sense of insecurity through the boy Arun in this story “Woman on Platform 8” and his feeling of insecurity is alleviated by the kind hearted mother character of a strange woman in white saree. This story is the story of the author, dedicated to a woman who showed her empathy towards him when he was a boy.
Their train arrives. Satish jumps into a compartment and Arun joins him. They place themselves at the open windows and the women stand outside on the platform, talking to them. Satish’s mother does most of the talking. She issues a lot of advice, like not to jump on and off moving trains; not to stick their heads out of the windows; and not to eat any rubbish on the way obviously meant for both the boys. She hands Satish a bag of fruit, a cricket bat and a big box of chocolates and asks him to share the food with Arun. Then she stands back to watch how Arun’s mother behaves. It is obvious that she regards Arun’s mother as incapable and thinks that they are a poor family. But, Arun does not intend to give the other woman away. As he respects and loves the woman and he never likes someone to look down upon her, he shows his love by letting her take his hand in hers without words. He is conscious of Satish’s mother staring at them, Arun hates her extremely (Bond, *NTDOS* “Woman on Platform 8”.16).

As the guard walks up the platform to blow his whistle for the train to leave, Arun looks straight into the eyes of the woman who holds his hand and smiles at him in a gentle, understanding way. He leans out of the window, puts his lips to her cheek and she kisses him. The carriage jolts forward and his smiling mother take off her hand. Satish says ‘good-bye mother’ to his mother. He does not wave or shout but sits still, gazing at the woman on the platform. She is also looking at him. Satish’s mother is talking to his ‘mother’ who stands there, a pale sweet woman in white. The boy Arun watches her till she is lost in the crowd. At the end of the story, the love, the compassion of a woman towards a little boy presents her real mother to Arun.

There are some people whom Bond could not forget in his lifetime. In this story, Bond talks about the woman whom he met in the railway station when he was twelve. He liked her for the simplicity and the serenity of her voice and face. Her behaviour did not make him feel her to be a stranger. She made him forget his loneliness. When Satish’s mother asks
the kind woman in this story, if she is Arun’s mother, she readily replies that she is. She
answers that I am Arun’s mother. For that, Arun cannot say anything against it. He is unable
to speak a word looking at the woman but the stranger woman does not appear to be at all
embarrassed and is just smiling at Satish’s mother (Bond, NTDOS “The Woman in
Platform8”. 15). His sense of loneliness and insecurity are suddenly vanished by an
affectionate woman. Though she is a stranger, her tender, warm and caring words remind him
of his mother. The white saree symbolizes an angelic quality of a perfect motherhood with
purity, serenity and love and peace, and the woman pours out these traits looking at the lonely
child Arun. She enters as a stranger but exists as a mother in the mind of the child Arun as he
craves for the love and care of a mother.

Like an average Indian, Bond believes that relations are predestined. The role of
intuition in bringing people closer is remarkable. The two strangers meet and feel quite
familiar with each other. It may be a matter of accumulated consciousness or pre-birth
impressions which every child carries with him. Amita Aggarwal shares her view related to
this that the closeness of the boy and the stranger woman appears to be the natural product of
such pre-birth accumulated impressions.

The lady portrayal reflects a peculiar aspect of Bond’s humanism that appeals
positively to the notion of a core humanity in terms of which people can be observed and
appreciated. A touch of compassion is essential to make this earth a seat of human bliss. The
compassionate woman showers human kindness, warmth and affection which evade the
loneliness and the disinterestedness of the boy Arun. She brings momentous happiness in his
life but which is to be cherished in his life time. She is a mother icon for Arun. Though
initially Arun is suspicious, but gradually he grows intimate with her by the way she speaks
and appeals to him. Two strangers turn out to be friends in the bliss of humanness. Bond’s
character’s like, Rusty, Arun, Sita, Binya and Labourdor’s family of A Flight of Pigeons
always at the mercy of other people, who may be strangers helping them in their loneliness and depression. Arun in this story is under the compassion of a mother in the strange woman’s presence, she helps him to come out of his monotony, renders him a parental care for a while which is forbidden to him by fate.

Bond’s mother was separated from his father when he was only four. Nothing his father said could bring his mother back home. The kind woman in the story resembles the aunt Bond stayed with, after the divorce a great extent. He liked his aunt who took care of him. Her age, look even the colours of the saree wrapped around her body is as described in “The Woman in Platform 8”. Vacuum in the child’s mind is compensated by the like minded mother trait of the strange woman. The child attitude is just like filling the empty vessel with careful, tender lovely provisions when it is ready to hold it voluntarily. Arun represents the child of his own age, who has confident of his own, craves for the love of mother he lacks but he does not reveal it openly. When he observes the real care and love, he readily and suddenly grabs it happily as if his mother matches or resembles the woman in all means.

“The Woman on Platform 8” is a marvellous presentation of two opposite attitude to life, embodied by two women on the railway platform. The stranger woman who gives tea, samosa and her pleasing company to the boy Arun travelling alone, is in sharp contrast to Satish’s mother who is ostentations and incredulous. The boy Arun and the woman are epitome of faith in essential nobility of man whereas the mother of Satish represents inherent suspicious along with other attributes. The faith and love between Arun and the strange woman lead the young readers to see how a pale, sweet stranger face gets kiss, the real affection on her forehead by a stranger boy on the platform at the time of departure. The strangeness turns into friendliness and motherliness is an embodiment of humanness which lurks in the mind of every Indians. Bond requires his readers to have such humanity and compassion to lead the children and to sow the seed of it in their childhood. This humanism
drives the home and nation towards peace and harmony Amita Aggarwal reflects Bond’s view:

“There are no strangers in India. People meet they exchange pleasantries according to their age, as son, daughter, sisters, grandmother and grand father. Their address in itself is sufficient to remove their alienation and strangeness” (Amita Aggarwal, The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond. 75).

The strange woman addresses Arun as her son, and answers to Satish’s mother that she is Arun’s mother. This addressing brings relationship together and binds the bond between the two, makes them familiar as if they knew each other already. This emotional attachment involved in calling by relationship can be always experienced in Indian soil.

Bond, though an Anglo-Indian he never lost his sense of belonging. He likes and loves to be an Indian. Hence, he belongs here. In India family relations are closer, warmer and more reliable than any other thing. The strange woman who is pale and gentle and kind, wears white saree may be a representation of India, where he abides, enjoys the warmth, kindness of his adopted family and sharing the relationship of Indian brotherhood. It is a replica of mother India where he forgets his times of trials and tribulations, always comforted and consoled by the compassionate mother-nature.

Human touch is the soul of Indian culture. People meet and inquire about each other without being misunderstood. In this story, a small boy Arun puts faith in the stranger woman because of her motherly concern. The woman’s touch, her kind words, her perceptions, her calmness make the boy accept her, his mother. Both touch unhesitatingly each other out of love, regards and mutual understanding. The boy Arun reflects Bond’s longing which he missed in his childhood. In Scenes from Writer’s Life Bond depicts:

“Human contact! That was what I missed most. It was not to be found in the office where I worked or in my land lady’s house… The freedom to touch someone without
being misunderstood, to take someone by the hand as a mark of affection rather than desire…. And fulfillment to be among strangers without feeling like outsider for there are no strangers in India” (Bond, Scenes from Writer’s Life. 155).

Bond insists on the brotherhood based on love and affection among children who are the future of the nation, led by the selfless, caring adult of India.

Bond has woven the mystery of railway platforms, compartments and tracks in his haunting Indian Railway stories. He reveals that he loves railway platforms and he spends a great deal of time on them when he was a boy, waiting for connecting trains to Kalka or Saharanpur. The odd incident stayed in his memory and when in his late teens, he started writing short stories, these memories became stories as in “Woman in Platform 8”. Train, is a favourite symbol of Bond. Train is a romance on wheels trekking into the remote corners of the land as in “Night Train at Deoli” and “Time Stops at Shamli”. In “Woman on Platform 8” the platform symbolizes relationship. It becomes the channel to make the unknown to known and familiar. It plays a part in bringing the two strangers together by love and care and they depart as mother and son. It serves as a unifying force. The woman tremendously lingers in the minds of readers by her exquisite charm of traits. In his “Kipling’s Simla”, Bond expresses his pure feeling eloquently that small way side stations have fascinated Bond. Manned sometimes by just one or two men and often situated in the middle of a damp subtropical forest or clinging little stations like Ambala always fascinated him. During his childhood he used to watch a changing engine spewing out clouds of white smoke and belching reddish sparks occasionally entering a tunnel with a deafening roar and smoothly moving out of it, till it disappeared, leaving behind a strange echo of its thundering cadence. But crossing the track on foot was a terror to Bond. He was afraid of getting run over, for his strength always deserted and his leg gave way whenever he came too close to the track (Swapan K.Banerjee Rusty and I. 10). Bond narrates such terror in this story “Woman on
Platform 8”. The stranger woman expresses the sudden fear when she watches a boy crossing the railway track. He narrates his childhood nightmare of crossing the railway line. The woman and the boy Arun stride out of the canteen the lady stops dead, her finger digging deep into Arun’s soft wrist. Arun swivels his head and watches a boy jumping off the platform on to the track. The boy safely clambers into the other platform. Her grip slowly loosens and they walk back to the place where Arun’s suitcase is kept. Arun notices a spasm of pain and fear and sadness pass across her face (Bond, *NTDOS* “Woman on Platform 8”. 15).

In *The Adventures of Rusty*, Bond narrated his nightmare thus: Bond has always had a superstitions dread of crossing railway lines. He gets a nightmare in which he finds himself lying helpless on a railway track, while a stream engine thunders towards. He has always woken up with the engine about three feet away but sometimes he wonders what would happen if he fails to wake up at the last moment. Through his story “The Woman on Platform 8” Bond has found the objective correlative of this nightmare says Swapan K.Banerjee in *Rusty and I* (10).

The boy leapt off the platform and ran across the rails, taking a shortcut to the next platform. The unknown boy’s act of crossing the rails shows the childish adventure and curiosity, to know what will happen next, unaware of the danger awaits him. Noticing this act of the unknown boy, the woman was shocked. She cannot get rid of this shortly. She relaxed her hold on his arms and took Arun’s hand again but her fingers trembled against him. Arun can feel the fear she felt. She embodies everyone who is afraid of the noisy roar engine spitting out dark smoke and reddish sparks of the train which closely arrives the station. Children are curious to watch the wonders of train which drags one from one world to another. Train is another source of adventure, exposure and exploration that usually every child enjoys to have the experience though it frightens them with its appearance and noise.
Especially the hill people who may not have a chance to see the train, in their first visit, they are excited and wondered at its appearance and its creaky, squeaky rear. The boy Arun is never afraid of the approaching train. He gets used to it whenever he travels to and fro from his boarding school.

“The Woman on Platform 8” has every aspect of children story as it deals with love and affection that every child requires not only from its parents but from strangers in strange places like Arun. Bond focuses on the motherhood of a woman that helps the boy come out of his loneliness and disinterestedness. Human concern is a primary object of this story which enables human being to care one another irrespective of the age, colour and creed they can live under one roof harmoniously. Bond’s story is a fable that teaches the children to imbibe independence and confidence to face the world alone like Arun. Adults like the woman took the leading role in showering, love, care and tenderness to mould the boy in having confidence of his own. The kindness of strangeness gives him and compensates him his mother. At the end both share kisses and depart as mother and son. Beside this, Bond has laid his terror of crossing the track and also of the acute sense of loneliness of his affection starved childhood in this timeless story “The Woman on Platform 8”.

“The Woman on Platform 8” is a typical Bond’s short story. It is about a twelve-year old boy Arun lonely and unloved who finds a spring of human kindness in a lonely widow. The theme is Bond’s favourite motif of finding an oasis of empathy amidst a desert of loneliness. Arun’s loneliness is glaringly obvious. The woman in a white saree is a kindred spirit, who instinctively empathizes with the lonely child, extends human kindness to him and ends up becoming his ‘mother’. The tenderness inherent in the paradigm is set off by the domineering, voluble and imposing mother of the other boy Satish. Arun’s silent ‘mother’, her companionship, concern, kindness and care touch a sympathetic cord in Arun’s lonely heart. He does not decline her invitation to eat; he does not protest when she is mistaken for
his mother; at the moment of parting he impulsively plants a kiss on her cheek. It is a touching story of a lonely child questing for love.

The third short story “The Blue Umbrella” is a great example of Bond’s ability to present the intricacies of life with much simplicity. Binya, the vivacious girl of “The Blue Umbrella” successfully overcomes the self-seeking attitude towards life. The readers are motivated in witnessing the indomitable spirit of Binya as she fights the external and internal forces of life. It is a moving story. Bond adorns the story with the basic human instincts, desire, possession, envy, greed and compassion for a tiny object ‘Umbrella’. Amita Aggarwal depicts:

“Bond’s favourite story “The Blue Umbrella” presents a moving account of human passions in third person narration. The beautiful blue umbrella emerges as a powerful symbol of longing and possession” (Amita Aggarwal, The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond. 88).

Binya Devi, the child heroine of the story “The Blue Umbrella” from Gharwal hills, is hardly ten-year-old. She walked barefooted over the rocks, over the brow of the hill and the summer grass, calling her cow ‘Neelu’ means the blue grey cow. The other cow was called ‘Gori’ meaning fair as it was white in colour. If the cows did not returned on its own at the right time, Binya would be sent to fetch them. Binya belonged to the mountains, dark forests and lonely hilltops held no terrors for her. The town was five miles away from her village, a pleasure resort for tourists from all over India. Binya’s father had died two years before. She lived with her mother, brother and her cows. They had fields where they grew potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, maize and mustard. They had enough to live on but not enough to sell. (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”. 5-8).

Binya was quite sturdy, fair of skin with pink cheeks and dark eyes and her black hair tied in a pigtail. She wore glass bangles and necklace of glass beads with the leopard’s claw.
It was a lucky charm. Bijju was her elder brother and his real name was Vijay but all used to call them Binya and Bijju. When she is calling for Neelu she heard voices, laughter, the clatter of plates and cups from a party of picnickers. Binya willingly lends her pleasing smile to anyone who is happy. She possesses the heart of a young lady. On a childish impulse, quickly gets ready to exchange her charmed pendant made up of a leopard’s claw for a dainty, blue silk umbrella. The umbrella is owned by a wealthy woman who came for picnic in the hills. Binya’s pendant created a stir in the heart of this lady. With a desire to possess the pendant, she reluctantly gets ready to exchange her umbrella for it. This was the first time Binya had seen such a small, dainty, colourful umbrella. She fell in love with it. The umbrella was like a flower, a great blue flower that had sprung up on the dry brown hillside. It had cast a spell over her, drawing her forward almost against her will. Binya was very happy, on the seventh heaven, after receiving the blue umbrella. She got, enamoured by its beauty. Her passions see no limit for her prize possession. She carried it wherever she went and seldom closed it. Sometimes Bijju snapped it shut that it got in the way, but Binya little later opened it again that it was not beautiful when it was closed. It accompanied her everywhere protecting her from storms and snakes. Whenever Binya went out- whether it was to graze the cows, or fetch water from the spring or carry milk to the little tea shop on the Tehri road she took the umbrella with her. That patch of sky blue silk could always be seen on the hill side (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”. 9-23).

Binya’s fawn like movements in dale and forest like Wordsworth’s Lucy, her innocence like Tagore’s Mini from “Kabuliwala” draw our attention and her love for the umbrella enthralls us. Binya enjoys her raised status in the village. The disparity between Binya’s poverty and the richness of the umbrella created a stir of jealousy among the villagers. The school master’s wife, a second class B.A. felt extremely degraded in not having the rich possession. She thought it was quite wrong for a poor cultivator’s daughter to have
such a fine umbrella while she, a second class B.A. had to do with an ordinary one. Everyone heaved a sigh of longing for Binya’s elegant umbrella. Their jealousy breeds ill will against it. Most of the people in the village were a little envious of Binya’s blue umbrella (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”. 43).

The Umbrella was so beautiful even as shrewd a man as Ram Bharosa, the tea shop owner cannot resist its charms. Rom Bharosa bargained it for five rupees, but Binya refused that the umbrella was worth fifteen. He came down to ask it for twelve. Binya refused to fall for the blandishment of an endless supply of boiled sweets. The battle of wills between the old man and Binya took many unexpected turns.

