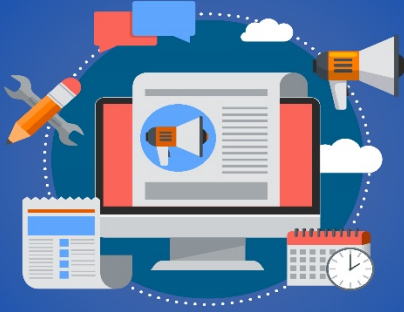


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Children by Ruskin Bond & Prakash Sant: A Comparison

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Abstract:

Children are the future of any society and should be given importance. However, in literature, very few happen to do so. Ruskin Bond in English and Prakash Sant in Marathi are two such writers who have created immortal children characters focusing on the middle and late childhood stage in the life span of a human being. Though, geographically and language wise apart, they arrive at the same point where they celebrate childhood. Their literature is can be used as a very effective tool in educating children and inculcating values among them.

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, Prakash Narayan Sant, middle and late childhood, children, gang age.

Children are the future of any society. Without them there will be no society. Hence, the focus of older generation should be on the careful and conscious upbringing of the children. But this factor is stressed only by children writers, except of course educators. From the point of view the Life Span Perspective in psychology, middle and late childhood is a very important and glorious stage in a human being's life. It stretches from 6 to 12-13 years of age. Games and gangs are the characteristics of middle and late childhood. Children are same everywhere. Their games may change but not their spirit. Children have a world into themselves, where they weave their thoughts and feelings and find joy and sorrow in their own way. Famous Indian English writer, Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan Ruskin Bond and Marathi short story writer Prakash Narayan Sant celebrate the uniqueness and individuality of children's personality and focus on the children from middle and late childhood stage and create immortal characters having all the characteristics of middle and late childhood without perhaps knowing what psychology has to say about it. Their innate capability of knowing children must have made this possible.

Children have their own way of perceiving and interpreting things. Most often, children are guided by their own decree. In the world of adults, children are often neglected. But both Bond's and Sant's children protagonists attract us by their lovely mood and passionate nature, lively and pleasing activities, playfulness and their never-ending pranks. They sulk on being scolded, fabricate smartly stories on being caught, quickly get involved in squabbles, startle us by their precociousness and unusual courage, easy to win a friend, bewitch us by their shining and innocent faces, ride bicycles down the hills, climb the trees, explore river and mountain paths, take nap under shady tress, run away from school or home, tell lies, steal jam or guavas, enjoy hunting or fishing, wrestle or ride buffaloes. Thus, the children characters of Bond as well Sant act and behave as the children do in any part of the world. In their appearance and attire, their children could differ but not in their attitude and temperament. They have a world of their own. The relationship of friendship in the 'World of Children' is very important as it plays a vital role in shaping the personality of young boys. Both Bond and Sant remain unsurpassed in their portrayal of friendship in their stories. Their young characters spread the message of love and friendship through the bond of fast friendship.

In Ruskin Bond's 'The Big Race' Koki is a fun-loving girl. She has a boyish attitude. Bond gives a very vivid and precise picture of Koki, her face, her gesture and her dress and shows how children are innovative and invent interesting games of their own even if they don't get modern toys to play with. The big race is the race of beetles. The beetles are pets of the children. A proper race is organized, tracks of cardboard strips are made, rules of race are set and prizes for winners are declared. All the children as well as the owners of the beetles are excited. The actual race is described in a photographic and serious manner. Lastly, Koki's beetle Rajkumari wins and Koki gets another insect as a prize. She plans her future – "She would breed beetles until she has a stable of twenty beetles. Her racers would win every event, both here and in the next town. They might make her famous. Beetle race would become a national sport." (171) Bond's children literature is abounding with the passages which characteristically reveal the thought processes and activities of children. He meticulously studies Koki's psychology and her common activities and records them in the story. His projection of Koki is life-like. The impact of gang on the children, their creative games, collecting and rearing pets and a sense of competition typical to children in the middle and late childhood is seen in this story.

In his 'Fight' Anil and Vijay spread the message of love and understanding through the bond of friendship. Their friendship starts just by an assurance to teach the lessons of swimming. They are not only quick in making friends but also are devoted in retaining it. Their friendship is pure and spontaneous. In the beginning, they fight for the right to bathe first in clean, cool and inviting pool in the forest. Initially, they grow hostile towards each other. Each one claims that the pool belongs to him. Anil's expertise in swimming suddenly solves the matter. Vijay asks him to teach him the tricks of diving. For that he would make him a real *pahlwan* like him. At this moment "they looked at each other with unflinching eyes, and in that moment a friendship was born" (205). The agreement between the two strangers turns them into friends. This story presents an incident typical to late childhood where children are possessive about their find, fight for it and then make a gang to keep others away from it.

