

Adolescents' Anxieties and Conflicts: A Study of Ruskin Bond's Work

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Abstract – This research deals with the adolescents' anxieties and conflicts which are experienced by them during their journey, as they mature from challenging adolescence to the ultimate doom of adulthood. It will also portray that how it is useful for the evolutionary process of an adolescent in particular and mankind in general. The research has explored mainly the vital stage of adolescents and their growth and development through the various stages of human life, namely; Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood. Through these phases of life one has to complete its life's journey which is from infancy to adulthood and maturity, from dependency to responsibility and own authority, from self-effacement to involvement with others and from exclusivity to cultural hybridity.

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INTRODUCTION

The novels, 'The Room on the Roof' and 'Vagrants in the Valley' talked about the journey of many adolescent characters and portray that how they cope with the stern reality of the world. This paper will truly and faithfully portray the mental condition and behavioral pattern of adolescents. As Ruskin Bond has not only described the things as they seen and happened, this research work also examines deeply into how the things happened and why they happened. In both the novels, he has painted a number of strong and lively adolescents like, Rusty, Kishen, etc. He examines the characters from the inside and analyses how their minds and hearts work. The portrayal of characters is sharp and evocative which produces clear and strong images in the mind of a reader. He has nicely portrayed the reality of human emotions, feelings and sentiments of his characters that are taken from the real life.

This research paper not only talks about the growth in terms of being a matured and responsible person and Rusty's transition from a vagrant adolescent to a responsible young adult, but somewhere it also deals with the psyche of adolescents as well as children that their ideas have their base in their hearts and not in minds. Among the variety of people portrayed by Ruskin Bond, some of them are caught in dilemmas and are at conflict with themselves. The dilemma of growing up is strongly presented in this paper through the character of Rusty. He shows the feelings, emotions and psychology of his own and depicted the shift in his individual consciousness as

he struggles for his identity and meaning in life by dealing with the issues and conflicts around him.

Psychological Aspect of Adolescents

Every human being in the world encounters the four stages of life, namely; Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood. Human life completes its journey through various stages and one of the most vital stages is "adolescence". This research paper deals with adolescents' anxieties and conflicts through Ruskin Bond's literary work. The term adolescence is derived from the Latin word 'adolescere' which means to "grow up" According to American psychologists, Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow, "The period of transition from childhood to adulthood or from dependent on adult direction and protection to self-direction and self-determination is referred to as adolescence, adolescent age or adolescent period of development" (Crow, *Adolescent* 4,5). All of us undergo this stage which poses many challenges and is full of excitement. But, at the same time it demands or requires significant adjustment to the physical and social changes. The adolescents, due to these changes often face a number of crises and dilemmas. According to Judith Rich Harris and Robert M. Liebert, "Adolescence is the transitional period from the dependency of childhood to the independence and responsibility of being an adult. At this point in their lives, young people struggle with two fundamental problems: to redefine their relationships with parents and other

adults and to establish themselves as individuals" (Khorana, *The* 30).

G. Stanley Hall was the first psychologist to advance the psychology of adolescence. He defined this period to begin at puberty at about 12 or 13 years and continues as late as 21 to 23 years of age. However, some psychologists may differ on this viewpoint. Hall also described adolescence as a period of "Storm and Stress" in his book 'Adolescence' written in 1904. He used this term because he viewed adolescence as a period of inevitable turmoil that takes place during the transition from childhood to adulthood. Storm refers to a decreased level of self-control and 'Stress' refers to an increased level of conflict. Hall described the three main categories of "storm and stress" – Conflict with parents, Mood disruption and risk seeking behaviors which increases levels of anxieties and conflicts in the adolescent period.