The large heartedness and innocence of children are set in direct contrast with the shrewdness and envious nature of grown-ups. Bond here juxtaposes the two worlds, the innocent world of children and the cunning and manipulative world of adults. The children openly admire Binya’s blue umbrella and get thrilled by its sensational touch. It is their sincere appreciation for umbrella that gives them a chance to hold it and experience its thrilling touch. The malicious attitude of grown-ups stopped them to admire it openly. But secretly everyone craves to possess it. Unlike the adults, the children did not have to pretend, they were full of praise for the umbrella. Most people consoled themselves by saying that Binya’s pretty umbrella would shrivel in the sun, if the sun was fierce; that it should collapse in a wind, if the wind was strong; that it would attract the lighting, if lightening fell near it; and that it would prove unlucky; if there was any ill-luck going about. Secretly, everyone admired it (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”. 45).

Here Bond brilliantly celebrates the innocence of children by setting them against the world of adults. The children sincerely appreciated Binya’s umbrella and gave a vent to their true feelings. By criticizing the umbrella, the grown-ups revealed their prejudice and egotism. Away from pretensions, the children purely at heart praised it. They knew that if they said
nice things about the umbrella, Binya would smile and give it to them to hold it for a little while.

The little girl Binya by her heroic adventure wins our hearts when she rescued her umbrella from the strong wind. Binya sat down in the shade of a pine tree, laying the opened umbrella beside her. The sleepy warm summery day dosed her. A wind came quietly, grew stranger and got into the umbrella and began to drag it over the grass. The wind lifted the umbrella about six feet from the sleeping Binya. The sound woke Binya. Binya set off in pursuit but the wind was in a wicked and playful mood. As soon as she came near to it, the wind sent it bouncing, floating and dancing away from her. A fresh gust picked it up and carried it to the very edge of the cliff. She peered down the cliff face it was about a hundred feet below. The umbrella had stuck in the cherry tree which grew crookedly out of the rocks and hanging across the chasm. Binya did not hesitate and she was at home on a hillside. She stuck her base leg over the edge of the cliff and began climbing down. She held on to the thorny bilberry bushes. As agile as a mountain goat, she reached the cherry tree within five minutes. Gripping the rough cherry bark with her toes, using her knees as leverage, she crawled along the tree, and she was almost within the reach of the umbrella and noticed that the blue cloth was torn in a couple of places. Still now, Binya felt no fear instead she was proud that she could climb them as well as Bijju. Looking down she felt dizzy. She concentrated only on the patch of blue. Twenty minutes later she emerged from the nettle clump, her precious umbrella held aloft. She had nettle stings all over her legs. She was as immune to nettles as Bijju was to bees (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”. 27-37).

Not only Binya, but her brother Bijju also had adventures. Four years back, Bijju had knocked a hive out of an oak tree, had been badly stung about the face and legs while on his way home from school. It had been a painful experience. Hence, if a bee stung him, he felt nothing that he had been immunized for life. On the way home, from school, the Kingora
bushes and bilberries feed him with the juice of the wild and sour fruit. He gave his sister handful of berries and she handed him the umbrella rewarding him for giving her the wild fruits (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”, 39). It depicts the sharing tendency and the give and take attitude of the children.

Bijju didn’t have money to buy sweets in the glass jars of Ram Bharosa’s shop. Some of his friends had taken sweets on credit, and at the end of the month, they could pay for it. Otherwise they had to hand over, Ram Bharosa some of their most treasured possessions such as, a curved knife for cutting grass, or a small hand-axe, or a jar for pickles or a pair of earring and they are well kept by Ram Bharosa. Afterwards he sold those items from his shop. Now Ram Bharosa had set his heart on Binya’s blue umbrella. He was anxious to give credit to either of the children (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”, 40-41).

Binya was waiting for an opportunity to use her umbrella. She sat on the hillside waiting for the rain. It was the time of the monsoon. Big black clouds kept piling up, and thunder rolled over the hills. As soon as the first big drop of rain came down, she raised her stitched umbrella over her head. It was like standing under a water fall. The umbrella was not a rain umbrella but, it held up bravely. Rods of rain fell around her in a curtain of shivered glass. Bond captures the scene of the children enjoying the rain that Binya was the only one who didn’t run. This was what she’d been waiting for and she was not in a hurry to go home and also she didn’t mind getting her feet wet. Bijju would have enjoyed getting wet but he had his school books with him and he could not leave them get spoilt. Therefore he sheltered in a cave. After seeing Binya he came out of the cave and shared the umbrella (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”, 48).

The monsoon enters, and changes the attire of nature. The hills turned a lush green. Ferns sprang up on walls and tree-trunks. Giant lilies reared up like leopards from the tall grass. A white mist coiled and uncoiled as it floated up from the valley. Bond admires the
monsoon season that it was a beautiful season, except for the leeches. Besides these natural enchantments, Binya encounters creatures such as leeches, field rats, scorpions and snakes who were all friends of this monsoon. Binya is a bold and courageous girl. When she crossed the small stream at the bottom of the hill, she saw something gliding out of the bushes, was a long black snake. Binya’s umbrella is a weapon to her now, she opened it and thrust it forward and the snake in hard snout thudded twice against the umbrella. The reptile turned and slithered away over the wet rocks and disappeared. Such is the courage of the mountain girl. She ran and told her mother how she had been saved by the umbrella. For her, the umbrella stands as a God, protects her from evil.

Firstly, the summer sun, now the endless rain faded the umbrella little. From a bright blue, it had changed to a light blue, but still it did not lose its charm and attraction and Ram Bharosa still desired it, not wanted to sell it but he wanted to own it. The more he saw the umbrella, the more he wanted it. The schools closed during the monsoon. As Bijju had holidays, Ram Bharosa asked him to work in his shop but Bijju didn’t have time. He had to help his mother with ploughing and transplanting of the rice-seedlings. Ram Bharosa employed a boy from the next village called Rajaram. Rajaram and Bijju went to the same school but they were not friends. Hearing from Ram Bharosa that how he was sick of that umbrella, Rajaram promised him that if he paid him three rupees he would steal it for him. What was the use of stolen umbrella and how he would be able to show it to others asked by Ram Bharosa. Rajaram replied that he took it into Tehri and had it coloured red. He agreed to give him two rupees, after fetching it, he would be given remaining one rupee (Bond, “Blue Umbrella”. 53-60).

Bond describes the monsoon wonders of the forest where the grass was always wet and the pine-needles were slippery under foot. The tall trees shut out the light, and poisonous – looking mushrooms, orange and purple sprang up every where. It was a good place for
porcupines who liked these mushrooms. Binya was searching for the porcupine -quills which valued as lucky charms. Ram Bharosa paid ten rupees for each quill. He sold the quills for more profit. Binya had already collected five quills. In searching for more, she left her umbrella away from her, which was seized by Rajaram. Bijju was coming home from another direction. He saw Binya rushing down the hill as if all the mountain spirits in Garhwal were after her. Binya told him that her umbrella had been stolen by the fleeting Rajaram. Bijju flung himself at the thief, caught him by the legs. A tremendous fight was taking place. The two boys swayed together on a rock, tumbled on to the sand, rolled over the pebbled bank. The heavy fight disturbed the magpies, bulbul and other birds and they flew away with cries of alarm. Elder’s greediness resulted in the fight between the boys. The adults’ mean passion changed a boy into a thief for a small amount of money. The situation highlights that human vices are not in born but a result of circumstances. Elder’s envy is imposed on children to fulfill their desire. When Ram Bharosa’s all mean attempts to seize it from Binya and her brother Bijju utterly failed, he sent Rajaram to steal it. The villagers got angry on knowing Ram Bharosa’s use of wrong means to get it from Binya. They boycotted him and stopped buying things from his shop. His reputation, business and life all collapsed. Because of his greediness over the umbrella, Ram Bharosa had suffered the tortures of greed, the despair of loneliness. People stopped coming to his shop and stopped trusting the old man and they turned against him. Children taunted him, twisted his name from ‘trust worthy Ram’ into ‘trusty umbrella thief’. The loneliness hurts him and he is left without any company. His ego is badly hurt. His mad pursuit of possession pricks him to obtain it, which ends in futile.

Binya has understood her faults in making Ram Bharosa a miserable outcaste. The tea-shop owner underwent a vigorous alienation giving him ample opportunity to realize his misery. Binya did not want him to feel too bad about what he’d done because it made her feel bad about herself. Towards the end of October, Binya went to the shop, left her closed
umbrella deliberately. She asked him to keep it. Ram Bharosa also realized his fault and said that he was never in the sun or in the rain and what use is an umbrella to him. She left the old man holding the umbrella though he protested to have it. The barrier between Binya and Ram Bharosa had been broken symbolically that there was nothing between her and the bright blue sky. He tells everyone that it is a gift from Binya. It was left outside the shop and whoever wanted, can use it. It became everyone’s property. People again started visiting his shop. After few nights, a bear visited Ram Bharosa’s shop, scrambled on to the tin roof of his shop while climbing off the roof the bear had lost its claw. Next morning he picked it up and put it in his pocked. A bear’s claw was a lucky find. He took the claw to the silversmith and made locket hanging in a thin silver chain. He presented the pendant to Binya for she gave him the umbrella. She walked back to her home with her cows singing of the stars and the trees stood still and listened to her and the mountains were glad (Bond, “The Blue Umbrella”. 71-86).

In “The Blue Umbrella” Bond emphasizes social belongingness. He portrays that his characters are not isolated in their own land. Though Ram Bharosa is excommunicated due to his own malicious nature, the small girl Binya offers her hand of friendship and brings him back into the main stream of life. The innocence of the child forgets the mistakes of the old man and unable to bear his loneliness. She voluntarily gave her only valuable possession. Binya embodies innocence and she symbolizes a remarkable balance between social and personal concerns. The story reveals the truth that man like Ram Bharosa is conditioned by circumstances and children possess better understanding and broader view of life like Binya.

The story reaches at its climax. Our heart is over taken not by the malice of the villagers against Ram Bharosa but by the sympathy and love of Binya for this forsaken man. She secretly feels herself responsible for the miserable plight of Ram Bharosa whom the villagers and the children have made the target of their taunts and jeers. She questions herself -a mere object an umbrella is more important to her, or an old man and his feelings. She gave
important to the old man’s feelings and won the heart of the readers. Binya proved herself ‘the child is a father of mankind’ as Wordsworth says.

It is through Binya, Bond raises the pertinent question on the concept of material happiness and futility of the whole process. He highlights the feelings and concern for other, ignoring the material wealth. The battle of wills between the old man Ram Bharosa and the girl Binya takes many unexpected turns. But, at last, the compassionate heart of Binya wins. She discovers that there is more to life than material possession. This little girl, willingly donates her prize possession, the blue umbrella to Ram Bharosa by her kind gesture, she teaches the great lesson of humanity. Love breeds love and the crooked Ram Bharosa melts. He repays her generosity by presenting her a pendant made up of a bear’s claw tied in a silver chain.

The story proves that a child can do and change the bad intention of elders as Binya did in this story. The projection of an under current of the inherent moral education is very appealing. The story pays a tribute to the basic goodness of man and underlines that human vice and goodness are not in born but a result of circumstances. The villain is not devoid of nobility. A touch of compassion, an ability to share and a sense of justice can turn a heart of stone into a heart of gold. Ram Bharosa’s case is an example of it. He rises like a phoenix from Binya’s kindness, lovely smile and selfless donation.

Umbrella is a sign or symbol and it is a barrier for love and happiness when Binya possesses it for herself. At the same time, it serves as a lamp, driving away the darkness of human mind, ie greediness, boastfulness and possessiveness in Binya and old man’s mind. It serves the double purpose of diagnose the disease that is human vices as well as the remedy for the ailment. While the material umbrella becomes pale, faded one, the mind of the villagers becomes pretty, bright blue sky. As the colour blue symbolizes love and serenity, it fills everyone’s heart with love and compassion in this story at the end. Ram Bharosa learnt a
lesson from Binya that sharing is enjoying. He felt guilty of his behaviour. At last, as a new born man, he presented the bear claw to Binya as a token of love. Bond, in *The Funny Side Up* reflects his comments on the story “The Blue Umbrella” that it teaches at last that Greed is overcome by generosity.

The blue umbrella is a character in itself. It represents beauty, love and obsession over material belongings. It is a tool which reveals the real character of the elders and the children in that village. Obsession for material things drives human in loneliness since they possess it for themselves. ‘Desire is the root cause of all miseries’ Ashoka, the great king says. But, the new maxim is, ‘The real joy blooms when it is shared’. When Binya has the umbrella it develops ego and boastfulness. It is a cancer, spreads agony around it. When she gives away it, the beauty of love spreads in every one’s heart as a snow covers the mountain in December. Amita Aggarwal puts her views in nutshell:

“The story “The Blue Umbrella” is a dramatic presentation of good and evil forces at clash and final victory of basic goodness of man” (Amita Aggarwal, *The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*. 21).

The whole story revolves around the blue Umbrella. As an object of urban sophistication, it stirs up the related passions like envy, pride, possession and isolation. It becomes an object of temptation and social prestige. It is highly evocative symbol capable of attracting and repelling alike. Love for the life and the people find varied expressions through this apparently insignificant object. This insignificant object motivates the thought and action of the characters. Their emotional ebbs and flows are regulated by it. The story emphasizes a touch of compassion and ability to share other’s gloom which is essential to make this earth a seat of human bliss. The umbrella acts as a catalyst in the conversion of Ram Bharosa. In spite of occasional hold of evil, he returns to divine attributes at the end.
Bond’s simple style comes with superb story telling skills. It makes the characters real and their problems true. The description of the mountains, seasonal changes, the children, their cows, the life in the village all seems to come alive. “The Blue Umbrella” is originally published in 1970’s, by publishing it again, has given another generation of children, the opportunity to fall for their special magic of Bond. Bandana Bal Chandnani is of the opinion:

“The story “The Blue Umbrella” highlights the innocence of children and communicates the lesson of kindness, sympathy and brother hood like the traditional children’s literature in India does” (B.B.Chandnani, Structures of Authenticity in Ruskin Bond’s Fiction, 79).

The above discussed story is really a revelation of innocence, kindness sympathy and brother hood of children. Bond’s acumen could well be observed in his projection of life like children. His child protagonist Binya appeals enormously for her love, adventure and inquisitiveness to know the things around her. Bond’s little girl heroine Binya is portrayed with liveliness and zest for life. She fills the atmosphere with her charm. She is boyish in temperament and activities. Bond has truly understood children and could see life again with their eyes and his stories keep them alive.

Bond’s long story “Sita and the River” is the fourth one under this chapter which is about the tale of two children and their bravery during a flood. Their positive attitude is remarkably brought out by the author. Nature, even in its fury is regarded as being friendly. The story portrays the girl Sita and her innate spirit of adventure to save herself from the angry river and her intimacy with nature. Bond captures the readers through his vivid descriptions of the island and the village and its people. ‘Sita’ is an embodiment of adventure, courage, humanity, preservation of trees. At present, children are in need to imbibe these qualities to exhibit their individuality and to face the world without fear like Sita. She is an inspiration for the children who read this story. The story contains several features of
children’s literature, besides being laid in the countryside. In “Sita and the River” Bond crafts around the theme such as – adventure, nature, flood rescue, learning to get along with life with the little touch of humour and humanity.

“Sita and the River” revolves around the life of an epic heroine Sita and her heroic battle with the forces of nature. It is the fury of the river which plays a crucial role in moulding the events of her life. Bond explores changing relationship with the river, from a deep love and gratitude for its many boons, to the awareness of its duality, to an understanding of its mystical nature. Sita lives on an island with her grandparents. The family depends upon the river for livelihood. But the life force the river becomes a destructive force when its flood submerges the island and uproots the shelter and carries Sita away. The story commences with the description of the river and hints its approaching role in the forthcoming events:

“In the middle of the river, the river that began in the mountains of the Himalayas and ended in the Bay of Bengal, there was a small island. The river swept around the island, sometimes clawing at its banks but never going right over it…. More than twenty years had passed since the river had flooded the island and at that time no one had lived there. But then years ago a small hut had stood on it, a mud walled hut with a sloping thatched roof” (Bond, NTDOS “Sita and the River”. 177).

