

The Portrayal of Animal Characters in Ruskin Bond's Grandfather's Private Zoo

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is considered a pioneer of children writer in India. He is a great lover of animals. His *Grandfather's Private Zoo* is a wonderful novella for children. It is a novella based on animal tales and consists of nine humorous tales. *Grandfather's Private Zoo* is a collection of short stories which has been published in different magazine and newspapers. These collections of stories described the happy times which Ruskin Bond had spent with pet animals at his grandmother's house in Dehra. *Grandfather's Private Zoo* has stories like The Adventure of Toto in which he has describe about the monkey whose name is Toto, The Conceited Python in which talk about the python, A Hornbill Called Harold, A Little World of Mud, The Banyan Tree, A Crow in the House whose name is Caesar, Henry: a Chameleon it is a story of Henry, A Week in the Jungle, green tree-frogs, squirrels, crow, and chameleon- has its own natural characteristic. Out of the nine short stories in *Grandfather's Private Zoo* seven are about animals. Ruskin Bond's has captures the imagination of young reader by portraying the world of animals and birds. Stories like The Panchatantra, Hitopadesh, Jakata Tales and Aesop's Fables which gives a vivid picture of animal tales for children.

Keywords: Fantasy, Imagination, Animal fiction, Adventure, humour, Kindness, childhood.

The Adventure of Toto: The first animal story in the novella *Grandfather's Private Zoo* is the Adventure of Toto. The Adventure of Toto is an interesting story about the mischievous monkey Toto. Grandfather brought a baby monkey at the sum of five rupees from the tonga-driver at home and named it Toto. The narrator's grandfather was an animal lover. He had his own zoo at home and possessed several animals big and small such as tortoise, squirrel, a pair of rabbit and a goat. He wanted Toto because he didn't have a monkey. Toto was an attractive monkey with sparkling eyes and pearls white teeth. He takes special delight in scaring elderly Anglo-Indian ladies. He has a tail which added to his good look, and also served as a third hand. As Grandmother did not have any interest in animals, she never allowed grandfather with a new bird or animals in the house. So, it was believed to remain secret of Toto's presence from Grandmother until she was in good mood.

“His presence in the house still a secret, Toto was now transferred to a big in the servants’ quarters where a number of Grandfather’s pets lived very sociably together – a tortoise, a pair of rabbits, a tame squirrel and, for a while, my pet goat.”

(*Grandfather Private Zoo*, 158)

Toto was shifted to a big cage in the servant quarters where Grandfather’s other animals lived collectively. Toto didn’t remain calm he remain trouble for servants. He jumped and made noise whole night and didn’t let them sleep. His destructive activities were rising day by day. One day Grandfather went to Saharanpur to get his pension, he took Toto along with him in a large black canvas kit-bag. The Toto monkey was fully packet in the bag, such that he cannot peep outside or take out his hands out of the bag and thus he jumped and rolled inside the bag in a funny manner on the platform of Dehradun railway station. When Grandfather reached Saharanpur railway station, ticket-collector caught Toto the monkey and assume him as a dog, so that Grandfather had to take Toto’s ticket also. Grandmother finally accepted Toto. In the *Grandfather’s Private Zoo* the portrayal of Toto, a mischievous monkey is taken from the story *The Adventure of Toto* which is a fine example of Bond’s humour. Toto caused much mess to the family. They could not tolerate him anymore. And finally he took a hard decision to get rid of the monkey. In frustration, the grandfather sold Toto back to the tonga driver and heard a sigh of relief.

The Conceited Python: The next story conceited Python is a story of a snake. After Toto Grandfather bought a python from the snake-charmer with the sum of four rupees. He put it around his neck and took him to his home from the bazaar. Grandmother does not has any problem for grandfather bringing birds and animals at home but she objected to him bringing the python home. Grandmother was scared of python and when she saw python curled around the grandfather’s neck she was almost fainted. Grandmother asked Grandfather to immediately get rid of the python but Grandfather was reluctant to do so and try to convince grandmother by saying that he is a young python. But Grandmother was not ready to accept him.

“Aunt Mabel arrived the next day for a three-week visit, and for a couple of days Grandfather and I were a little worried in case the python made a sudden appearance; but on the third day, when he did not show up, we felt sure that he had gone for good.”

(*Grandfather’s Private Zoo*, 165)

Grandmother asked the Grandfather to leave the python in the jungle near the river. Decided over this Grandfather went to the bathroom, where he has kept the python. He couldn’t find the python in the bathroom or anywhere in the house seems like the python has disappeared and after

couple of day's python suddenly reappeared. Aunt Mabel saw the python in the garden on the guava tree. When Grandfather tried to catch the python he again disappeared. The very next day the python was seen curled up on the dressing table, watching his reflection in the mirror. Aunt Mabel left the house due to the fear as the python but it was frequently reappearing. Finally, Grandfather succeeds to catch the python in the large cage that has mirror and left him in the jungle with the door of the cage open.