REVIEW OF RUSKIN BOND'S SELECTED LITERARY WORK AND ADOLESCENTS

Ruskin Bond, a well-known Anglo-Indian writer of twentieth century has been chosen in this research because throughout his life he has written about children, adolescents and young adults which includes more than thirty books for children. As he never wanted to forget the memories of his childhood, so he narrates the experiences of his childhood in his different literary works. The other reason of him, writing about children is Bond's own childhood was unhappy. The reason of his unhappiness is being the continual quarrel between his parents. He always felt insecure and lonely even in the presence of his parents. "A feeling of insecurity began to creep over me a feeling that was to recur from time-to-time and which was to become part of my mental luggage for the rest of my life" (Bond, *Scenes* 32). This shows the lack of wholesome parentage filled his mind with an extreme sense of insecurity. So, writing children's stories also became a means by which Bond fulfilled his own needs and longings as a child, refashioning his unhappy and disrupted childhood into a secure and joyous time. He writes "I don't suppose I would have written so much about childhood or even about other children if my own childhood had been all happiness and light" (Bond, *Scenes* 4).

While analyzing Ruskin Bond's novels "The Room on the Roof and Vagrants in the Valley – Two Novels of Adolescence", apart from the autobiographical elements, both the books are portraits of adolescence written by an adolescent. 'The Room on the Roof' is a complex novel that functions at several levels of experiences. It is a novel that explores typical adolescent concerns of identity formation, alienation, rebellion against adult restrictions, personal autonomy and financial independence. These anxieties develop in a person as he matures from challenging adolescence to the ultimate doom

of adulthood. 'The Room on the Roof' talks about the two worlds presented in the novel, the English World and the World of Bazaar. The first is inhabited by the former rulers and the second is inhabited by the native Indians. There is a purposeful separation in the physical setting and construction of Anglo-Indian residences, which separated them from the ordinary and common people of Dehradun. There is a huge difference between the life of the English people and the people of Bazaar. The noise and confusion, tastes and smells and feverish activity of the bazaar represent a microcosm of the world to Rusty.

This real world which is beyond the Clock Tower; the bazaar, and India and life itself are forbidden to him. Because of the differences between these two worlds, Rusty portrays his adolescent anxieties and conflicts and wants to be a part of the real India. 'To be in the world but not of the world' this phrase suits Rusty because he was in that world of Englishmen but he was not happy at all. But, at the beginning of the story Rusty operates within the narrow sphere of the European community, a world which is not rooted in the soil of India.

The novel also depicts adolescent's inner conflicts and anxieties. One of them is the rebellion against adult restrictions. The first act of Rusty's "crossing the threshold" symbolizes his psychological need to empower himself and his readiness to take responsibility for his life and actions. When Rusty returns home after secretly meeting his Indian friends in the bazaar, he is scolded for disobedience and beaten as a punishment by his guardian. "The point is, I have told you never to visit the bazaar. You belong here, to this house, this road, and these people. Don't go where you don't belong" (Bond, *The* 20). Yet, Rusty continues to disobey these rigid social codes because now he is ready to move out of his narrow world into the real world which is mysterious and forbidden. Rusty is warned by his guardian for the consequences of mixing with the Indians. But adolescents always want to break the barrier. They have a keen curiosity to see the unknown and experience the things which are new or unusual in an interesting way. Rusty in his early teens, is free from the racial prejudices. He does not know why he should remain cut off and not talk to the people who inhabit the same land he himself is a part of. By crossing the forbidden barrier, Rusty for the first time, confronted the challenging authority of his guardian and revolts against the colonial attitude and defies the laws of his English community.

Rusty's inception into the Indian world is marked by his participation in the festival of Holi. For the first time in his life he was experiencing the happiness of being out from that strict world of his guardian and experiencing his dreams of dream-world in reality. Rusty's playing Holi is symbolic. It breaks the racial barrier and taught him to overcome class and caste distinctions. This Holi

festival releases him from the bondage of Mr. Harrison who is an insensitive man and tries to inculcate a sense of racial superiority and exclusivity in Rusty. But, Rusty finds his own self and he beats his guardian, and runs away from his rootless and stifling world to the world of freedom. The beating of Harrison gives him the confidence that he can act independently. Thus, Rusty's departure from Mr. Harrison's house can be interpreted on two levels. First, Rusty's leaving from the feeble Anglo-Indian society to the healthier Indian society and the departure from the stage of helplessness of a small boy to the stage of strong and energetic manhood. The same thing has been shown in the Victorian novel 'David Copperfield' written by Charles Dickens in 1850 in which the role of adolescents have been highlighted in true perspectives. David Copperfield, a child living with his mother in the world of innocence, is beaten by Mr. Murdstone, his stepfather. As a revolt to the beating incident, David Copperfield bites on the arm of his stepfather in self-defence. Here too, like Rusty, David Copperfield raises his voice against the cruelty of his stepfather and tries to adjust the emotion of anger through biting.