The river flooded the island, uprooted the only peepul tree and took Sita away with its waves. It was a village boy Vijay who rescued her. She returned with her grandfather to the island when the river water receded. Sita had by now experienced both the generative and destructive aspect of nature.

Ten-year-old Sita lives on an island in the midst of the river with her grandfather and grandmother. There is the only house and the only family on the island where she lost her mother when she was two or three. Only ten years back they had come to live on that island. A small hut has been built into a huge rock as if the hut built on the rock stood firm. They had
goats grazing on the short grass and the leaves of the thistle and hens followed them. There was a melon patch and a vegetable patch and also a small field of marigolds. The landmark of the island is a three-hundred-year old peepul tree, the only tree on the island. Bond makes a naturalist’s statement saying:

“Peepul trees will grow anywhere – through the walls of old temples, through gravestones, even from roof tops…. Even during the great flood, which had occurred twenty years back the peepul tree had stood firm” (Bond, NTDOS “Sita and the River”. 177).

The reader can read more of peepul tree in Bond’s Book of nature. In Book of Nature (122, 133-134) the peepul tree occupies a particular place, where he depicts many aspects of the peepul tree, related to the story “Sita and the River”. The peepul was a good tree to sit beneath. Its heart – shaped leaves, sensitive to the slightest breeze and it span like tops, attract one’s attention and invite into their shade. It was beneath a peepul, Gautama Buddha gains enlightenment. This tree came to be called the Bothi, the ‘tree of wisdom’. The peepal is especially sacred. Its roots represent Brahma, its bark Vishnu, its branches Shiva. In the new moon day on Monday, the peepul is worshipped by women who pour water on its trunk and lay at its roots a coin and sweets. As its roots are quite capable of pushing through bricks and mortar, it is planted some distance away from buildings. The leaf is beautiful, and has been likened to the perfect male physique, from the stalk (The human neck) the edges of the leaf run squarely out on either side (the shoulders) and curve round inwards to the end in a finely pointed tail (The waist) So that the suggestion is of a square, broad torso upon a narrow waist – a body of Kirshna (122,133-34).

Bond also records the Indian reverence for the ‘peepul’ tree, a sacred tree, the abode of spirits, good and bad and Sita’s grandmother’s superstitious belief about the peepul tree:
“Do not yawn when you are sitting beneath the tree… And if you must yawn always snap your fingers in front your mouth. If you forget to do that, a demon might jump down your throat” (Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River”. 178).

Sita can do all that a boy can do and sometimes better. As she lost her mother in an earlier age, her grandmother had taught her all that a girl should know: cooking, sewing, grinding spices, cleaning the house, feeding the birds. Grand father had taught other things like taking small boat across the river, cleaning a fish, repairing net or catching a snake by the tail. Some things she learnt by herself were, climbing the peepul tree, leaping from rock to rock in shallow water and swimming in an inlet.

The river around this island cut her off from many things especially her education. Her grandparents cannot read or write and as a result Sita can’t read or write. Though there is a school in the village Shahganj across the river, Sita had never seen it. She has never seen a city and she has never been in a train. She is too busy in her hut, in governing her grandparents and the entire household. Bond unfolds the typical village girl whose ability to handle the situation against her loneliness in this story from this point onwards.

Sita finds the sky dark with monsoon clouds. The monsoon rains have come early this time. Sita is not afraid of getting wet in the rain; she neither likes it. She walks about barefooted, barelegged; she is very sure on her feet; her toes have grown accustomed to gripping all kinds of rocks, slippery or sharp; though thin, she is strong with black hair and black eyes, brown arms with the scar on her thigh caused by a hyena trying to scratch her when she once visited her mother’s village. Moving about in the pouring rain, she sees a harmless brown snake. She picks it up with a stick and drops it behind a cluster of rocks. She has no quarrel with snakes, which keep down the rats and frogs. Sita dislikes the huge black scorpion, one of which bit her once, leaving her in great pain for a long time. So whenever she sees one, she crushes it with a rock. Sita has a rag doll, made with grandmother’s help out
of bits of old clothing she keeps it by her side every night. The doll is someone to talk to. She lovely named it Mumta. She often spoke to Mumta, sharing her secrets with her, though there are no special secrets in her life. Bond shares the good reason for Sita to have Mumta that if she had secrets, she must have a friend to share them with. Since there were no other children on the island, Sita shared her secrets with Mumta, her only friend (Bond, “Sita and the River”. 180-182). In short Bond’s little girl Sita is a child of Nature, reminding the reader very much of William Wordsworth’s “Lucy Gray”. In William Wordsworth’s poem “Lucy Gray” the little girl Lucy lives alone on a wide moor, with “no mate, no comrade” but still “not blither is the mountain roe”. She is the daughter of the wonderful nature. She is a part of nature just as Sita in this story.

Sita’s Grandfather tells her if her grandmother is not feeling better by morning he will have to take her to the hospital in Shahganj. He knows that Sita had been alone before. Though she had been alone before, she hesitates now since, it is in the middle of the rains, with the river so high Sita is not afraid of being left alone but she does not like the increasing level of the river.

The next morning Grandfather leaves his small boat taking grandmother and their three goats with him. He intends to sell the goats and procure medical care for Grandmother who is very ill. Grandmother raises her hand to bless Sita and the little girl touches Grandmother’s feet. Now Sita is alone except for the little hut and the peepul tree. Sita asks Mumta she will save her if the river rises. Sita assures her that she will not go anywhere without Mumta (Bond, NTDOS “Sita and the River”. 182-84). The rag doll serves as the emotional link between her mother and Sita and her Grandmother and Sita. It evades Sita’s loneliness. Though it is an insignificant object abstractly it indicates life around it. Sita finds some emotional attachment to this doll as it was her only companion to share with. It is the only treasure she possesses for herself after leaving her grandparents.
Bond portrays Sita who indulged in the adventure to save herself from the flooding river and her affinity with nature. Related to this story, Brinda Bose in her review extends that the most striking about Bond is his ability to accept the vagaries of nature, the fury as well as kindness as rivers show.

“Sita and the River” illustrates that life is not only good and happiness but it puts light on the darker side of bad and suffering as you have two sides on the same coin. The river represents life by itself. It reveals the agile of life and ups and downs of it.

Sita watches the level of the water that rises in the river. She sees a drowned bullock, being carried downstream. Sita prays for the rain to stop. Sita’s worst fears were confirmed when she sees planks of wood, small trees and bushes and then a wooden bed-stead, floating past the island. The fear in her heart results in prayer. She prays to the God Indhra for the safety of her grandparents and for her own safety too. The angry river is now rampaging down from the hills and thundering across the plain, bringing with it dead animals, uprooted trees, household goods and huge fish choked to death by swirling mud. The little girl looks after her hens and small vegetable patch, faces the ferry of flood on her own. She places their valued possessions; Grandmother’s hundred years old single-thread sewing-machine, more than a century old sword of Sita’s great-grandfather, grandfather’s hookah, grandmother’s walking-stick, a clean white cotton dhoti of Grandfather’s and Grandmother’s only spare sari and spices used in cooking. She stuffs the trunk with everything useful and valuable (Bond, NTDOS “Sita and the River”. 186). These valuables emerge as a symbol of heritage and tradition, handed down from one generation to another. Since, Sita is a small girl she has possessed the responsibility of safeguarding the things, her grandparents kept years long.

As the water enters the hut, horrified by what she sees, she forgets about her meal, she runs splashing through the ankle-deep water toward the safety of the peepul true. If the tree hadn’t been there, a well-known landmark she might have floundered into deep water, into
the river, she feels to the peepul tree and climbs into its branches. The flood in the river carries away a lot of things from the villages upriver. Sita wonders why the river, which she has loved, is threatening her now. When she sees a drowned woman float by she begins to cry. Climbing higher into the tree, she sees a crow’s nest with four eggs in it. The flood carries Mumta away. Sita cannot save her from the flood. She finds great consolation within herself that she lost her rag doll Mumta, if she can be so careless how she can expect God to notice her. She realizes that ‘she is a part of the river’ which minimizes her sense of suffering (Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River” 187).

The river is very angry now. The peepul tree groaned as the earth is softening, the stones are being washed away, and the roots of the tree are losing their hold. There is a flurry of leaves, then a surge of mud from below. To Sita it seems as though the river was rising to meet the sky (Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River”. 189). It reminds us of the first flood in Noah’s period in Genesis from Bible. The Genesis 7: 17-23, from the Bible, the flood was forty days upon the earth, the waters increased, and the ark was lifted up above the earth. The waters prevailed were increased greatly upon the earth: and all the high hills that were under the heaven were covered, the mountains were covered. All the flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl and of cattle and of beast and of every creeping thing upon the earth and every man. Every living substance was destroyed, which was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle and the creeping things and the fowl of the heaven and Noah only remained alive and they that were with him in the ark. (Genesis 7:17:23) Sita is the only girl survived in the island, with the help of the peepul tree like an ark in Noah’s time. Only Noah’s family is saved along with. The tree tilts swinging Sita from side to side. She clings to peepul’s branch desperately. As the tree is great in size it cannot move swiftly on the river. At a bend in the river the tree strikes a sandbank and comes to stop. She has to cling tightly to
her branch, her arms are aching and she feels that she is not alone. The broken branch of the tree seems to her that as if one of the gods had remembered her.

Bond portrays that Sita does not lose her grip. The tree was her friend. It has known her all these years and now it holds her in its old and dying arms as if it were determined to keep her from the river. The peepul tree once stood majestically in the middle of the island. It is much older than her grandfather who is seventy. It provides shelter for the birds. It attracts birds and insects from across the river. Even after death, the peepul serves the purpose of saving human by protecting Sita from the river.

In “Sita and the River” for the grandmother, peepul leaves looks like Krishna, broad at the shoulders, then tapering down to a very slim waist. This similitude makes the tree more sacred and loving. These mythological beliefs have helped Sita to cling to the branch without fear. Bond accumulates myth about trees to reinsure faith in them.

Suddenly someone calls to her. She sees a small boy in a boat. He approaches Sita and helps her into his boat. Then he pilots his little boat down the river. The boy’s name is Vijay. He is from a village near the foothills, about six miles from Sita’s island. He was going to Shahganj to sell some mangoes when the swollen river swept his boat down stream. Sita eats the mangoes. After sometime the fury of the flood abates and stops carrying the boat downstream. Learning that Sita cannot read and write, Vijay offers to teach her-if they get back. Vijay pulls into a bend in the river and escapes the pull of the current. They spend the night in the boat, which Vijay ties to a tree in the inlet. Vijay keeps watch while Sita sleeps, when a young elephant trumpets Sita is awakened, Vijay plays his flute for her as if Lord Krishna. In her sleep, Sita dreams that the boy and Krishna are one and she is sitting beside him on a great white bird which flies over the mountains, over the snow peaks of the Himalayas, into the cloud-land of the gods (Bond, NTDOS “Sita and the River”. 194). The music from the flute carries Sita away again into the land of dreams and they are riding on the
bird once more, Sita and the blue God Krishna are passing through cloud and mist. Then
Vijay too falls asleep. Waking up, he rows the boat through the trees until they reach a village
on a hill. A farmer of the village, a Jat, offers to take them by his bullock-cart to Karauli,
from where they can catch a train to Shahganj.

The Jat farmer, named Hukum Singh, is going to Karauli to sell his farm produce. He
is accompanied by his son Phambiri, who is a wrestler. He has a wrestling match at the fair
with the Karauli champion. Vijay and Sita climb into the cart on the way they see a lot of
nature’s creatures: a number of birds in the paddy fields, black and white curlews and cranes
with pink coat-tails. They stop the cart and sleep for the night. At the fair Phambiri wins the
match and the prize amount of thirty rupees. He gives Vijay and Sita a feast and a present
each. He buys a bright blue sports shirt for Vijay, colored glass bangles for Sita. He takes
them into a temporary cinema. Hukam Singh takes them to the railway station next day and
they board the train.

Bond never forgets to mention about humanity in his short stories. Bond attempts to
bring at common humanity of the characters. In many of his stories and novels, especially in
his novels The Room on the Roof and A Flight of a Pigeon there are few humans still, to come
to the aid of the troubled and the affected people.

A Flight of Pigeons is Bond’s novel of humanism besides a historical novel. The
entire events of the fiction reveal the cardinal values of faith, love and honesty. While reading
the novel, one can witness the angelic compassion of Lala Ramjimal who takes care of his
master’s family after his death. The family comprises of eight members including two pets.
Ramji Lal not only saves that entire family but also keeps them safe in his house and provides
food and shelter for the broken hearted Labadoors for about one month (17-23). Ramji Lal
saves his master’s family at the risk of his own life. In “Sita and the River” Sita is being
rescued by vijay. With the help of Hakum and Phambiri they reach Shahkanj and they find
her grandfather. In “Sita and the River” Sita is being helped by Vijay. Both Sita and Vijay are at the mercy of Hukam to reach Shahganj and Hukum’s son Phambiri also help them in his own way. After they depart, from the railway station, Sita feels that Hukam and Phambiri are like people in a fairy tale, met briefly on the road and never seen again (Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River”. 205). Sita and Vijay are at the kindness of these strangers. Bond indicates that the humanism shoots in the minds of people without any discrimination which leads the troubled people to live and overcome the calamities and destruction.

At Shahganj, Sita runs into her Grandfather, who tells her that her grandmother is dead. He still has two goats with him. Vijay takes leave of Sita after giving her his flute and another boat. Returning to their island, Sita and Grandfather repair their hut, with Grandfather’s recalling other floods which he has experienced as a boy, the wrestling matches he won in his youth and the kites he flew (Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River”. 207). Grandfather recalls that kite flying was then the sport of kings. In “The Kitemaker” (102-103) Bond elaborately presents the kite flying as the recollection of Sita’s Grandfather in “Sita and the River”, Grandfather remembered the Dragon Kite that he had built – a great kite with a face painted, the eyes made of small mirrors the tail like a long crawling serpent. In the first attempt, the kite refused to leave the ground. Then the wind came from the right direction and the Dragon Kite soared into the sky, higher and higher with the sun glinting in its eyes. It pulled fiercely on the twine determined to be free, to break loose to live a life of its own and it did. The twine snapped, the kite leapt away, sailed on heaven ward and it was never found again. He did not make another like it. Sita thought that it was like her doll Mumta (Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River”. 208). Both the kite and the doll have souls and feeling in it as if they are persons liked and loved as their friends or companions by Grandfather and Sita respectively. Sita herself confesses that Mumta has been a real person, not a doll, and now Sita could not make another like her.
Kites are the interest of the children. Sometime children make it a hobby to fly the kite leisurely. Its colour, face, eyes and tail, and the way of dancing according to the music of the wind attract not only the kids but the elders and even kings. When the kite glides in the sky, the children feel as if they are floating in the sky as kites and they are nearer to heaven. Each one tries to reach the heaven first without losing the string of the kite. It reminds us of our destiny that one is like a kite, and the string is controlled by our Master Creator God. Bond beautifully depicts the relationship between god and mankind. If one wants to be with God, the string that is world they have to lose is the underlying note here.

Vijay keeps his word and comes to visit Sita on her island. He offers to teach Sita how to play his flute. Sita says that sometimes the river is angry and sometime it is kind. Vijay says that they are part of the river. Bond concludes the story saying:

“It was a good river, deep and strong, beginning the mountains and ending in the sea”

(Bond, *NTDOS* “Sita and the River”. 209).

Bond sees human lives intertwined with the passing moods of nature, says T. N. Dhar in “Tender and Authentic” (156). In this story Sita’s life is interlinked with nature. She has to face both the kindness and the furious phase of nature and accept to live with it. Sita is a plucky girl who fights a successful battle against the swollen waters of river, otherwise friendly.

Sita and her Grandfather’s return to the island represent their attachment and adjustment to live in the same land irrespective of the troubles and loss. It sketches the village people’s sturdiness, fearlessness and stead fastness to hold the life as it is. Sita and Vijay are embodiment of children, who realized life and nature and ready to join hand in hand with nature, never care about the negative phase of nature as well as life.

