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## Psyche Of Adolescent In “*How Far Is The River*”

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### Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze the psyche of an adolescent craving to be free and independent. Through his short story "*How Far Is The River*", Ruskin Bond tries to emulate the behaviour of an adolescent filled with curiosity and trying to satisfy his enthusiasm at any cost. Through his journey, we can study the impulsive and erratic nature of an adolescent's decision-making and to what extent they might go to quench their thirst for knowing the unknown. Their attitude towards anyone who tries to cage their freedom changes instantly, from being rational to judgmental. They tend to discard the advice and opinions of people who are restricting them from what they want. Ruskin Bond tries to mirror these eruptive behavioural substances of adolescents through the character of the Boy.

**Keywords** - Adolescence, Impulsive, Curiosity, Knowledge gap.

### INTRODUCTION

Ruskin Bond is a well-known author for his children's and adolescent stories. Ruskin Bond, in his writings, painted the canvas of Himalayan mountain ranges and the valley in our imagination with his writings. He makes the reader teleport into the tranquillity of nature. His use of adolescent characters is a hallmark of his storytelling. These adolescent characters serve as a powerful narrative tool to explore universal themes of growth, discovery, and the human spirit in a relatable and compelling manner.

He is a household name for children and adolescent stories. He incorporates beautifully the psyche of children and adolescents in his writings. He addresses self-discovery, grappling with questions of youth's identity, belonging, and purpose. So it will easily connect to the emotions and experiences of the youth. He involves moral and ethical standards. They navigate the turbulent waters of self-discovery, grappling with questions of identity, belonging, and purpose. These characters, and countless others, mirror the universal struggles of adolescence, resonating with readers across generations and cultures. The adolescent protagonists in Bond's stories often undergo significant personal growth and transformation, their experiences mirroring the tumultuous journey of adolescence itself. This emphasis on the coming-of-age narrative makes Bond's works particularly resonant with young readers as they see their struggles, dreams, and aspirations reflected in the characters.

Furthermore, Bond's adolescents are not simply passive observers. They actively participate in their stories, driven by curiosity, courage, and a thirst for adventure. They forge unlikely friendships, challenge societal norms, and embark on quests of self-discovery. These characters inspire readers to embrace their agency and pursue their dreams.

The central theme of his short story, "*How Far is the river*," deals with a young adolescent lad and his trials to fulfil his desire to trek the mountain and experience the river he had only heard of. He is so fascinated by the river that he takes on a dangerously adventurous journey to satisfy his desire. Ruskin Bond tries to sketch the commonly found curiosity-filled attitude of adolescence through the character of the Boy.

## ANALYSIS

The Boy in the story starts his narration by addressing the obstacles he faces to reach the place he wishes to be, which happens to be the river. Bond showcases the obstacles the Boy should overcome as way more significant than the Boy himself and more extensive than his destination. Bond also portrays the qualities of each object he chooses in the opening lines. The Little Boy is shown as a fragile little being who has to go through a Herculean task. The mountain, which is the obstacle he needs to overcome, is robust, vast and wild. The river, his destination, is free-flowing, serene and beautiful, just like his thoughts and aims about his future.

"I was a small boy, and it was a small river, but the mountain was big." (P – 97)

The enthusiasm of the adolescents to explore the mysterious and unknown is projected in the following few lines. Hurdles were portrayed as if they were an abyss. The Boy should pass through a way that he never went through, which is unfamiliar to him and a way that is a potential threat to his life. Though he can afford a pair of shoes, the Boy opts not to wear them as he likes his bare foot to feel the warm stones and cold grass. He comfortably skips the thought about all other harmful things that would cause trouble to him. For him, the only problem he needs to be saved from is taking off his shoes when required. In a dense forest on a mountain, there is also a chance of having thorns and animals that may harm him if he is barefoot. Despite all these risk-causing factors, the boys choose to be free-willed and only think of being at the river and experiencing it.