This new world is the world which is full of joy, excitement and full of opportunities and which helped Rusty in search of his own identity, independence and a home where he feels secure. And by crossing the social, cultural and economic barriers, Rusty gets what he desires the most- a room of his own, which is symbolic of his 'personal autonomy' that autonomy which he never got when he was in his guardian's house but longing always remains. After being in the free world, Rusty acquires maturity and self-knowledge. He has resolved his identity crisis and became a mature and self-confident young man who is willing to face the future with hope and courage.

About Adolescents the same thing has been depicted in the novel 'Vagrants in the Valley' which is the sequel to the previous novel. It continues from where 'The Room on the Roof' ends with Rusty having reunited with his beloved friend, Kishen. Both of them continue their journey as they explore and search for a place to call 'home'. As in the previous novel, the journey serves as a metaphor for growth and maturation from adolescence to adulthood. In this novel, it depicts that how the homelessness changed Rusty from a vagrant adolescent to an ambitious and responsible young man. Is "home" a sense of belonging to a physical dwelling, such as a room or is it the comfort of a familiar place, a place where one is loved and where one matters? In the novel, for Rusty and Kishen, the place Dehra represents all of these. When they reach Dehra, their physical homes that is, Rusty's room on the roof and house where Kishen had lived with his family are no longer waiting for them. They have been locked up by the landlord and they become 'homeless'. This homelessness of adolescents disturbed their emotions which are connected to their homes. So they decided to live the life of vagrants, because

vagrancy on the one hand gives them freedom in the journey of life and on the other hand it is their only means of survival.

Rusty makes friends with other vagrants- Devinder, Goonga, and Sudheer, the Lafunga' Each has a touching story of how they became homeless and vagrants. Their miserable condition shows that how much a home and a family is important in a child's life. But, they all are deprived of love and affection which are connected to home and which they deserve in their life. This Homeless world, the world that is both lonely and free gives the way to them to live the life of vagrants. For Rusty, home is where the freedom is and this searching of freedom increases his anxieties to be independent. Rusty wants to be free and independent like Mr. Pettigrew and Rusty's aunt, who both are individualists. But, the price they paid for their independence is 'loneliness' and he does not want such a fate for himself. Here, loneliness serves as the metaphor for Rusty's fear and inner conflicts. So, He resolves to leave the life of vagrancy. Now, he is a changed adolescent, no more a 'vagrant in the valley'. He understands that vagrancy is a temporary phase. One has to end it when adult responsibilities and the necessity of earning money are faced. He suddenly realizes that he himself is entering into the adult world. So, he must leave the people for his own growth and development, with whom he has been living. For this, he decided to go on another journey to England to find his identity and to fulfill his ambition of becoming a successful writer.

CONCLUSION

A close analysis of the characters in Bond's novel reveals that they symbolize a definite journey of self from innocence to experience. There is a constant movement towards ripeness. Rusty matures from sensuous delights of boyhood to a sort of metaphysical awakening. Kishen in 'Vagrants in the Valley' matures from his adolescent careless or thoughtless attitude to a grave acceptance of life. They are like those human beings who are going through various stages of growing up along with the widening expanse of experiences. Their experiences became the tool through which they deal with every situation and become highly responsible youth cherishing a definite aim in their lives. To conclude, in both the novels 'The Room on the Roof' and 'Vagrants in the Valley', Ruskin Bond portrays Rusty's journey from childhood to adulthood and maturity, from dependency to responsibility and own authority, from self-effacement to involvement with others and from exclusivity to cultural hybridity. Hence, this journey helped him in search of his own identity, independence and his place from a vagrant adolescent to a responsible and healthy adult, who is ready to face the challenges of life with

hope and courage. This spells out the evolutionary process of mankind from adolescence to adulthood as represented by Ruskin Bond through his two novels.

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