The story “Sita and the River” is a fine example of Bond’s narration and description of characters, places and events with the touch of humanism. Here, Bond’s characters Sita
and her Grandfather struggle consistently in order to survive. Life is another name of struggle and Bond ardently believes in the ultimate victory of human. The image of river conveys life and continuity. Nature’s bounties make one realizes her benevolence. One has to accept the realities of autumn, flood, drought, heat and storm. Negative phase of nature is ephemeral and transient. As autumn is followed by spring and draught by rain, hope is their shield. Its protective nature helps them survive. Sita has not lost herself in flood rather she gets strengthened in the company of nature.

Island in the story “Sita and the River” conveys solitariness by compulsion. The story brings out the truth that each individual is like an island, till he is swept in the current of life and starts interacting with other individuals. The island may provide an opportunity for calm contemplation but for his development, man needs society. Sita though happily living with grandparents, has no vision of life beyond the island. It is when the flood sweeps away the embankment and the island is submerged into water, Sita is introduced to the real world of life and relationships.

The story “Sita and the River” unfolds children’s attitudes; adventure, acceptation of life, learning through situation through Sita and the boy Vijay. Amena Jeyal in “A Magical World” opines that “Sita and the River” portrays the girl Sita, whose innate spirit of adventure to save herself from the angry river and her intimacy with nature (“An Island of Trees”: Nature Stories and Poems. Rev. 35). The river, the island, the peepul tree, the kite and the doll Mumta represent life and nature.

Subhadra Sen Gupta says in “The Perfect Choice” a review that Sita’s adventure illustrates something Bond wants his readers understand the extraordinary resilience children have in facing up to the vicissitudes of life. Little Sita and her gallant rescuer Vijay ‘Krishna’ triumph at the end. One day the clouds go away, the water goes down and the river becomes their friend again.
The remarkable blending of the literary traditions of Indian and English literature is noticeable of Bond’s creativity. He focuses the individuality of children, their dreams and their adventures like English children’s writing. He captures the innocence of children in his stories. Sita in this story bravely fights the destructive forces of nature. Another fact about Bond’s young character is that they spread the message of love and understanding through the bond of friendship. They are quick in making friends but it is pure and spontaneous. In “Sita and the River”, Vijay gives Sita a flute while parting from her. In the story “A Rupee Goes a Long Way”, Ranji befriend Koki by giving her pretty necklace of bright coloured stones. Bond’s children have courageous spirit in them. In “Sita and the River” Sita bears the responsibilities of her household in her grandparent’s absence, bravely faces the hurdles and uncertainties of life during the flood. She displays an unusual courage while tackling her harrowing circumstance. Jusk like Sita, Tembu in “The Tigher in the Tunnel”, Jail in “The Eye of the Eagle”, Bisnu in “Panther’s Moon”, Bisnu in “Dust on the Mountain”, Kamal in “The Coming of Kamal” through their capacity for hard work, by their positive aura and cheerful personality become a source of inspiration for the children. Bond provides the child reader, a better understanding of life by projecting dynamic, brave and precocious children who bravely fight with their challenging circumstances.

The story “Sita and the River” is an allegory of life. Characters: Sita and Vijay, places: island and fair, events: flood and rescue have allegorical interpretations. The story of Sita becomes a universal predicament when she assumes her protector Vijay as Lord Krishna. The story quite long is divided into many episodes titled as ‘Island in the River’ ‘The Sounds of the River’, “The Bullock Cart Ride” “The Return” and so on.

Bond explores and presents a world where children are supreme. They enjoy the life and bravely face its ups and downs. He through his precocious and dynamic children portrays his vision of life and the challenges of life should be faced bravely. His children are epitome
of his philosophy. His children make us believe that the world is a good place to live in. The difficulties and challenges of life have to be coped with. They by their unyielding spirit overcome the most formidable obstacles with little difficulty. Sita is a fine sample of Bond’s child character in this short story.

“Romi and the Wildfire” presents a different type of adventure of the boy, Romi, in the forest. The boys Romi and Teju in this story are shocked to see the dreadful forest fire, which imperils the life of thousand beasts and birds along with numerous types of vegetation. The narration of the story explicitly indicates Bond’s attitude of love and understanding towards other creatures and nature.

This story narrates how Romi is able to escape from the forest fire, does he reach home on time how he is able to safe himself and Teju from the forest animals, which are also running to save their lives from the fire and what happens when he encounters huge elephant standing in the middle of the road.

Bond brings together an action packed, full of adventure in this story, set against a terrifying backdrop of a forest fire. Bond carefully deals with the raw issue of saving the wildlife in this gripping and moving story. Bond trains the younger generation towards the preservation of the wildlife that is the pride of the jungle.

Boys appear as the pleasant obsession of Bond. Both Romi and Teju are in the leading role in “Romi and the Wildfire”. They are sensitive, energetic, curious and innocent. They hardly bother about future. They live in the present with all its joys and odds. Confidence and self-assertion lend them boldness and courage. Bond relieves his own boyhood through his fictional incarnation. At a certain age, a boy is like young wheat, growing healthy on the verge of manhood. His eyes are alive, his mind is quick, his gestures are confident. For a boy it is an age of self assertion, of growing confidence in him.
Romi is that kind of boy of twelve years with live eyes, quick mind with confident gestures. It is an age of self assertion to prove him that he can do anything for his ailing father risking himself in the wildfire. As boys love to take a mischievous sort of delight in pursuing forbidden enterprises, Romi takes as a challenge to cross the fiery forest though he has a chance to stay back in this friend’s house.

Brave Romi cycles seven miles through a forest when a forest fire has already started just to give his ailing father, a medicine that he badly needs. Romi risks his own life for his father when he has got the option of staying at his friends place for the night. Children cannot change their ideas so easily that Romi already decides in his mind to hand over the medicine timely. He cannot withdraw himself from it due to the forest fire. It seems to him that it might be a lame excuse if he considers his father’s health. He gives priority to his father, forgetting the danger awaits him in his path towards his village. Bond portrays wonderfully, the boy’s concern for his parents. He depicts his own love, affection and care for his father through Romi. Romi never cares and worries for the perils he is going to face. He invites such thrills and excitement during the riding whole heartedly. There is no sign of fear on his face. He thinks of present situation not bothering about future which renders him courage and confident to face anything on his way.

Romi and Prem are classmates and friends. Romi sees the smoke rising from behind the distant trees and it looks like a forest fire. Bond, as usual draws the summer season:

“As it was the middle of May and it hadn’t rained for several weeks grass and leaves were brown covered with dust” (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire” 8).

It may be the cause of the forest fire. The dried leaves and branches of trees crash with each other may result in fire. Sometimes, because of the over whelming population, forest is cleared away by the people to make into the land of cultivation or building new constructions or factories in the edge of the forest. It is like sending the wealth of the forest
into tomb and building the empire on it without its wealth. Bond indirectly shows his distrust on destroying the forest. He expresses in his stories to safe guard the wealth of wild life and the greenery of the forest.

Romi has to ride forty minutes through the forest. He peddles fast in the main road of the village, scattering stray hens, stray dogs and stray villagers. Romi’s village lays about seven miles, on the other side of the forest. There is only a primary school in his village. Romi is at high school hence, he has to cross seven miles every day through the forest to his school by cycle. The children of nearby villages, going to school inspired Bond to peep into their ordinary shells. He visualizes something special or heroic in their day to day life through Romi in “Romi and the Wildfire”.

Romi represents every school boy in the village who walks many miles daily to reach his school amidst the lurking fear of animals and forest fire. Romi enjoys the long rides with thrills and adventures. He might have stayed the night with Prem, if he did not have to give the pills to his father. As he was given such a fine cycle he wants to do in return by getting these pills to his father as early as possible. It is Romi’s way of thanking his father. He takes it a chance to show his love and care towards his father at any costs.

Romi’s adventurous ride begins in the fiery forest. Bond’s description has a functional value. The important feature is landscape. In this story, forest is carved out for scenic background, appears in a prominent role. Forest serves as a natural habitat of animals and birds which are being driven away by the threat of fire is the theme of this story.

“Ahead of him the smokes rose from the burning forest and the sky glowed red”

(Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire”.13).

Romi, with and adventurous spirit, never scares for the fierce situation. His only aim is to cross the barrier of fire in order to help his father. After he left the village far behind, he had to climb and push harder on the pedals to rise. Once he is on the top, the road went
winding down to the edge of the forest. Romi enjoys this part of the forest. Children who are reading this part of the story really have such an experience of riding cycle like that of Romi. He relaxes, stops pedaling and allows the bicycle to glide gently down the slopes. As usual he is enjoying the riding he never cares for the seriousness of the situation. He is confident of what he is doing Bond delivers Romi’s enjoyment:

“Soon the wind was rushing past him, blowing his hair about his face and making his shirt billow out behind. He burst into song” (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire”. 15).

Romi, first encounters a dog from the village which ran behind him, barking furiously as if it senses something danger. Romi shouts to the dog and encourages it in his race. But, the dog, looking at the forest ahead, turns back to the village as it is afraid of the forest. Even the dog dares to enter into the forest, but Romi is ready to face all. Bond interludes the scene by describing the wildfire that the smoke was thicker now, and Romi caught the smell of burning timber. But ahead of him the road was clear.

By and now, Bond portrays the status of fire in the wilderness which drives the readers to hold their hands tightly inspecting the break of suspense. Amita Aggarwal is of the opinion on Bond’s stories:

“Suspense is a part of the art of storytelling. Bond is undoubtedly, the master of this art” (Fictional World of Ruskin Bond. 160).

Bond picks up a small idea, the forest fire and conceives a vibrating story around it in a way that the reader gets impatient to grabble it whole. “Romi and the Wildfire” is replete with suspense, adventure and curiosity. His capturing scenes of fire build thrills and suspense in the reader’s mind. The road is rough and dusty road, cut straight through the forest. Tall trees grow on either side, cutting off the last of the daylight. Only these trees on either side of the road are the protecting hands for Romi from fire. Logs of trees won’t catch fire easily
compare to the twigs and dry and tender branches. Romi is so confident that the fire won’t cross the road from left to right. Before that he can reach the other side of the jungle.

The spreading glow of the fire on the road light lit up the road, and giant tree-shadows danced before the boy on the cycle. Usually the road is deserted, but this evening it is alive with wild creatures fleeing from the forest. The animal he meets was a hare which leaping across the road in front of him, followed by several more. Here Bond depicts the terrifying danger in which the animals were trapped and its reaction toward the situation for escape. A band of monkeys streamed across chattering excitedly. Romi knows that the other side is safe and the fire won’t cross the road. He is sure that he will be out of forest in an hour (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire”. 19).

On the side of the road he notices several pheasants, long-tailed, brilliantly coloured birds rise in the air, fly low across the path. Taken by surprise, he falls off, his knee is bleeding. He takes his kerchief and bandages his knee. He is alone, nobody is to help him but he is not afraid of the loneliness because he gets used to it whenever he goes to school. Romi mounts again his cycle and he rides it a bit slower because birds and animals kept coming out of the bushes.

Romi slows down to save the crossing animals from dashing and crashing in his bicycle. He stops hurrying for a while though his escape is doubtful, but he never doubts that he is very sure of his life beyond the fire. Romi reflects Bond’s concern for the creature of the jungle. He lists out the animals Romi encounters during the fire:

“Not only pheasants but smaller birds too were streaming across the road-parrots, jungle crows, owls, magpies-and the air was filled with their cries” (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire”. 20-22).

The atmosphere is filled with the confused cries and veils of birds and animals along with the sounds of fire. Romi can feel the hot of the fire on his face and can see the flames
and hear the crackling of the dry leaves. Romi is close to the perils of red, hot, flames. For the first time he starts feeling afraid. He watches a herd of deer crossing the road.

Bond drives away Romi’s sense of fear by the company of Teju, boy younger than Romi. A faint clanging sound like that of a fire engine announces that the noise came from a small boy who runs along the forest path, with two milk-cans clattering at his sides. Teju is from neighbouring village. Romi stops for him to jump on his cycle. He is eight or nine and Romi is couple of years elder to him. His job is to deliver milk to road workers. The worker left at the sign of fire, Teju carries the can with full of milk. Romi carries him on the cross bar of the cycle.

Friendship emerges as another predominant theme in Bond’s story. A spark of smile binds the two together. A boy and another boy happen to meet on the road, they exchange glances and an understanding develops and they become friends. This association may be for an hour but they try to make each other safe and secure and happy. In this story Romi sympathizes with the boy Teju who carries two milk cans which results in friendship. Amita Aggarwal is of the opinion on Bond’s story that sometime sympathy for a particular self culminates into intimacy.

The sympathy, the human concern, trust and sobriety in relations are essential to make friendship enduring forever. Romi conceives humanity, sympathy, trust and sober that he wants to help his ailing father by giving the medicine on time inspite of the danger he has on the way. Romi comes to the rescue of Teju, the boy of his own stage. Bond constantly produces characters and they shower mercy and kindness to the needy. Romi is another good sample of it. He can be raised to the level of a Good Samaritan who serves the affected one without expecting anything in return.
Flames shot up from the dry grass and ran up the trunks of trees and along the branches. Smoke billowed out above the forest. Romi asked Teju to keep on beating his milk cans that the animals will know they are coming as his cycle bell doesn’t make much noise.

Teju also already has seen the python in the middle of the road keeps running and jumps over it. In the company of Romi and his cycle riding, Teju does not care for the flames, just chatters. But Romi has got the responsibility of saving himself and Teju and to give the medicine to his father. As the flames grew higher and higher, the fear lurks or embers in his mind, and he does not pay attention to what Teju is chattering. The responsibility is a kind of yoke, burden, he feels heavy and afraid how he is going to keep the responsibility. He takes it voluntarily and he finds pleasure in bearing that yoke for others (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire” 25-29).

Romi’s eyes are smarting and his hair and eyebrows feel scorched and tired but he could not stop riding. The urge of finishing the larger jungle is in his mind. He has got another ten to fifteen minutes ride to cross the small wooden bridge that spanned the little river, separating the forest from the sugar-cane field. Across the river they will be safe as the forest ends at the river’s edge.

The fear of fire is raised in their minds when both hear the sounds of the fire that grew louder and see a tall silk-cotton tree has caught fire and a burning branch fell to the ground few yards away from them. The protective agent, the tall tree catches fire imparts that their safety is doubted without these protecting hands of trees. Naturally Teju and Somi feel disheartened. They react to the situation prudently. Both get off the cycle and leave the road, the way through thorny bushes on the left, dragging and pushing the bicycle. Never losing the hope, Romi pedals with all his might after joined the road (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire” 30-33).
A sudden appearance of elephant surprises Romi and Teju. They stop, Teju slips off the crossbar, his cans roll down on the ground, spilling its milk. Not only the boys baffled in that situation but the elephants too. Bond explicates the elephant’s confused stage that the elephant moved about restlessly, its big ears flapping as it turned its head from side to side, wondering which way to go. This scene delineates surprise and suspense with astonishment to the readers. They feel Romi to come out of it as soon as possible. To the far left, a herd of elephants move towards the river. The leader of the herd raises his trunk and trumpeted a call. Hearing it the elephant in the road replies to the call and moves towards the herd leaving the boy’s way clear.

Bond intently depicts the protecting, guiding and leading tendency of animal to safe its herd. Bond insists human to have the same feeling towards his fellow beings. Romi reflects Bond’s notion of his concern for the boy Teju. Looking at the boy in the wilderness, he does not want to be indifferent and selfish to care only about him. Bond’s children especially his boy heroes imbibe good qualities of serving others, showering mercy and kindness and love towards their fellow boys, taking the responsibility of protecting other. Bond renders harmony among nature, man and animals.

As the fear rushes in Teju’s mind, he forgets milk cans and they run forward to gain speed with the cycle. It seems all animals can get away, have done so. They come across a jackal too, overcomes by the heat and smoke, lies in the middle of the path unconsciously.

Romi gathers all his strength into one final effort and they covered hundred yards at top speed. They are out of the forest to the sloping road to the river. But the bridge to the land is on fire. Romi never hesitates. He leaves the bridge, riding his cycle over sand and pebbles and both reach down the river bank and into the river.

Romi and Teju’s final expedition starts as they are crossing the river. They are in the river water splashing around, trying to find each other in the darkness. Teju cries that he is
drowning. Romi knows that the water is only up to the knees and he asks Teju to grab hold of him. Together, they manage to pull the bicycle out of the river water. Romi makes him set on the cross bar to cross the rest of the river without fear. He encourages Teju and drives away his fear of water and strengthens him by saying that there is not much water in the river at this time of the year, but the current is quite strong in the middle, so sit still all right? (Bond, “Romi and the Wildfire”. 37-40).