A Hornbill Called Harold: The story A Hornbill Called Harold is a short story written by Ruskin Bond. A Hornbill called Harold is an interesting story covered from the *Grandfather's Private Zoo* novella. Ruskin Bond's Grandfather is lover of animals. He is in the practice of keeping collection of birds and animals at his home. Harold was the name of a hornbill bird. The bird has a long beak. It is a story of Harold, Harold mother was careful and dutiful wife like many other hornbills. And his father was simple and calm creature. In the garden of Grandfather there was a Dhak tree. In the month of January, red flower blossom on the Dhak tree. Harold's father took his wife near the trunk of the tree where there was a hole. Harold's father encircles his mother in the hole with the help of sticks, dung, and mud. After two months she laid an egg and Harold was born. When the new born Harold grew little bigger the hole become congested for the two. So his mother planned to move out of the hole. She broke the protecting shield of the hole and fly to the top branches of the tree. Seeing Harold mother on the tree branches his father was got delighted. They together repaired the outer wall of the hole and developed it into a nursery for Harold, this ensured safety of Harold. Harold was very happy in his nest and started growing up, soon he has feathers.

"Harold was not beautiful by Indian standards. He had a small body and a large head. But his nature was friendly, and he stayed on good terms with both my grandparents during his twelve years as a member of the household."

(*Grandfather's Private Zoo*, 171)

One day a wicked cat attacked in the hole to eat little Harold, but Harold parents attacked the cat wildly and in that effort poor small Harold fell down from the Dhak tree in the garden of grandfather. Grandfather and young Ruskin made a big wooden cage for Harold and kept it in the verandah.

A Little World of Mud: A Little World of Mud is a story revolves around a rain water pond which is situated behind the author's bungalow. The story describes the varied life inside the pond where all living beings lived in symbiosis with each other. The rain water pond was the whole universe for the creatures dwelling in it. One day author's grandfather took him to the rain water pond, only that day the author noticed and observed frogs and tadpoles living inside the pond. Before this he has only seen buffaloes taking a dip in the water. While walking around the

pond Grandfather told the author that he kept some green tree frogs in a glass jar during his younger days. Grandfather told him that the frog makes loud noise and Grandmother never liked them. Grandfather was reluctant to leave the frogs as he wanted to make a barometer using frogs as an indicator of temperature. But the very next day Aunt Mabel took the cap of the jar out of curiosity and she got frightened seeing numerous green tree frogs. All the frogs escaped from the jar and Grandfather could never find them again.

“When Grandfather was young, he had once brought home a number of green tree-frogs. He put them in a glass-jar and left them on a window-sill without telling anyone, anyone at all, of their presence.”

(*Grandfather's Private Zoo*, 175)

Author loved riding on buffaloes back. Ramu and author would sit on favourite buffalo's back and race. While their rides on buffaloes back they were accompanied by big sarus cranes. Grandfather told the author that village people love sarus cranes and they are pets as dogs. Ramu told the narrator that blue-jay, which is commonly known as Nilkanth as the bird has blue throat as lord Shiva. Ramu told the author that lord Shiva drank lethal poison that was meant to demolish the world. Author asked Ramu to tell him the story of squirrels. Ramu narrated to the author that squirrels were loved by Lord Krishna.

The Banyan Tree: The Banyan Tree is a story weaved around a small boy's childhood experiences. It is also taken from famous novella *Grandfather's Private Zoo* written by Ruskin Bond . The boy is the narrator of the story, he lived with his grandfather and grandmother in Dehra dun. Though he lived in belonged to his grandparents but he always felt that grand banyan tree belong to him. He used to spent long hours of the day playing on and around the banyan tree. The banyan tree was older than grandfather. Banyan tree was an ecosystem in itself. It has long branches sprawling over the ground and forming narrow passages. The banyan tree was home to birds, squirrels, snakes, butterflies, snails and was temporary residence to the narrator.

“I could read there, propping myself up against the bole of the tree with a cushion from the living-room. *Treasure Island*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *The story of Dr. Dolittle* were some of the books that made up my banyan tree library”.

(*Grandfather Private Zoo*, 183)

That afternoon he witnessed a fight between a mongoose and a cobra. The cobra knew that the grey mongoose was an excellent fighter and the cobra was expert rival. It was a war between the winners. The cobra took attacking position, raised himself three feet on the ground, spread his hood and the mongoose brushed his tail. Other than the author there were two more spectators of

the combat; the myna and the jungle crow. The myna and the crow sat on the cactus to watch the climax of the fight. Soon cobra took a defensive position but couldn't fool the mongoose as mongoose has judged his power right. The mongoose bite cobra on his back, immediately the cobra got stuck.

A Crow in the House: A Crow in the House is a story about a young crow that the narrator Ruskin Bond found injured on the road, as he has fallen from his nest. The narrator compassionately took the wounded crow home. The author and his pet loving Grandfather took good care of him and fed him timely which help the crow in his recovery. Soon the crow fully recovered. Grandfather and the author set him free but the crow refused to leave the house. They named the crow Caesar.