Curiosity is described to be one of the most common behaviours in adolescents. It is what drives them to learn about things they are unaware of. Young children usually have knowledge gaps. These knowledge gaps deal with the child's lack of knowledge about certain things. To fill the knowledge gap, children tend to learn out of curiosity (Gruber and Fandakova). Ruskin Bond mirrors the curiosity that the children possess during their adolescence. The Boy possesses a knowledge gap about the river. He wants to learn about the river, the fish in its waters, the rocks in and around it, and the waterfalls and currents that flow along it. Until then, the Boy only heard about the river, so he wants to experience and satisfy his curiosity by visiting and watching the river with his own eyes.

The Boy reveals to us later in the story that his parents are not at home. He knows that if his parents are at home, he will most probably get restricted from going out on such a dangerous journey and staying out for such long hours. So, the young Boy chooses a time when he can be independent to make such an adventurous decision. He thinks that what his parents were terming to be unsafe and dangerous was just a face. His parents' instructions stood no chance in front of his determination to chase his curiosity. The Boy consistently disregards the remarks of danger given to him about his journey. Midway, he encounters a woodcutter who is older than him. Young Boy asks the Woodcutter regarding the directions and the distance of the river from that place. After knowing the young lads' intentions of reaching the river, Woodcutter warns him of the time it takes as it will become dark by the time he reaches the destination. The Boy ignores the warnings of Woodcutter by saying –

"But I'm a good walker, I said, though I had never walked further than the two miles..." (P – 98)

The Boy himself isn't confident, and he is unsure of his ability to walk but still discredits the warnings given by the Woodcutter. After going a little further, he runs into a girl who says that the river is about twenty miles from the current place. He dismisses her information, saying that she might've never been to the river or even might've been thinking of another river. He discredits every piece of information that does not follow his will.

Ruskin Bond incorporates that adolescent habit of turning a deaf ear to advice or information that restricts them from being free-willed and independent. This habit of adolescents usually occurs when older adults try to limit them. They don't like to be shepherded all the time. This is due to the age or generation gap between the parent or elders and the children (Morgan 395).

Discrediting all the red flags issued by these people on the way, the Boy resumes his adventure. He also writes off his parents' instructions, the woodcutters' and the girl's advice. He puts forth his idea of reaching the river no matter what. He is hasty in his decision-making. His impulsive nature resulted in several risky injuries as well, which also could've been fatal. Due to the uneasy path, he slipped twice into a slope of slippery pine needles. He has no adequate food except for the little loaf of bread that he is carrying with him. Water is scarce on high-lying rocky mountains. The scorching heat made him feel thirsty and think of

the distance he had yet to cover. His decision to go barefoot on the mountain hasn't paid off well. His feet felt the heat of the stones in the sun, which made it uncomfortable for him to walk through. He was frightened by the silence of the forest. He even regrets his impulsive decisions;

"I began to feel discouraged. If someone had been with me, I would not have faltered; but alone, I was conscious of my fatigue and isolation. But I had come more than half way, and I couldn't turn back; I had to see the river. If I failed, I would always be a little ashamed of the experience." (P – 100)

At this point, the journey was not about his joy and excitement but was all about his prestige and fear of failure, so he continued his journey. Despite all the warnings he received, he opted to continue, and he now has to face the problems caused by his impulsive nature.

The portrayal of the Boy and his impulsive nature is prevalent in adolescence. They tend to make decisions in the heat of the moment and abide by them very rigidly, sometimes being irrational. Their mind sometimes goes on with what they feel rather than the facts and advice they receive. They are without experience and disregard the expertise of elders as well when they try to restrict and hinder their freedom. (Sinha et al. 7).

## CONCLUSION

Adolescent children act up sometimes unusually as they are in a transitional phase. Their elders must adequately channel their energies to tap their maximum time and energy resources. Ruskin Bond tries to personify the wavered nature of adolescents in this story. He illuminates the unhinged independence that they crave. Like the river, the Boy wants his life to be free-flowing, away from being restricted in his own world. He pays the price for his impulsive nature and risks his life to attain his satisfaction. Adolescents are to be given proper support and talked with in an understanding manner to ensure that they overcome this impulsive behaviour. They are brave at heart and are unmoved by their aim. This lends the young lads the power to attain anything they want. They need to be shaped and shown a path where they can have a free hand in filling their curiosity in a safer environment and filling their knowledge gaps pleasantly. The curiosity in adolescents to know and understand new information is an epistemic emotion. It only needs to be appropriately driven (Gruber and Fandakova).

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