Romi behaves like Teju’s father, with maturity in leading, advising, encouraging and saving Teju. He takes effort to make Teju comfortable. The river was shallow and sluggish in midsummer. Having got safely out of the burning forest, Romi is not in a mood to let a little river defect him. He kicks off his shoes to have the grip of the smooth stones, concentrates on keeping his balance and getting the cycle and Teju through the middle of the stream. Teju also gets down in shallows and helps Romi push the bicycle.

At last they reach the opposite bank, resting down on the grass. They watch the fire spreading through the forest and it has crossed the road they have come. Bond declares their great escape in his words colourfully.

“The sky was a bright red and the river reflected the colour of the sky” (Bond, Romi and the Wildfire”. 41-47).

The red colour of the fire traditionally signifies life, innocence and belongingness to the elements. Bond aspires for the escape of other animals too hence he concludes the story with their escape from the wild flames. Several elephants had found their way down to the river. They were cooling off by spraying water on each other with their trunks. Further downstream, there were deer and other animals. Romi and Teju looks at each other. Though they have not known each other before, they felt they have been friends for years. Circumstances make them friends. The fire will be over in one or two days but the bridge repair will take long time. So he has nice long holidays from school. Bond narrates the threats
of wild fire and adventures of Romi with great accuracy and speed. In spite of the quick succession of scenes there is coherence in his narration. Amita Aggarwal quotes in *Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*:

“Bond has successfully experimented with the modern visual device documentary film in narration” (159).

Bond believes that nature is a stirring force that quickens every object and creature to act, to respond to grow and to die. For pantheistic Bond, anything that vibrates with life is beautiful. Unlike Wordsworth, he is not confined only to the creative and beautiful aspects of nature. He knows nature is not always birdsong and dew-drenched daffodils. He is aware of the fact that the very benevolent and beautiful face of nature sometimes becomes ‘red in tooth and claw’ as in “Romi and the Wildfire” and “Sita and the River”. It is whenever man takes nature for granted or misuses its generosity it turns against and unleashes the forces that disturb life-earth quake, tidal wave, typhoon, flood, forest fire and drought.

All these violent elements of nature in Bond’s view come to remind the readers that we are not, after all the masters of the universe. In some stories like “Sita and the River” “Romi and the Wildfire” and “Nature’s Fury”, Bond reveals the devastating aspect of flood, fire and earth quake respectively. Bond believes the life-force nature remains kind to man if man sensitively handles it. Sometime man has to suffer the fury of nature. But after showing its fury nature settles down again and resumes its general ways. In “Romi and the Wildfire”, Romi has to overcome the fury of fire. At the end he reaches the other side of the bank of the river along with the friend Teju. After sometime, he starts going to the school in the same way. Bond a true devote of nature not only records it in its fullest form but also advocates its preservation and conservation in this story. Bond seems to have been writing about saving our environment and concern for it long before ecology became an important aspect of our daily life, says Bandhana Bal Chandnani in *Structures of Authenticity in Ruskin Bond’s*
*Fiction* (127). Bond has been writing about the steady decline of the forest due to growing industrialization, urbanization and the ruthless destruction of the natural habitat of the creatures of the jungle. “Romi and the Wildfire”, “The Tree Lover” and “The Prospect of Flowers” reveal Bond’s concern for trees which deserve our love, care and protection.

“Romi and the Wildfire” reveals the affected animals, in the wildfire which is the main focus of Bond’s story. Bond deals with various issues related with the wild life such as deforestation, hunting and the problem of man-eater. In this story, Bond handles the issue of forest fire. He insists on the harmony of animals and man and trees through this documentary cum – story.

Bond is the only writer who has woven wild life so earnestly and imaginatively in the texture of story. From the story, it is interesting to know now man and beast have adapted themselves according to each other mode of existence. They survive against the constant threat to their lives because they live in conformity with the laws of nature. Almost dozen of his stories render a fascinating account of human encounters with animals and birds. “Romi and the Wildfire” is one among them. The animals such as, a deer, jackal, elephant and birds are closely observed. It seems that Bond’s microscope does not spare a single tiny creature around him. Bond records a photographic story.

Bond is constantly scribbling about the hazard of pollution of environment. He takes up the issue of ecology and environment through his stories in most conspicuous manner. The planned destruction of trees on mountain slopes in the name of progress and development is the theme in “Romi and the Wildfire”. It narrates that the fire threatens the life of wild life and human too who live close to the forest. The story unravels the sordid picture of green massacre.

Forest, animals and man are interdependent. They are the part of the great chain of survival. By calling the endangered beast, the soul of India, Bond has reinforced the principle
of ecological balance. Each big and small creature in nature is indispensable to keep the earth beautiful and healthy. Bond has skillfully knit the message of save forest and save wildlife in the plot of his story. Bond’s candid opinion is that wild animals are not an object of exhibition or entertainment. They too deserve equal right of graceful and unperturbed life as human beings do.

Besides wildlife, through this story, Bond earnestly pleads to save the green layers of the earth and the trees. The fire worsens the situation but the boys Romi and Teju’s tremendous will power and unity help them come out of that danger. Bond’s story “Dust on the Mountain” focuses on Bisnu, a boy who searches for a job that enables him to learn the importance of trees. This story discusses on how the deforestation affects precipitation. It also affects badly the monsoon rain and it is an outcome of ruthless deforestation. Other than deforestation trees have perished due to our carelessness. The campers make a fire and forget to extinguish it which sometimes becomes the cause of huge fire and many valuable trees are lost. Here Bond emerges as an environmentalist explains the disappearance of the trees- an important characteristic of his story dealing with environmental concern.

The action and adventure of “Romi and the Wildfire” would interest the children. Bond’s language is easy to understand with vivid and brief description that make the images spring to mind quite readily. One races from one page to another on a voyage full of suspense and surprises. It is difficult to predict what will spring out at us at the end of the story. The characters are ordinary flesh and blood whose activities are quite believable. Romi and Teju indulge in ordinary childhood activities which are charmingly documented. It is a book that invites reading at full speed with few stops. Amita Aggarwal comments on this story:

“This story is filled with vivid descriptions which gathers tension, lurks a touch fear and finally ends happily” (Amita, The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond. 88).
Children get enamoured of Romi’s heroic aptitude. Romi is packed with courage, confident, hope, intrepidity, helpful, balance and coolness. Romi symbolizes Bondian humanism that is his concern for Teju. The beast, one comes across in this story symbolizes nobility and represents the soul of India. They safeguard the jungle and the villagers against infiltration of outsiders. Bond emphasizes on their right to live and safeguard the forest wealth.

The sixth short story, “The Kitemaker” is a nostalgic tale. Mehmood, a famed kite maker of yesteryears, nostalgically recalls the past day when his skill in kite-making was a legend and kite flying was a popular sport. Now he makes kites only for his grandson Ali. At the end of the story, he daydreams about making a wonder of a kite for his grandson and while doing so, he breathes his last.

“The Kitemaker” is the narration of the Kitemaker’s longing for the past. Sitting under the old banyan tree, he reminisces his past. He is forcibly called back to the living present by his grandson” (158) shares Amita Aggarwal in *Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*.

The story reels in flashback the golden days of Mehmood Ali, when his kites were the cynosure of the town are revived. Bond begins the story that Mehmood’s grandson Ali’s kite has caught in the branches of an ancient banyan tree, known Gali Ram. The boy Ali barefooted runs along the stones of the streets where his grandfather Mehmood sat. He sits dreamily in the sunshine of their back courtyard.

Bond exhorts all those who have a dream to follow, and not abandon the ship in mid ocean. He pens in his poem “Hold on to Your Dream”:

“Hold on to your dreams.
Do not let them die
We are lame without them
Birds that cannot fly” (Swapan K. Banerjee, *Rusty and I* 18).
In *Rusty and I*, Swapan K. Banerjee explicates Bond’s view on dream. In this story Mehmood Ali is day dreaming of his past, glorious, colourful days of his kite making. It showers enthusiasm and interest to lead his present life though he may be forgotten now by his neighbours. It renders him pleasure and spirit to face the life as it is. The dreams are his energy force which moves his engine. His memories of past help him live at present, otherwise he might have gone to the eternal world. He wants to be useful, as a flying bird, as a walking man, unfortunately, at presents, he seems to be lame and a bird without wings because of the loneliness and the indifference of his neighbourhood. He never stops making kites for children and for his own amusement.

Grandfather’s daydream is disturbed by the shouts of Ali that his kite has gone and struck in the banyan tree. Grandfather knows that Ali is too small to learn how to fly a kite properly and Grandfather is too old to teach him the techniques of flying kites. He desires to help the boy in a way that he can make a new kite for him. He makes a new kite from a bamboo paper and thin silk and he lays it in the sun for forming up. It is a pale pink kite with a small green tail. As the old man hands over the pink kite to his grandson Ali, the boy conveys his thankfulness, by kissing his grandfather’s hollowed cheek. Ali promises that he will not lose this kite as it was his grandfather’s precious gift and he is sure that he can fly it like a bird (Bond, *NTDOS* “The Kitemaker”.101).

The newly made kite affirms the love and affection between the boy Ali and his grandfather. The old man is able to bring smile and satisfaction and gaiety in the world of a small boy. He finds joy in his grandson’s happiness. Ali shows his grandfather’s loneliness. The belief and the trust of Mehmood on his grandson is that he can get him or make him the best new kite, it renders joy that he is also a part of his grandson’s little world.

S. K. Desai in his “Tales from the Mountains” comments that there are two kinds of nostalgia. One is unhealthy and the other is healthy. The unhealthy nostalgia degenerates into
sickening sentimentality and simplistic romanticism. Bond’s nostalgia belongs to the healthy nostalgia which results in precise and subtle details of experience depicted with loving care, without any loss of objectivity.

The lyrical sketch of a kite maker in the story “The Kitemaker” sensitively register the gradual erosion of old crafts, changing face of the city life and the sense of vacancy that envelops an old dying kite maker. The fast paced society has no time to share the memories of the old. The old Mehmood’s deftness in kite making at his prime won for him respect and glory. Mehmood becomes nostalgic remembering those bygone happy days, when he was well known throughout the city and his neighbours cared for him. Once he had fallen sick, everyone in the locality came to enquire about his health. But today nobody cares for him. His art, like him, gets lost in the rapidly changing world which was engulfed both the leisurely hours and open spaces. The city once a lively place with kite flying at its heights is now a congested city. It’s rapidly expanding size has swallowed up the open grasslands. People do not want to buy his kites, adults disdain them and children prefer to spend their money on movie. The old man remembered the days when, there was time to spend an idle hour with a gay, dancing strip of paper. Now everyone hurried, hurried in a heat of hope, and delicate things like kites and day dreams were trampled underfoot.

The children brought up in a swiftly changing and competitive world, hardly have any time to hear the memories of the old. Mehmood feels himself ignored and isolated like the banyan tree. His grandson Ali is a ray of hope and regeneration amidst the darkness of alienation and gloominess. Mehmood gladdens watching the small boy at play in the winter sunshine and growing under his eyes. He makes kites for him and encourages him to learn how to fly. And it is this kind of healthy nostalgia that we find in Bond’s story which lends an authentic sense of deeply felt and lived life (S.K. Desai “Tales from the Mountains”.104).
The old man remains in day dreaming in the sun. He thinks of his good old days that he once owned a kite shop. At that time kite flying was the sport of kings. Mehmood remembers that the Nawab would come down to the river side to participate in the ‘noble past time’. It was time to spend an idle hour with gay, dancing strip of paper outdoor. Everyone hurried in a heat of hope to fly kite. Mehmood shares his own green memories with charm. In the prime of his life, he had been well-known throughout the city. His elaborate kite sold for three or four rupees each in those days. He reminisced his younger days. Once, at the request of Nawab, he made a very special kite with very light paper disks and bamboo frame. He gave the kite the appearances of a crawling serpent. Everyone heard of the dragon kite and the rumour spread around that it possessed some supernatural powers. Those days large crowd assembled to watch in the open, its first launching in the presence of the Nawab (Bond, _NTDOS_ “The Kitemaker”. 102).

Bond fantastically portrays the gliding movement of the kite for the perusal of the children. While reading the story, every child may imagine itself indulge in flying kite, experiencing the same enjoyment of Mehmood. The dragon kite soared into the sky wriggling its way higher and higher with the sun glinting in its devil eyes. His sons have to help him with a reel. The kite pulled and determined to be free, to break loose to live a life of its own. It sailed heavenward, it was lost to view. Afterwards he never made another kite like that. Instead he presented to the Nawab a musical kite, it made a sound like a violin when it rose in the air.

Kites are the interest of the children. Sometime children make it a hobby to fly the kite leisurely. Its colour and the way of dancing according to the music of wind attract the kids. Each likes to possess the kite of its own kind. When the kites glide in the sky, the children feels as if they are floating in the sky as kites and they are near to heaven. Each one tries to reach the heaven first without losing the kite. It reminds us of our destiny that one is
like a kite and the string is controlled by our Master creator God. Bond beautifully depicts the relationship between man and kite.

The kite reminds the readers of Donne’s “Valediction Forbidding Mourning”, where he uses the metaphysical conceit ‘compass’ to reveal the spiritual love or relationship between the lover and the loved one. Similarly kite is a symbolic representation of human life as it can fly till its master wishes. The master craftsman is ‘God’ himself. The life or the destiny of human and the kite is controlled by the ‘Creator’ himself.

Amita Aggarwal is of the opinion that in Bond’s story, the kite is a symbol of past. When time did not scuttle but moved in slow pace and man had ample leisure to enjoy kite flying. Kite becomes a symbol of freedom when it succeeds in breaking the tie, it pulls, determines to be free, to break loose, to live a life of its own. The kite maker Mahmood is like a kite whose string lies in the hands of destiny. The image of a torn kite struck to the tree reflects his old age when he finds himself being out dated and isolated.

The kite image conveys the ultimate truth of life as the kite maker gets freedom from the earthly bondage and flies towards eternal deep. The liberated kite will float away into the blue unknown sky is a philosophic notation on the life everlasting after death. It is a rest from the world of burden and troubles by the destiny. It represents the liberated soul from the body after the demise.

The analogy between the kite maker and the old banyan tree underlines the relationship of man and nature.

Bond’s literature off and on highlights the analogy between tree and man. He points out the similarity of evolution and decay in human beings and trees. Both trees and men grow much at the same pace, if both are not hurt or starved or cut down. Both in youth are resplendent creatures and in declining years stoop a little. At the end of journey a man like a tree sheds his leaves with a sigh. “The Kitemaker” exclusively presents the affinity between
trees and human being says Chandnani in *Structures of Authenticity in Ruskin Bonds Fiction* (126). The old grandfather Mehmood is compared with a banyan tree and the young grandson Ali with a young mimosa plant:

“Mehmood was like the banyan, his hands gnarled and twisted like the roots of the ancient tree. Ali was like the young mimosa planted at the end of the courtyard. In two years both he and the tree would acquire the strength and confidence of their early youth” (Bond, *NTDOS* “The Kitemaker”. 104).

Bond says that both were taken for granted permanent fixtures that were of no concern to the raucous, sweating mass of humanity that surrounded them. The old banyan tree and the old man are now not the concern of the human beings. It is a natural outcome of fast developing society where man has no time and consideration for others. Loneliness is dreadful. Bond hates the idea of being lonely. Once, people gathered under the banyan tree to discuss their problems and their plans, now they do not gather. Bond strikingly brings out the contrast between the past and the present through the day dreaming of Mehmood that they do not have time for the old man and his memories. They have to adjust with the swiftly changing and competitive world. They looked at the kite maker and the banyan tree with the same indifference.

The kite maker Mehmood is like the banyan, his hands gnarled and twisted like the roots of the ancient tree. In their declining years, the tree stoop a little they stretch their limbs in the sun, with a sign they shed their last leaves. There is a great affinity between trees and men.