Soon Caesar started behaving like a supervisor of the house. Caesar joined the family member on the dining table and most of the time he trouble the family members during the meals. Caesar was very inquisitive and exploratory. He troubled everyone in the house. Grandfather and the author put him in a cage but he was not happy in the cage, he grew restless and made noise all the time. Thus Grandfather and author decided to free him from the cage. Caesar never made friends with other crows who lived on the banyan tree but he loved human company. The Grandfather told the narrator the Caesar doesn't mix with other crows as he is a raven, as the Jungle crow.

“But it seemed to me that Caesar, having grown used to living with humans on equal terms, had become snobbish and did not wish to mix with his own kind”.

(Grandfather Private Zoo, 188)

Caesar would sit on authors arm and say “Kiss, Kiss”. Caesar soon stated going to neighbours houses and troubling them. He would pick pens, pencils, toothbrushes, ribbons, combs; keys etc from neighbors' houses and keep them on the author's cupboard. He would snatch sweets from children. One unlucky day, Caesar was tempted by neighbors' beans. The neighbor threw a stick on the crow and broke his leg. The author carried wounded Caesar home. The narrator washed and bandaged his leg, took best care of him but there were no signs of recovery in Caesar's health instead he grew feeble day by day. After few days he refuses to eat and soon he died.

Henry: A Chameleon: This short story revolves around its hero Henry, a chameleon. This was one of the pets in the Grandfather's Private Zoo. Chameleon's though fall in reptile family but can be easily demarcated from the lizards. Henry has peculiar protruding eyes which were not beautiful. His eyes had independent movement that used to give an impression that of a squint.

“Chameleons are in a class by themselves, and are no ordinary reptiles. From their nearest relatives, the lizards, they are easily distinguished by certain outstanding marks. A chameleon’s tongue is as long as its body.”

(Grandfather Private Zoo, 191)

The author and his Grandfather found Henry on their visit to one of his grandfather’s friends, who live in countryside. The author and his Grandfather saw people assembled near the gate of a garden. They were carrying stone sticks and shouting to kill the chameleon. The people believe that the chameleon is poisonous creature that can kill people at a distance of twenty feet, thus they want to kill chameleon. Grandfather rescued and saved the chameleon. The Grandfather brought him home, he was named Henry and lived with us. The author found Henry friendly, did not find him dangerous and non poisonous. Ruskin Bond used to put his finger in Henry’s mouth but he never hurt the author, instead would wait patiently for the narrator to take his finger out. Henry loved author’s company and Henry has great trust in the narrator. He was a peace loving creature who never troubled anyone in the house.

A Week in the Jungle: This story A Week in the Jungle by Ruskin Bond elaborates his expedition into the Terai jungles with his Grandfather friend, Uncle Henry and his friends. The narrator never like hunting animals and killing them for pleasure, he believed that all living creatures have equal right on life. The narrator’s Grandfather also had a similar life philosophy on not killing animals. The narrator disliked hunting animals as he found it boring, young Ruskin Bond found shooting non- adventurous as shikari spent long hours waiting to get a sight of wild animal, which was rarely found. Ruskin Bond half-heartedly accompanied Uncle Henry’s shikari troop. The troop spent whole day searching for a big catch but at the end of the day, what they got were two underweight wild fowl. On day two the author manages to stay in the rest house. He found a book shelf in the verandah of the rest house. The narrator spent whole day reading books, of his taste from the book shelf.

“I knew that long, weary hours would be spent tramping behind these tall, professional-looking hunts-men who spoke in terms of bagging this tiger or that wild elephant, when all they ever got, if they were lucky, was a wild hare or a partridge.”

(Grandfather Private Zoo, 196)

A Photograph: The short story ‘A Photograph’ by Ruskin Bond is an anecdote of his childhood memories, in which inquisitive Ruskin Bond was fascinated by his Grandmother’s childhood picture. The story portrays an interesting account of author’s life when he was ten year old. One autumn afternoon the grandmother was knitting a pullover sitting on a rocking chair under the mango tree in the garden. She was knitting the pullover for the young author. Flipping through

the pages of book he found a faded photograph in between the pages of the book. The photograph was of a girl who was standing close to a wall near a garden.

“Grandmother was always threatening to teach me how to knit. She said it would take my mind off unhealthy creatures like frogs and lizards and buffaloes.”

(*Grandfather Private Zoo*, 203)

Grandmother took the picture from his hand and kept looking at it for some time. The girl in the picture has long hair; she wore a long dress with long sleeves. The girl in the picture looked confident and free. Grandmother looked carefully into the picture as she has never noticed it before. Ruskin asked Grandmother if they were Grandfather’s hands. Grandmother denied, as she was not ready to share the information with the little author due to reasons best known to her.

Conclusion:

In *Grandfather’s Private Zoo*, Ruskin Bond has depicted various animals – from monkey to frog, from python to hornbill, from squirrel to crow to show its vivacity and mischief of animal’s life. Ruskin Bond’s tries to arouse love for animals in children through his appealing portrayals, presenting in *Grandfather’s Private Zoo*. All the stories in *Grandfather’s Private Zoo* are full of humor and laughter. We find that Ruskin Bond is a true artist in the portrayal of the Animal characters. He writes about the birds and animals in *Grandfather’s Private Zoo*. Ruskin Bond’s Animal characters are widely popular among his readers.

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