'It Happened One Spring' from *Rusty Runs Away* highlights the importance of healthy peer relationship in the 'World of Children'. In the story, Bond has glorified the importance of friends and friendship in the life of youngsters. For children, friendship is an easy, protective and lovable relationship of life. The adolescent narrator Rusty is lucky to have great friends like Somi, Ranbir and Kishen, who infuse in him the zest for life. The bond of warm and close friendship contributes a great to the narrator's development by offering a climate for growth and self-knowledge. The orphan Rusty lives with his strict guardian, Mr. Harrison. Rusty feels, "I felt I was being owned by him. And that I must do only as my guardian wished" (125). Rusty always obeyed him not because "any respect for him, but because... was afraid of the man, afraid of his silence...and of the supple Malacca cane that lay in the glass cupboard in the drawing room" (125). He being lonely often broods on the future, dreams of sudden and perfect companionship, romance and heroics. He wants to squeeze freedom, explore, get lost, wander afar, find new places, throw himself on the bed and visualize the morrow. He wants to listen to the devil in his heart, and wander everywhere. During such miserable days, Rusty meets Somi on one of his solitary walks and Somi offers him a bicycle ride. Rusty gets attracted to the warmth, hospitality and disarming charm of Somi and his friend. The generosity and warmth of Somi's behavior changes the course of his life. The narrator comments, "His laugh rang out merrily, and there was something about laugh, some music in it perhaps, that touched a chord of gaiety in my own heart" (133). They fill Rusty's "very dull to date" (139) life with merriment. Rusty revolts against Mr. Harrison's dogmatism and rudeness. He thrashes Mr. Harrison, grips him by his

collar, pushes him backwards, slaps his face and hits him again and again wildly and awkwardly. At last, he escapes through the bedroom window. Thus, he brings his dream of thrashing Mr. Harrison into reality.

During the days of emotional crisis, Rusty finds a reliable source of support in royal and trustworthy Somi. Somi, thus, emerges as the incarnation of friendship. He enters in Rusty's life as a ray of light and happiness. He impresses the readers by his devotion and selfless love for Rusty. The cheerful and enthusiastic company of Somi, Ranbir and Kishan not only consoles Rusty, but also rejuvenates his dull and miserable life. For the first time, Rusty feels secure and cheerful after his father's death in the company of his friends. The dreary desert of his life blooms by their support and unconditional love. He rejoices in the company of his lovely friends, the thrilling bicycle riding, the spicy *chaat*, the wild enjoyment of *holi*, and many other exciting things. Rusty shares his hopes as well as doubts with them. Their company lessens his sorrows and multiplies his joys. It is the institution of friendship that gives Rusty an impetus to live in an alien society, and freedom from his insensitive and cruel guardian.

Bond has presented here friendship as a great source of happiness. It functions as a soothing balm and, at the same time, contributes to a child's growth by offering him a climate for growth and self-knowledge. Rusty successfully overcomes the exploitation, sad surroundings and miserable life with the help of healthy relationship and blissful presence of his friends.

The same spirit can be seen easily in Prakash Sant's various stories. The story 'Maitri' (Friendship) radiates with vivacious children who, by their individuality, captivate the readers. Sant's first-person narrative helps the readers to identify easily with the narrator child. He displays a fresh outlook while projecting the 'World of Children', their dreams and high spiritedness. He has consolidated the notion of the child as a cherished and valued member of the society, who has his own aspirations to follow and dreams to pursue. With his uncanny capacity of going straight into the heart of the reader and unveiling the layers of childhood, Sant has brought freshness, imagination and a unique identity to Indian children's literature. His acumen could well be observed in his projection of life-like children. His protagonist Lampan appeals enormously for his love, adventure and inquisitiveness. Sant's child protagonist, Lampan, acts and behaves as any child does in any part of the world. Thus, Sant achieves universality while delineating with accuracy the familiar characteristics of his child protagonist. His story 'Maitri'

is the best example of it. His close observation of children's behavior endows his child persona with convincing authenticity. This story is a specimen of 'gang age' of the children. Jambya is an example of strained child-parent relationship in this age.

Lampan's friends are extraordinary characters. Lampan calls his friends a 'chain of friends'. He describes the games he plays with Paralya, Kanbargi Gangya, AC, DC, Sampann, who are of his age. Jambya Katkol is one of them but he is older, powerful and headstrong. Lampan calls him 'Gundas' Gundas' Gunda' to show the height of his rowdiness. Jambya keeps an account of the 'slaps', he would give to anybody who goes against him. He even deceives his father and others by running away from a locked room in one incident and by pushing a big stone in a well and shouting that 'Jambya fell in the well! Save him'. Such a rowdy Jambya breaks the hut that Lampan and his friends have made, loses his gold chain, and makes Lampan search for it. Fortunately, Jambya's grandfather has it and Lampan is saved from Jambya's slaps. However, when he comes to know about Lampan's and his own grandfather's friendship, he makes friends with Lampan. This story shows some unfavourable traits in the stage of middle and late childhood in some children who are rebels. It also makes a comment the parenting style and stresses that permissive parenting is always better than authoritarian parenting. However, such children also value friendship above everything.