The kite maker Mehmood speaks of the inseparable relationship between man and nature. The analogy of man and tree gives the total essence of Bond’s treatment of nature and it is very well familiar to all. From time immemorial, nature with all her mysteries and beauty
has been a perennial source of inspiration for all writers in different languages of the world. Nature has been consistently a source of joy and faith in life.

In his youth, as a young tree, he is confident and feels higher. In the old age like a stooped tree, he is also stooped, shy and speechless.

The small plants grow higher and stronger like children grow rapidly and achieve stateliness if one strokes them fondly. Bond compares the small boy with the small mimosa tree. The small boy Ali gladdens the old man’s heart by watching the boy who plays in the winter sunshine. He grows under his eyes like a young well – nourished sapling putting forth new leaves each day. The tree and the boy grow at same pace. In their youth they are resplendent creatures. Ali was like the young mimosa planted at the end of the courtyard. Within two years he and the tree both would acquire the strength and confidence of early youth and become the attraction of the world.

The kite maker gazes upon the kite struck in the branches of old banyan tree. All who are old and passing their years, in their life, boy like Ali takes part in their loneliness, shares their solitude. Old people like Mehmood has a chance to share his interests and obsessions. Amita Aggarwal quotes in her book:

“Bond shows unique sensibility in joining the old ones and their life experiences with innocent children” (Amita Aggarwal, Fictional World of Ruskin Bond. 33).

Here, Mehmood Ali presents his experience in making the new kite for his grandson Ali. The tragedy of modern man is that he forces the older to be in his cocoon. He has locked himself in that cocoon. Children are the keys to open the cocoon and enjoy the days of old by their talking, laughing, engaging them lively in their presence. Old people have the responsibility of raising their grandchildren in the right path and also making themselves recover from the boredom of solitude. “The Kitemaker” renders an interesting account of mutual sharing between the children and the old.
Bond’s age long sense of loneliness is overcome to a larger extent in the warm environs of a joint family. Prattles of Siddarth and Shrishti, his grandchildren erase that boredom which generally envelops a man of his age. Simultaneously, he enjoys a blissful solitude which is essential to concentrate his creative gusto. One cannot deny the impact of Prem’s family with whom he has been sharing his day-to-day life for the thirty five years at Mussoorie.

In “The Kitemaker”, Bond bemoans the ravages of development which has turned once a lively city into a congested metropolis with no space for innocent activities. He feels traumatized on seeing ruthless killing of animals and felling of trees which has brought many species of flora and fauna on the verge of extinction. In some of his stories like “Death of Trees”, he makes a dig at the unwise decision of the authorities to cut trees and build roads and buildings in those places. Binsu in “Dust in the Mountain” feels restless on his way to Mussoorie where, the treeless land disheartens this hill boy who was born and brought up amidst nature. Binsu becomes the spokes person of Bond’s concern for the depletion of forests and the disappearance of greenery.

Those days are leisure and more spacious days. Now the city swallows up the open grassland that has stretched from the old forts walls to the river bank. Not many people buy kites these days. Adults detain them and children prefer to spend money at the Cinema. There were not many open spaces left for the flying of kites. When time did not scuttle but moved in slow pace and man had ample leisure to enjoy kite flying. Now the time has changed. The leisure has shrunk children now do not show much interest in flying kites or other outdoor activities. Everyone hurried in a heat of hope and delicate things like kites and dreams are trampled underfoot. Bond has brought out the striking contrast between the past and the present by the dream of the old person.
When Mehmood was young, he had fallen sick. Everyone in the neighbourhood has come to ask after his health. But, now his days are drowning to an end, no one visits him. His friends are dead, his sons have grown up. The children had bought kites from his ten years ago now grown men struggling for a living. They do not have time for the old man. The negligence of the old people is increasing, Bond emphasizes that it has to be stopped, the care and affection for them is appreciable. He focuses on the children to bear the responsibility of governing the helpless lonely elders who are their own grandparents.

Bond’s use of flashback is to give momentary diversions from the present life. Bond is more sensitive towards life and relations. Flashback summarizes the entire life journey of Mehmood. The frequent use of stream of consciousness device reveals the working of his inner mind. The reader also fluctuates from living present to living past along with the character. The train of thought continuously keeps him shunting from present to bygone days. Man cannot avoid past and so Bond. Past gives meaning to one’s life. It is a foundation of life. His mode of portraying the present in relation to the past contributes new dimension and positive approach to life. These nostalgic interludes reflect Mehmood Ali’s emotional impact in the story.

In “The Kitemaker”, Bond portrays the utter alienation and the negligence experienced by the old. They are caught in the whirlpool of changing time. They are like peels thrown to rust in today’s competitive and fast-paced society which has no time, or feeling to brood over the things and people of by gone days. The old who are moving slowly through the autumn of their lives find themselves caught in the vortex of changing time. Mehmood a skilful kite maker in “The Kitemaker” Hassan, a champion wrestler in “The Garland on his Brow” an old lonely lady Miss.Mackenzie a ravishing beauty in her youth in “Prospect of Flowers” old vendor in “The Box Man” Mr.Pettigrew, an old withering man in Vagrants in the Valley are some old characters who have made a mark to their young age.
Today they desperately miss their prime. Through the portrayal of these old characters, Bond evokes the themes of passing time, their yearning for the irrecoverable and the inexorable past and their craving for company.

Mehmood does not answer the boy who asks him his mother has returned from the bazaar. As there is no reply he repeats the same question. Bond answers for his silence in a sensitive way that the butterfly left the old man’s beard and flew to the mimosa tree, and a sudden gust of wind caught the torn kite and lifted it in the air, carrying it far above the struggling city into the blind blue sky (Bond, *NTDOS* “The Kitemaker”. 104).

The soul of Mehmood lifts up from him and touches the mimosa tree, bids farewell to his grandson in the form a butterfly. The sudden gust of wind is nemesis which releases the torn kite, the soul and lifted it in the air, drives it far from the material world into eternal blue sky of heaven. The soul gets freedom from the body and floats towards everlasting life.

Skillful use of myth and symbol imparts the story a remarkable intensity. When death steals upon the kite maker, he feels as if he were going to sleep and dreams of a big beautiful kite resembling Garuda Lord Vishnu’s famous steed. Myth denotes the salvation of his soul from earthly bondages and transcending towards divinity. Bond incorporates myth in narration as a literary device. Amita Aggarwal opines that the use of myth as T. S. Eliot points out affords the necessary control to explore his subject and means to generalization. Myth is a means to transmute personal destiny into the destiny of mankind. “The Liberating Force of Ruskin Bond’s Poetry” Swapan K. Banerjee states:

“In “The Kitemaker” Bond compares the kite maker with a man who composes poem” (63).

In the short story “The Kitemaker”, Bond pens that kite makers are like poets, once have their patrons, but no one knew Mehmood, simply because there were too many people in the Gali. Bond reflects the same in his poem “Kites”
“Are you listening to me, boy?
I’m only your kite – maker.
My poems are flimsy things
Torn by the wind, caught in mango tree,
Gay sport for boy and dreamers
My silent songs.
But once I fashioned
A kite like a violin,
She sang most mournfully, like the wind
In tall Deodars. . .
Boy, are you listening
All my kites
Are torn, but for you I’ll make a bright
New poem to fly” (Bond, “Kites” Book of Verse. 52).

A Kite, when it is cut loose and lands nobody knows where. None can say whether it remains whole or gets torn. Similarly, when a poem is published the poet does not know exactly which corner or stand it is likely to hit. This is to say he cannot know who actually read it and whether the poem is given its due. The poet laments the fact that the critics generally make mincemeat of it without caring for it all. A poem which he calls a ‘silent song’ is not taken seriously. A poem in his hand reaches the level of soulful music like the wind in tall deodars. But sadly gets unnoticed because to most of us it is a ‘flimsy thing’. And yet, the poet determined to continue to craft out poems with invisible wings which like the kite can fly. Bond brings out poignantly the apathy with which poetry in general is treated.

Bond compares the kite maker with the tree, man and the poet. The tree requires the attention of the future generation, and young readers to patronize. The symbolic
representation of kite speaks to the innocent heart of children who learn to treat the old tree, old man, and the poem of the poet with compassion and condescension.

Bond presents the story in the colour of nature. Indian life with its vivid and varied colours can be discerned in all aspects. One can find Mehmood the kite maker, sitting under an old banyan tree and contemplating the glories of by gone days with half shut eyes can be seen anywhere in this land. Bond has immense sympathy and understanding for those who are neglected in society.

Bond’s story takes the form of an intense though short lived encounter, in which a moment is charged with significance. The story is permeated with love, sympathy, warmth and fellow-feeling. The story encounters the old man who finds the world considerably changed from what it was when he is young. “The Kitemaker” dramatizes the nostalgia for the past, which is consistently evoked in many of Bond’s stories. Bond seems to pay a compliment to the world of his youth and the dream of his childhood.

In Indian family system, the children always enjoyed the friendly and secure company of grandparents. Children also reciprocate the love and care of grandparents with the same zeal. Bond has understood the importance of adults in the life of children that he uses adult character like Mehmood who forms the backdrop of this story.

The seventh story “A Long Walk with Granny” focuses on the attachment between a grandmother and his grandson Mani. Mani offers to accompany his grandmother on a two days journey to Mussoorie where the nearest eye hospital is located, so that she can get a new pair of glasses. The atmosphere of this Himalayan region during monsoon is charmingly described as they two set off on their adventure. Damini Butalia comments in “Himalayan Tales”:
“Bond’s style is so simple and straightforward that it makes his story very easy to read. While reading, you know, you’re climbing a mountain, crossing a stream and looking out for trees, plants, flowers, birds even animals” (24).

As she stated, in this story Mani and his grandma walk through fields and forests, up and down mountains, see a river rushing swiftly, pass a mule-driver singing a romantic song and admire a flock of parrots and the hills.

“A Long Walk with Granny” is adventure-packed tale about a young boy of eleven years who takes his grandma on a long and difficult journey over the mountains to the town. It traces an arduous journey of an old lady and her grandson through the rocky terrains. The story, through their walking, depicts the world of nature with its essence: hills, mountains, monsoon rain, spring and river, flowers, birds with trees and sunlight in front of the readers.

Mani is living with his granny who is seventy years old and with his father. Mani is motherless when he was one year. Granny compensates the role of mother in bringing him up. Both had a long walk to Mussoorie which was almost twenty miles from their village to change Granny’s years old spectacles in the eye hospital.

Bond is marked for his sense of humour. He describes Granny’s poor eye sight humorously:

“Granny could hear the distant roar of the river and smell the pine needles beneath her feet, and feel the presence of her grandson, Mani. But she couldn’t see the river or the trees and of her grandson” (Bond, Treasury of Stories for Children “A Long Walk with Granny”.1).

She can recognize Mani by his fuzzy hair, sometimes by his black berry eyes and the gleam of his teeth. She can hear, talk, feel and smell but she cannot see as her eyes grow weaker and the glasses grow older. Granny knew the way about the house and fields. In a clean sunlight day, she could even see the mountains, the mighty Himalayan snow peaks just
striding away into the sky as if the world is small in hills. This story is more about Granny than about Mani. Bond evacuates the child like tendencies through Granny. He puts an effort to bring out the child in Granny. In *Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*, Amita Aggarwal states:

“This story is narrated around seventy year old granny and her grandson Mani. Not only children, old people also need great care and affection. Bond is highly sensitive towards their physical and mental requirements” (39).

“A Long Walk with Granny” is an evident of the fulfillment of elder’s physical and mental requirements. Mani’s love and affection and care for his granny are revealed when he accompanies her to doctor for her eye check up. They have to walk to Nain Market, which was twelve miles at least to catch a bus to Mussorie. It is two days journey. Granny walked all the way to Mussoorie ten years back as she hated buses. She never feels like going far from the village. Her only world is Mani, and his father, her cows and her mountains. Initially Granny hesitates to go to Mussoorie, thought that she has to go alone. The main reason is she has to part her only grandson Mani. Granny is his mother, bringing him up ever since his mother had died. Happily, energetically she takes the role of a mother in all the way of pampering him with love and care.

Bond admits that he does write about grandmothers and grandfathers. They are just his dream incarnations. Bond, losses her parental care, he gratifies himself with his dream of having a good care of granny. The Granny, here, fulfills Mani’s requirements as a child. In the absence of proper filial affection and attention, granny compensates the natural expectations of Mani. Bond personally feels old people are very interesting because they are full of experience and stories to relate.

Bond imparts the vigour of hill people through the character of Granny. Though she has a weak sight, she has got so much energy and strength to stand on the walnut tree and tossing walnuts and to walk nearly twenty miles like a youth. Her stamina is that of an oak.
Bond always refers oak to the power of mountain people that they can withstand in any circumstances. She cares for Mani and his father, cows and hens and all household works, all these years with great energy and devotion. Their oneness with nature renders such a mighty strength of mountain.

Mani doubts about how Granny is going to walk ten mils to reach Nain to get bus. But Granny competently utters that she may be going blind but there is nothing wrong with her legs. Granny always says ‘I can’ and she never withdraws herself due to her age. She is young and energetic at heart and mind which strives her to keep pace with the boy as if a child. Granny proves herself to be an able and a powerful person. After she knows that Mani is going to accompany her, she is ready to make the journey.

In this story, Bond shares his joy of tramping. Hill is the heavenly landscape which compensates the emotional vacuum and drives him out of his gloom. Hence, hill is another caretaker for Bond. The boy Mani gets the warmth of motherhood from Granny as well as from the hills he lives. Bond develops the habit of tramping along with the slopes. Till today, his tramping has been a great source of creative impetus. He says that he was really a walking person and was to remain so all his life.

In “Long Walk with Granny”, Granny reflects the same idea of Bond. She prepares herself to walk may be twenty miles to reach Mussoorie with much enthusiasm. She philosophically says that she can walk for ever she had been doing it all her life. One day she’ll just walk over the mountains and into the sky. Mani also loves to travel with Granny. Both belong to the hills and they have fellow feelings for birds, flowers, rivers and clouds around them. It shows their close association with nature. Bond’s detail descriptions of slopes and mountains parade his great geographical accuracy.

Bond fantastically narrates his memories along with his old age. Mani represents Bond’s childhood days, he dreams of with parents and grandparents. Granny embodies
Bond’s present situation. Bond breathes life into the character of Granny as a newly born child by changing her old spectacles into new one. It renders her new vision and life of a childhood to Granny. There is no age limit to enjoy the beauty and the serenity of nature. Due to her poor vision she can’t even see her own grandson. After receiving the proper sight through the new glasses, she feels as if she is new to the world around her. She expresses her anxiety looking at Mani. The child Bond shoots out through Granny and she starts to enjoy her second childhood.

Here, Bond captures the mountain, with its birds, flowers, rivers, spring, path, deodar forest, pine leaves, seeds, bulbs, umbrella and spectacles which are symbolic representation of the new life and new spirit in and around Granny.

Monsoon has started and that is the season everyone is awaiting althought the year for the seeds to sow, crops to grow, man to relieve himself from the heat and dust, earth to change its colour from yellow and brown to different shades of green all over the landscape. Bond sets monsoon as a mile stones to indicate turning point. Here, Granny, who never likes to go out of her village, was ready to go to Mussoorie with Mani. She accepts to meet the doctor for the clear vision. Monsoon alters the course of action. In this season the story moves from the one stage to another stage. Granny’s vistas are also going to change as that of Mani. Bond renders old people a chance to enjoy the world of beauty as a child. He too realized old age is a second childhood. He thrusts his eagerness, anxiety and curiosity of his childhood in Granny. Granny is none other than Bond himself who still nurtures his boyhood days through nostalgia.

Mani and Granny started their walking in their known path. Path may represent life one leads. Path is not often used by the travelers as they found themselves lost. The people or the villagers who lived there for years took the path as the better way of reaching their destination. It is narrow, crooked, aimless but the one who choose the path is a man of
courage, hope and confident and familiar of the path. It helps them reach their place faster and safer. Hill people know the wise and a good path to cross the mountain. Bond describes such path in this story:

“the path went through fields and around the brow of the hill and then began to wind here and there, up and down and around, as though it had a will of its own and no intention of going anywhere in particular” (Bond, TOSFC “A Long Walk with Granny”. 2).

Bond teaches the lesson of life in this path. Like path, life also has winds here and there, ups and downs and around. In spite of these, one must have guts to lead the life whether he likes it or not. Those who choose the right path will reach their place correctly. Hill people are wise enough to select the correct way. Therefore, they can lead life irrespective of troubles and natural calamities like land sliding and the flood. Both walk steadily not losing their energy in talking. They just listen to the sounds around them:

“A flock of parrots whirled overhead, flashes of red and green against the somber sky. High in a spruce tree a barbet called monotonously. But there were no other sounds except for the hiss and the gentle patter of the rain” (Bond, TOSFC “A Long Walk with Granny” 3).

Mani and Granny encounter parrots flying in the sky and they heard barbet’s singing and hissing of the wind and patter of rain. The colourful sight of parrots and the sound the bird, wind and rain add more beauty to place. It seems some mild rhythmic music notes are being produced by Nature. Plunged in these sounds they forget the tiredness and the boredom of walking. They are keen to the sights and sounds of nature.

Nature is not only the feast for their eyes and ears but also to Mani’s mouth. He feeds his stomach with wild black berries and his lips were purple with the juice from the berries.
“The rain stopped and the sun came out. Below them the light green of the fields stood out against the dark green of the forests, and the hills were bathed in golden sunshine” (Bond, TOSFC “A Long Walk with Granny” 3).

Rain paints the world with fresh colours and washes the dust and dirt from nature’s dress. Rain adorns the atmosphere. It spreads life around it. It reflects and foretells the renovation that is going to take place for Granny. Sun denotes day and light and brightness. It drains away the darkness and the gloominess, her angel beams are blessings on earth to flourish. Earth bathed in rainwater, after the rain stops, she was bathed in golden sunshine as she wore the jewels of gold after bathing.

Bond depicts the vivid picture of the landscape that light green fields that stands separately against the dark green of the forests. The dark clouds raises its curtain, the sun peeps through it to view the whole earth. As the sun brings brightness and clarity on earth, Granny’s newly bought glasses provide her clear view of things and nature around her. Both are near to Nain and reach the road.

Granny and Mani have their meal on the road side, in the shade of a whispering pine, and drank from a spring a little further down the path. Seeds and bulbs denote the revival of life and production of life and the purpose it fulfills in its birth. Spring is another symbol and it quenches the thirst of the thirsty travellers. After ten miles of walk they find shade to rest and water to drink. It is a rest from the routine, from the trauma, from the trials, from the pain of walking which seems to be invisible as they have aim and purpose in their walking. Bond likes tramping. He narrates such experience in his novel The Sensualist which leads to hope and better future.

Late afternoon, they reached Nain. The mist hides her view she cannot see Nain. When they entered the small market, it began raining heavily. The town is on the banks of the river. Granny’s umbrella is also leaking. It does not serve the purpose of it as the specks of
Granny. Like the specks, the umbrella is of no use in the rain. They sheltered in his uncle’s house.

Next day early morning, Mani gets up and runs down the street to bathe in the river. Boy’s bathing in the river is a frequent scene in Bond’s stories. It refreshes and purifies the stagnant mind and body. The small boy is just enjoying and experiencing the joy of water by jumping, emerging, plunging, splashing and diving. It is a thrill and an adventure to embrace the water. It is delight to their senses. Here the water of the river was a tributary of the sacred Ganga. So, its waters are held sacred. It is believed that one who plunges in it also attains purity and holiness. Mani bathed in the river not to attain purity or holiness but to experience the joy of water. It shows the union of Mani with the elements of water and air.

From Nain, Granny and Mani get bus to Mussoorie. The bus travel is very horrible and troublesome that the bus was old and rickety and rattled. The passengers barely hear themselves speaking. Granny never pays attention to that, falls asleep, resting against Mani’s shoulder. Granny used to say that she never likes bus and motor roads, her words are true that there was a big landslide. The earth and the trees and the bushes come crashing down, completely blocking the road. Showers of stones and small rocks came clattering down on the roof of the bus. As a result, everyone desert the bus and start to walk. The collapsed road makes the passengers return to primeval people though nature shows her negative phase on their way, the will power of both thwart the ambivalent of nature. Irrespective of the hurdles they walk nearly ten mile by the foot path to Mussoorie. They reach the top of the mountain, there was much huffing, puffing and pausing for breath and view the river below and above circled a golden eagle. The sight of the golden eagle is auspicious. In mythology it is a vehicle of Lord Krishna. Here, it stands for the hope and gives them the satisfaction of attaining the purpose. It announces them that they are near to the goal. From the top of the
mountain they can notice the houses of Mussoorie situated as white specks on the dark green hill side. Bond puts an end to their journey:

“Down again they went, and up the next mountain, and over bare windswept hillsides and up through a dark gloomy deodar forest… they saw the lights of Mussoorie twinkling a head of them” (Bond, TOSFC “A Long Walk with Granny”. 9).

Lights of Mussoorie stand for benefits, brightness which drives away the darkness prevalent there. Symbolically, light represents the clear eye sight Granny is going to get soon. Old days of darkness have gone and the new days of brightness are ahead of them. In the crowded bazaar, Granny holds Mani’s shoulder for support so that she won’t lose him. She is in the position to protect him as a mother. They spend night in a dharamsala where pilgrims had taken shelter. There is a touch of humour in Bond’s stories. Amita Aggarwal opines:

“A mild touch of humour is present in this story. He laughs upon his follies and impractical attitudes and misunderstanding in ordinary life” (Amita Aggarwal, Fictional World of Ruskin Bond. 161).

In “A Long Walk with Granny” granny’s misunderstanding of things cracks out in laughter. In the beginning she misunderstands the apple as a ball and asked Mani not to throw on the cow. Another instance, she points at a beast grazing on the hillside, remarks ‘What a large cow’ Mani corrects her that it is not a cow and it is a buffalo.

Bond is humourous when he is narrating the talks. For instance, When Granny is examined by the doctor, the doctor remarks over her spectacles which results in laughter. The doctor took one horrified look at Granny’s glasses and dropped them in a wastebasket. He fished them out and placed them on his desk and comments that he thought of sending them to a museum. She should have changed her glasses years ago. It has probably done more harm than good.
After getting convenient sight by the new pair of glasses, Granny becomes as curious as Mani. On their way back she shows much interest in the landscape and the things she is watching. In *Fictional World of Ruskin Bond* Amita Aggarwal comments:

“A Long Walk with Granny” is not the end of the journey for both Granny and Mani but it is screening off a new world to Granny and Mani” (162).

After getting clear vision, one can observe child like enthusiasm and curiosity in Granny as Mani. As a new born babe, she looks clearly for the first time. Bond expresses her attitude:

“Mani! She exclaimed, clapping her hands with joy, ‘How nice you look! What a fine boy I’ve brought up! But you do need a haircut and a wash and buttons on your shirt and a new pair of shoes. Come along to the bazaar!’” (Bond, *TOSFC* “A Long Walk with Granny”.10).

The child Mani fulfills her requirement of giving her clear sight. Now it is her turn to take care of Mani by providing him hair cut, wash, buttons on his shirt and new pair of shoes. She buys new umbrella, Tibetan pullover for his father, seeds and bulbs and cowbells.

At the beginning of the journey, both lack something physically and materially. Now they returned fulfilling everything they need. It shows the perfection in life. The change of place changes their situation in a better way. Mani and Granny both share their companionship. Both depend on each other for strength, power, love and affection. One can say that they are interdependent. While grandparents share their age – long – experience with grandchildren, children share their loneliness and give them an opportunity to revive their childhood. This relationship survives on the basis of give and take. Granny and Mani are good example of the give and take that Bond derives in this story.

During the travel to her village Granny never sleeps and she is curious and eager to see things that she hadn’t seen for a long time. New spectacles have opened new vistas of
life. They have infused a new vigour in her frail frame. She takes a seat by the window in the bus and carols like a little girl at the colourful spectrum of the world outside. Each bend in the road opened up new vistas for her. Granny can seen distant villages, people working in the fields, milkman on the road, two dogs rushing along beside the bus, monkeys in the tree and most wonderful of all, a rainbow in the sky. She is very pleased with this improvement. Road is compared to life, each turnings or bend in life, sometime seems troublesome and painful as the walking of Granny and Mani. But, each bend lends new vistas. The bends and turning in life are for the good perception of life. Bond is always positive. While everyone in the bus looked weary and bored, Granny continues to gaze out of the window, discovering new sights.

In the return journey Mani sleeps on Granny’s shoulder comfortably supported. Without Mani, it is impossible to come out of her village. The moral support of Mani, makes everything possible for granny, he gifts her with the new sight as a sign of gratitude unintentionally.

Granny’s insistence strengthens Bond’s view point that everyone grown up has a child in him. It is another matter that it remains docile most of the times. Saaz Kothare remarks:

“One Indian writer, whose work indicates that he too writes not for children as future adults but instead, considers adults to be grown up children is Ruskin Bond” (234).

Bond stories help him to revive all sweet, sour memories of his boyhood. This is how, at least for sometimes man returns to his primeval innocence. Each object fills him with pleasant surprise, a little stream invites him to splash water and there is rainbow in the sky to exhilarate him to dance. Each thing they encounter in the path and the road render them pleasant surprises.

Children love Bond’s stories for his humour and fantastic illustration. They feel very close to the characters and events and incidents as depicted, in this story. Though Bond is
widely known as the writer of hills, his children are not different from the children of other places. He says that in some ways the lives of Indian children aren’t very different from anywhere else. Their aspirations, what gives pleasure or sorrows are universal (93).

Jumping in a pool of water, bathing in river, listening to the sounds of birds, trees and wind and rain walking in the hill path, accompanying grandparents and listening to their age old story are common to children anywhere. Mani of this story has these nature experiences which make him forget the problem for a short while and he regenerates himself in the natural atmosphere. Nature provides Mani and Granny momentary diversions from the hardships of their life. Hence they get back to their village with an enthusiasm. Bond presents the graphic details of hill life in “Long Walk with Granny” along with the innocent world of Mani and Granny and insists on the love and concern of the young one towards the old people.

The final short story “The Cherry Tree” is a typical story of a child and his close association with nature. In “The Cherry Tree” Bond speaks of his own reflections through the boy Rakesh. The story is a depiction of young Bond’s friendship with the tree. It reveals the relationship between the boy Rakesh and his grandfather. The germination of a cherry seed into a baby plant and the growth of the plant into a tree spread love and understanding not only between the old and the young but also between the boy Rakesh and the cherry tree. Bond beautifully portrays the cherry tree and its protective and productive attitude in facilitating its own minimum effort to unfold its peace and power that human can feel underneath.

Rakesh is a six year old boy living with his grandfather, a retired forest ranger, in a little cottage outside Mussoorie. His parents are farmers in a small village, fifty miles away. Since there are no schools in the village, his parents have sent him to his grandfather (Bond, TOSFC “The Cherry Tree”, 100).
One day, on his way back home from his school, Rakesh buys some cherries at the Mussoorie bazaar. These are from the Kashmir valley. In the Himalayan foot hills where Rakesh lives, there are not many fruits trees, because the stony soil and the dry cold winds, stunt the growth of the most plants. There are the forests of oak and deodar. The oak stands for steadfastness of the hill people while deodar represents Godliness, the cherry tree represents the invincible power to exist (Amita Aggarwal. *Fictional World of Ruskin Bond* 127).

When Rakesh reaches home, he has only three cherries left. He offers a cherry to grandfather and promptly ate the other two (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Cherry Tree” 100). This reminds the reader of the behavior of the little boy Bo-bo in Charles Lamb’s essay “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig”. In Charles Lamb’s celebrated essay, “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” the Chinese boy little Bo-bo caught by his father Ho-ti in the barbarous act of eating the burnt flesh of a pigling that perished when their hut caught fire, tears off the lesser half of a burnt pig and offers it to his father to ‘discover’ the forbidden taste of roasted flesh while he keeps the larger portion for himself (171). Likewise, Rakesh ate all the cherries in half an hour, walk home and kept only one for his grandfather to taste it. Rakesh himself keeps the last seed in his mouth for some time and then places it on the palm of his hand. He asks his grandfather if cherry seeds are lucky. When grandfather says that, they are, Rakesh decides to keep it. However, grandfather says that anything is lucky only if it is put to use. Grandfather conveniently teaches him the lesson of being useful to others in a natural way. The luck is decided on the utility of the object great or small. Rakesh asks what he can do with a seed, grandfather asks him to plant it in the shady corner. The seed is planted with the hope of rebirth or resurrection in its own season. Then Rakesh runs off to play cricket with his friends and forgets all about the cherry seed (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Cherry Tree”. 101).
Up to this point “The Cherry Tree” is a conventional story about a small boy, but from this point onwards it becomes a typical Bond’s story, full of nature and children’s love. He conveys to his young readers, the need to plant, the need to protect the plants to maintain the ecological balance and to keep the atmosphere safe and pure and to protect the people from pollution. Bond reiterates the same idea in “The Tree Lover” where, the Grandfather explains his grandson, the need of planting that they are not planting for the people only but they are planting for the forest and for the birds and animals which live there and need more food and shelter. Grandfather tells him that not only birds and animals needed trees – for keeping the desert away, for attracting rain, for preventing the banks of rivers from being washed away and for the wild plants and grasses to grow beneath (Bond, TOSFC “The Tree Lover”. 73).

Bond cultivates the capacity to view miracle of nature in most ordinary stirring of a day, a thrusting new shoot of a cherry seed in this story for his children readers. Implicitly he draws a thin line through the change of seasons, the growth of the cherry plant, the consequent threat it has while growing and the full fledged tree becomes a shelter and spreads peace and power.

In the winter, a cold wind blows down on the hills from the snows, going ‘whoo-whoo-whoo’ in the deodar trees. The season changes and it is gloomy, dry and no sign of life. The cold keeps everyone indoor in shudder. Winter renders the time of rest for body and mind. In the evenings, sitting over a charcoal fire, grandfather and Rakesh spend their time, telling stories about people who turn into animals and ghosts who lived in trees and beans that jumped and stored that wept. Since grandfather’s eyesight is poor, Rakesh reads the newspaper to him-a very dull chore. Both share their loneliness by narrating stories of supernatural and surprises (Bond, TOSFC “The Cherry Tree”. 101). Both depend on each other to make life interesting and caring. Bond implicitly conveys his young and elder readers on building the relationship between the elders and the young one. Grandfather depends on
Rakesh to meet his need of driving away his loneliness and Rakesh also enjoys his childhood days in the company of his grandparents. Each pay respect and gratitude in their possible way.

Bond recalls through his boy protagonist Rakesh, in this story, the planting excursions with his grandfather in the slopes of Mussoorie. It nurtured him a great naturalist. The boy Rakesh is none other than Bond himself. He ponders his emotion to plant a garden of his own in *Rain in the Mountains* as that of Rakesh in “The Cherry Tree” where Bond expresses his surprises in his garden which is a little untidy unplanned but full of surprises – rather like his own muddled mind which gives him a few surprises at times Bond’s *Rain in the Mountains* (126). Bond shares his desire to plant a garden of his own. He dreamt of it. He pictures his garden that the front garden was a maze of flower-beds of all shapes and sizes, masses of sweet peas, petunias antirrhinum, poppies, phlox and larkspur, scarlet poinsettia leaves draped the garden walls, while the purple and red bougainvilla climbed the porch: geraniums of many hues mounted the veranda steps. It was this garden of his childhood that implanted in his mind the permanent vision of a perfect garden. In this story, Rakesh makes a little attempt to plant a cherry seed in the garden. Rakesh also has that surprise, when he stares at a small twig for a moment, runs to fetch grandpa, shows him the cherry seed gives birth to its tender shoots. That is the seed he planted last year. It is now about four inches high. Grandfather advises him to water it and Rakesh waters the plant sprinkling and also encircles it with pebbles ‘for privacy’ (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Cherry Tree”. 101). This reminds the reader of the behavior of Rikki in Kamala Markandaya’s novel *Pleasure city*.