Sant's insight into child psychology enhances the knowledge about children. It appears that Sant lives permanently in the mental environment of a child as he depicts their inner and outer world clearly. In 'Maitri' he gives an insight into the working of Lampan's mind. He meticulously studies children's psychology and their common activities, and records them in 'Maitri'. His presentation of children in it is unmistakably realistic. The simplicity, universality and lack of pretention in Sant's stories make them especially accessible to young minds.

Sant has exalted the importance of friendship in the life of youngsters in the story 'Khel' (Games). Through Lampan, he has used it creatively. It is portrayed as an easy, protective and lovable relationship of life. The young friends portrayed by Sant are open, intimate and honest, and show great concern for one another. Sant highlights this healthy peer relationship. The adolescent narrator Lampan has friends like Kanbya, Vashya, Kashinath, Karguppikar. His friends infuse in him the zest for life. Such close friendship contributes to Lampan's growth by

offering a climate for growth and self-knowledge which is formed in the middle childhood only. This story shows characteristics of ‘gang age, play age and creative age’

The exciting cricket match, the wild enjoyment of climbing the trees of “Laxmi”, beating the stray dogs and running after them, catching crabs in the rice fields, fun of listening to the crying frogs and many other exciting things Lampan experiences in the company of his lovely friends. He shares his doubts as well as hopes with them. Friendship is projected in ‘Khel’ as a great source of enjoyment. In the invigorating company of his friends, Lampan’s joys are multiplied. It is the true friendship that gives Lampan an impetus to live away from his parents. Their friendship is not a give and take relationship for them. It is pure and spontaneous. Lampan and his friends make the readers believe that the world is a good place to live in. In the story ‘Khel’, Sant shows how the children always want to extend the realm of their experience by observing the things around them. This inquisitiveness of children emanates from their innocence, their curiosity to know the world and their snoopy nature.

Sant projects very vividly and forcibly this insatiable curiosity of children. The children in ‘Khel’ go and peep into a bird’s nest made in a hole to see its eggs. They fancy that a large yellow frog would turn into a handsome prince and marry a beautiful princess. This trait of exploring and fantasizing is a typical trait of middle and late childhood. They spend their summer afternoons on two trees named the ‘Laxmis’. The story abounds with the passages which characteristically reveal the thought processes and activities of children. In it, Sant throws light on the mischievousness of children and their frolicsome nature.

Sant places all his ‘Lampan stories’ around 1947 which makes even the adult readers identify with the stories, the children characters and their activities. These stories show how children in those days were imaginative, innovative in finding their own games, learning to grow in a team as a member or a leader and how they didn’t need any modern toys or games to spend their time because they lived in the company of nature and each other. They were not isolated like modern day children, nor did they live in ‘virtual reality’. They were down to earth, though romantic. Lampan, the central figure is shown constantly with his friends whose boisterous company he enjoys, and from whom he cannot stay away for any length of time. Even when he is at his parents’ home, his mind is preoccupied with the thoughts of his friends. Sant shows, here, how peers play a crucial role in the psychological and social development of children in middle

and late childhood. Children are more dependent upon peer relationship because the ties with parents become progressively looser as they gain greater independence. According to John W. Santrock, children's friendship in middle and late childhood can serve six functions, namely companionship, stimulation, physical support, ego support, social comparison, affection and intimacy. One can easily find all of them in the children's friendship in 'Khel', rather in all stories of Lampan where he is shown in his gang. They are shown playing 'Tarzan' on the Laxmi trees with a rope stolen from somebody's well, and knives made of screws flattened under railway. Though they show to be fearless, even the boldest of them fear police, and they throw all knives. This shows that they are not mature enough to be completely independent.

Ruskin Bond's children characters also show the same traits even though they belong to modern day India which shows that both the writers had a very deep understanding of child psychology. Though these writers belonged to regions geographically apart, with upbringing poles apart, religions completely different, they share the same understanding of child psychology, love for children and hope for humanity through children.

These days when everyone is worried about loss of various values, searching for various ways to inculcate the human values, environment values, moral values in members of any society and not finding any ready answers, these two writers hold a beacon to the mankind. It is the children in whom these values are to be inculcated not by preaching them, not by disciplining them, but through stories which they will enjoy, cherish and make a part of their life.

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