In Kamala Markandaya’s bildungsroman *Pleasure City*, Rikki the fisher boy becomes the constant companion and de facto assistant of Mark Tully. Mark Tully is one of the Directors of the British firm developing the coastal resort of Shalimar. Tully, the grandson of a former British Resident in colonial India, Sir Arthur Copeland of Devapur state,
undertakes the renovation of Avalon, the colonial mansion built nearby his grandfather. Being a sculptor, Tully sculpts the statue of a marble cherub to adorn the pool room of the mansion, while Rikki builds a pebble mosaic for his part, having learnt this art from the British missionary couple, his earlier mentors. When Tully is away, Rikki covers the marble cherub in a fisherman’s rain wear, made of plamya leaf and when asked by Tully why, gives sheepish and conflicting answers (Kamala Markandaya, Pleasure City. 80; 93; 126; 133; 144-47; 231-32; 258-59).

There is a climate change intimated by the V-shaped formation of wild duck flying north to Siberia announces the birth of beauty in and around nature and it is spring (Bond TOSFC “The Cherry Tree”.101). Like a typical child, Rakesh looks curiously at the tree every morning, but it does not seem to be growing very fast. So, like a typical child, he stops looking at it, though he cannot resist the temptation of taking a peep out of the corner of his eye. After a week or two he finds that it has grown at least an inch.

Bond writes a poem on cherry tree in his Book of Verse under the little “Cherry Tree”. He explicates what is written in the short story “Cherry Tree” in a form of poem briefly and effectively.

“Eight years have passed
Since I placed my cherry seed in the grass.
‘Must have a tree of my own’ I said

………..

The young tree struggle upwards thrust
Its arms in a fresh fierce best
For light and air and sun” (Bond, Book of Verse. 50).

Writing about the new cherry tree, Bond could not avoid thinking of his own garden of his childhood. Bond introduces his garden to his readers that implanted in his mind, the
permanent vision of a perfect garden that of Rakesh’s grandfather. Hence, whenever he is worried or down in the dumps, he closes his eyes and conjures up a picture of this place which gives birth to the tiny cherry plant. Similar garden can read in Bond’s “These are in My Garden”. There Bond portrays his own garden with the bronze petals of shattered marigolds, spears of golden red beans, two armored lizards, a map butterfly, a division of ants, a small yellow bird attack the cherry blossom and a boy stands over new grown clover (Bond, *Book of Verse* 127).

Ruby Yasmin quotes in her “Ruskin Bond: Bonding with Nature”:

“We scarcely notice these miracles of nature until Bond draws our attention to them through his work. Suddenly we find ourselves stumbling upon a long forgotten treasure trove of rare beauty” (46).

Bond narrates such scarcely noticed miracle not only in “The Cherry Tree” but also in his poem “Silent Birth”. The poem teaches the readers, its humbleness, forbearance, tolerance and silence of the little seed when it gives birth to a baby plant. Bond renders harmony in nature and human in “The Cherry Tree” as well as in “Silent Birth”. It is apt to show the suffering in silence in the tiny seed who sacrifices itself to create a new life in the world.

It reminds us of Jesus Christ who bears and suffers everything in silence at last dies on the cross and the third day he has risen from the dead to prove that he is resurrected, (Bible Luke 24:46) and he becomes life to the world. Another reference from John12:24 that is about a corn of wheat which falls into the ground and dies. It abides alone. There it dies and the wheat seed brings forth a new plant and much fruit. Bond narrates the silent birth of a new plant in *Book of Verse* “Silent Birth”

“When the earth gave birth to this tree,

There came no sound

A green shoot thrust
In silence from the ground
Our births don’t come so quiet
Most lives run riot
But the bud opens silently,
And flower gives way to fruit
So must we search
For the stillness within the tree,
The silence within the root” (25).

The plant Rakesh grows, assumes the role of a guardian spirit. When it is small he has to guard the plant when the plant becomes young, it takes the roll of a guardian in protecting, consoling, comforting and sharing his joy and sorrow. Bond remembers the poem by George Morris taught by his grandfather that he mentioned in his story “The Tree Lover” which reflects the same notion of protection (76).

“Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I’ll protect it now” (Bond, “The Tree Lover” 76).

The new shoot reminds Bond of his father. Bond imagines his father back to life through new shoots. Rakesh expresses his surprise and joy in looking at the new shoot is that of Bond who watches over his father who comes to life in the form of new plant. The reader can read from “The Funeral” (Bond, TOSFC. 232) where the boy Bond was surprised that what was down in the depths of the earth? Even Samson cannot push his way to the surface but his father was a gentle soul who would not fight too hard against the earth, and the grass and the roots of tiny trees. Perhaps he’d grow into a tree and escape that way. If he was put away like this, the boy thought that he will get into the root of a plant and then he’ll become a
flower and then may be a bird will come and carry his seed away and he will get out somehow (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Funeral”. 232).

Bond reinforces the Vedanta philosophy of ‘Advita’ by perceiving the one and the only one undiminished flame in all things great and small. He feels the power of the sky, the earth and of a small cherry seed alike. The seed is the microcosmic force of nature; its power to survive is invincible. The cherry seed symbolized invincible power to exist (Amita Aggarwal, *Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*. 127).

Nature runs its course. The monsoon rains come early and Rakesh plods from school in raincoat and gumboots; fern spring from the trunks of trees, strange lilies come up in the long grass, and even when it is not raining, the trees drip and the mist comes up curling the valley. The cherry tree grows quickly in this season (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Cherry Tree”. 101).

When the cherry tree is about two feet high, a goat enters the garden and eats all the leaves, leaving only the main stem and two branches remain to proclaim the hope of growing later. Grandfather assures the upset Rakesh that it will grow again since the cherry trees are tough enough to withstand any destructive mode.

At the end of the rainy season, as the dipped ball emerges out of water, new leaves appear on the tree to prove that it can survive. But a woman cutting grass scrambles down the hillside, her scythe sweeps through the tree and it is cut into two as if cut her throat. It seems that it does not have life and any sign of growth. Now even grandfather is not sure that it will grow again. But, the cherry tree has no intention of dying.

Grandfather is Bond’s dream incarnation whom he uplifts morally and mentally in times of depression and loss. Similarly, Rakesh’s grandfather does his duty to rescue him from the assumed loss of the cherry plant. He stands with Rakesh, supports him to bear the loss as the cherry plant which tries hard to survive patiently. It withstands in all seasons in order to live. The cherry tree teaches the art of living in spite of all troubles and calamities.
Summer arrives, the cherry plant has sent out new shoots with tender leaves, declaring its victory over the foes as if David defeats Goliath. The growth of the plant represents the boy Rakesh who also grows taller and now he is eight, a sturdy boy with curly black hair and blackberry eyes. That monsoon, Rakesh goes to his village to help his parents with the planting, ploughing, and sowing. Bond narrates an ordinary village boy who is going to school by walking for hours and takes part in helping his parents in their field work. Rakesh represents children of Indian village who share their parent’s work. After rendering his duty to his parents, Rakesh returns to his grandfather at the end of the monsoon. When he returns, he is thinner but stronger like the cherry tree. The cherry tree has also grown up and reaches up to Rakesh’s chest. He waters it regularly, even when it rains because, he wants it to know that he was there (Bond, TOSFC “The Cherry Tree”. 102).

Bond remembers his aunt who came to stay with his grandmother, has an obsession of watering the plant. His aunt waters her plants every morning. Even in rain she did not miss her routine because she thought that plants expected her in that time. Similarly Rakesh also never likes to miss his plant, In Bond’s “Panther’s Moon” Treasury of Stories for Children (116) Dr. Taylor attended her patients only after attending to her plants. Bond imparts to his readers that such an affection, love and care require towards plants and nature as their fellow beings. Here, Bond takes a chance of insisting his children readers to have the same amount of care in nursing the plant.

One day Rakesh sees a green praying mantis, a large insect with stout legs, on a branch, bearing at him with bulging eyes. It is the cherry tree’s first visitor. The next visitor is a caterpillar which starts eating the leaves. Rakesh removes it quickly and drops it on a heap of dry leaf, lettering it to come back when it is a butterfly (Bond, TOSFC “The Cherry Tree”. 104).
Winter brings snow and the cherry tree bends low with the weight of the snow. Field mice seek shelter in the roof of the cottage. The road from the valley is blocked. There is no newspaper for several days, making grandfather grumpy. His stories begin to have unhappy endings.

In February, when Rakesh turns nine, the cherry tree is four. One morning grandfather steps out of the cottage and excitedly calls out to Rakesh. Both of them see a pale pink blossom at the end of a branch. Suddenly the tree is taller than Rakesh as well as grandfather. The cherry leaves are two to six inches long and have a finely toothed edge. Bond describes its gliding movement in the wind that they are pretty leaves and they are always ready to dance, if there is a breeze (Bond, *TOSFC* “The Cherry Tree”. 104).

Rakesh goes into the garden and lies down on the grass beneath the tree. He gazes through the leaves at the great blue sky and turning on his side and he can see the mountain striding away into the clouds. Grandfather also joins him in silence till the stars come out and the nightjar begins to call. The togetherness showers them happiness as if heaven comes down unto their feet. In “The Tree Lover” also Bond portrays this happiness of friendliness (73). In “The Tree Lover” Bond narrates the serenity of being beneath a tree. Sometimes when the boy sat alone beneath a tree he would feel a little lonely or lost but as soon as grandfather joined him, the garden would become a happy place, the tree itself more friendly (Bond, *The Treasury of Stories for Children* “The Tree Lover”. 73).

In “Our Trees still Grow in Dehra” Bond shares this experience of being beneath the cherry tree like Rakesh that last summer Bond spent a night in the pine-knoll, sleeping in the grass beneath the cherry tree, listening to the chatter of stream and the occasional tonk – tonk of a night jar, and watching through the branches over head, the star twinkling in the sky and he felt the power of sky and the earth and power of a small cherry seed.
The story reveals to Bond’s readers that his belief in mystical unity which is embodied in the images of the sky, the earth and the cherry tree. All have become small ecosystem, representing the universe in a microcosm. The readers can also observe that Bond makes that microcosm alive through his writing that comes from genuine feeling.

Children have always rated grandparents high in the list of their favourites who respect their feelings, trust them and stand by them in times of trouble. Bond colours the canvas of his story with friendly and considerate adults who love children and are loved by them in return. Michael Heyman says that Bond depicts relationship between adults and children where children are not wiser and where they rarely challenge the adults.

Bond is aware of the fact that the tender body and immature mind of children need protection and guidance, to acclimatize themselves in the world of adults. Bond invokes loving and nurturing relationship between children and adults in “Long Walk with Granny”, “The Kitemaker” and in “The Cherry Tree” (Heyman, Michael, *The Life and Works of Ruskin Bond*. 253-254).

In the cherry tree, the following years there are more blossoms. Bees come to feed on the nectar in the blossoms and birds peck at the blossoms and break them off. Then in summer, small cherries appear. Rakesh tastes one and finds it sore. Grandfather assures him that it will be better next year. However the birds like them, especially the bigger birds like the bulbuls and scarlet. Grandfather rests on a cane chair under the cherry tree. Rakesh lies down on the grass beneath the tree and enjoys the panorama of nature around, with the sound of insects in his ears, with grandfather sitting beside him (Bond, “The Cherry Tree”. 104).

In the forest, the crickets and cicadas begin tuning and suddenly the cherry tree is full of the sound of insects. This reminds us of Bond’s *Rain in the Mountains* (91). In *Rain in the Mountain*, Bond captures the music performance of the birds and insects. If the brain fever bird makes music by night, the cricket and cicadas orchestrate during the day. As
musicians, the cicadas are in a class by themselves. All through the hot weather, their chorus
ring far from damping their spirits only rouse them to a greater choral effort. The tree crickets
are a band of willing artists who commenced their performance at almost any time of the day.

Bond ponders the sound of joy made by the birds and insects in “The Cherry Tree”.

Birds and insects express their joy at the termination of the hot weather and expectation of the
cool quenching relief of the monsoon while the cherry tree is filled with virgin blossoms of
that year. Both Rakesh and grandfather are intoxicated by the cacophony of the nature around
them.

Rakesh asks his grandfather what is so special about this cherry tree when there are so
many in the forest. Grandfather says that they planted it themselves. Rakesh admires that it is
just one small seed! He feels the touch of smooth bark of the tree, runs his hand along the
trunk of the tree, puts his fingers to the tip of a leaf, wonders ‘is this what it feels to be God?
(Bond “The Cherry Tree”. 104). The touch performs miracles. The touch establishes an
understanding between the two unknown entities. Bond too prefers a loving touch to the
appreciation of nature. Bond in his Book of Nature pens his own experience of planting a
cherry seed (143,144) when he was exactly seven year old as Rakesh in “The Cherry Tree”.

The subject matter of this short story “The Cherry Tree” is the growing up of a tree.
Now Bond puts a request that everyone must have a tree of his own. Even if you do not
worship the tree, you can love the tree is plead of Bond. Bond’s Book of Nature expels his
own experience of a cherry seed when he was seven years old. One day, he had cherry seed in
his hand and on an impulse he thrusts it into the soft earth and then went away and forgot all
about it. A few months later he found a tiny cherry plant in the long grass. He did not expect
it to survive. But the following year it was two feet tall. Some goats ate its leaves and a grass
cutter’s scythe injured the stem and he was sure that it would wither away. But it renewed
itself, sprang up even faster, within three years it was a healthy growing tree, about five feet
tall. It grows in spring, autumn, summer and monsoon. When he returns to the cherry tree, he feels the peace and power of the place. It’s a big world and momentous events are taking place all the time. He admits that this is where he has seen the most momentous of them all happen (Bond, *Book of Nature*. 144).

The story “The Cherry Tree” almost reads like a poem. The different stages of the growth as well as the constant threat to the death of the tree is described in minute detail with pointed reference to seasonal changes and the flora and the fauna of the area, and with special reference to the growth of Rakesh himself. The cumulative effect is that the tree becomes almost human. It even has visitors. It gives shade to grandfather and shelter to Rakesh. At the end of the story it gives Rakesh the feeling that he has, in his own small way, shared in God’s function of creation. The story is about a loving grandfather who introduces the child Rakesh to the world of nature. He acts as a catalyst in upbringing Rakesh. He passes on his wisdom to him and enables them to gain confidence and assume responsibility. This invigorating relationship of child Rakesh with his grandfather paves the way toward happy selfhood of the boy Rakesh. The grandfather becomes the loving source of his grandchild’s growth and self knowledge. He takes care of the child protagonist by his caring attitude. Hence, he commands respect from the boy naturally. Rakesh also understands the significance of growing trees and safeguarding them. Bond’s stories breathe his great love and sincere concern for nature which takes care of us like mothers. Therefore, everyone needs to prove sincere, selfless, honest and loyalty towards nature by inculcating a true sense of environmental ethics and ecology. This story forwards a contemporary relevant theme that one must be aware of the evils of deforestation and other environmental imbalances. Through Bond’s stories children are made aware of the protection and preservation of the environment. Eco-writing in the form of children’s literature enhances environmental literacy. It motivates the children to get engaged with the environment and develop their knowledge of environmental concepts. The children
characters of Bond, the boy in the “Funeral”, Arun in “Woman in Platform 8”, Binya and Bijju in “Blue Umbrella”, Sita and Vijay in “Sita and the River”, Romi and Teju in “Romi and the Wildfire”, Mani in “A Long Walk with Granny” and Rakesh in “The Cherry Tree” all have exposure to natural environment that improves their awareness, reasoning and observational skills which can be noticed by the readers in Bond’s rendering of characters. Nature helps these children develop powers of observation and they become strong enough to handle any situation on their way. Children have more positive feelings about each other. The environment plays a vital role in developing the independence and autonomy of children. The naturalized backdrops offer the hope that children will develop the environmental values to become the future stewards of the Earth and they will preserve the diversity and the wonders of nature.

Bond is a devoted short story writer. He enjoys it because of its brevity and the free play it allows with themes, style and characterization. Bond’s stories are marked by restraint, retentive and moderation both in theme and style. His penchant for short story and novella, first person narrative, lucid language and digression free plot are characteristic traits of his writing that attract young readers. The concentration span of children in general is short. They prefer shorter fiction to longer one. The children enjoy the first person narrative because it gives them an idea that a child is narrating the story. The young Indian children become the ardent readers of Bond because of the simplicity of his language and exactness of expression. Jasbir Jain summarizes his chief concern in his “The Plural Tradition: Indian English Fiction”(83) that Ruskin Bond’s sensitive portrayal of the countryside, his being so much in tune with nature and the vignettes of childhood- remarkable for their range, open out a new dimension of Indian writing in English.