

## **Rest in Peace: A Humanitarian Scrutiny of Ruskin Bond's *The Funeral***

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### **Abstract**

Life refers to the facet of survival, which discriminates humans from inanimate matters. The significant part of life is that it never waits for anyone and moves forward which refers nothing is permanent. The life is so precious because of the uncertainty of the death. No one will ever know the time of their death and it is the most important reason to live the life to the fullest. To Ruskin Bond, life is the essence which add some positive flavours to human. He celebrates life through the spirit of nature and small-town life. In the short story "The Funeral", Bond describes the theme of loss, vagueness, solitude, connection, willpower and optimism. The paper titled, Rest in Peace: A Humanitarian Scrutiny of Ruskin Bond's *The Funeral*, depicts the basic quality of human being: Humanity.

**Keywords:** Life, Death, Humanity, Small-town

## **Rest in Peace: A Humanitarian Scrutiny of Ruskin Bond's *The Funeral***

*The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.*

- William Shakespeare

Life is a thread which can be stretched but the sustainability is uncertain. It has both the sides (joy and sorrow), where every individual should have the tendency to accept it. One can live their life to the at most by experiencing the levels of change as life is a cluster of pleasure, comfort interposed by misery, defeat, and failures. There is no human being on Earth, who is strong, powerful, wise or rich, without experiencing struggle, suffering or

failure. Thus, the acceptance is the key term of life. In the poem “*A Dream Within a Dream*,” Edgar Allan Poe sightsees the difference between the individual’s perceptions of life and the effects of time:

I stand amid the roar  
 Of a surf-tormented shore,  
 And I hold within my hand  
 Grains of the golden sand

Life differs from individual’s point of view; it depends upon how they matter. To Ruskin Bond, life is the essence which add some positive flavours to human. He celebrates life through the spirit of nature and small-town life. He sees life in every pebble, leaf, grain of sand, and everything that exists. The most remarkable idea Bond attempts to infect his reader with that- humanity co-exists with simplicity. In the short story “*The Funeral*”, Bond deals with the theme of loss, vagueness, solitude, connection, willpower and optimism. The story is set in an unnamed small town. The small town is home to individuals from all the walks of life. Although, there are only few characters who form the part of the plot, the story is presenting all the residence of a small-town. Although, there are very few words spoken, the story brings out all the voices of the individuals living in the community. The story opens on a sad note. The title of the short story refers to an inevitable occurrence of life.

The story opens in a mourning household, where the master of the house is very recently passed away. However, the house is a hive of activity where the well-wishers of the family come to pay their respect to the departed soul. The pleasant irony is that by well-wishers and friends, the author refers to the entire town. Everyone in the town is come together to support the family. This social gesture does not just symbolise the close-knit community in this unnamed small town, but also, indicate the spark of humanity thriving in the society. It also proves that humanity lives in the small lanes of a small-town. The provincial town portrayed in the story is unremarkable and lane with minimum infrastructure. However, it is the spirit of the inhabitants of this town which give it a character and a quality.

However, the readers discovered that there is a small boy in the story, and he is the son of the diseased. The small boy is left alone and the boy’s uncle, Padre Lal does not encourage having children at the funerals. Further, the small boy is isolated and confined in a dark room. This dark room does not just signify the sadness in his life, but also, it points out the impending loneliness in his life. Padre Lal is the only kin to the grieving family. Therefore, he feels more responsible towards the small boy. He feels that it might affect the children deeply seeing their parent’s death. He contemplates from the side of the boy and asks him to stay inside and away from the funeral scene:

The house was full of people— friends, relatives, neighbours. Some had tried to fuss over him but had been discouraged by his silence, the absence of tears. The more understanding of them had kept their distance. Scattered words of condolence passed back and forth like dragonflies on the wind. ‘Such a tragedy!’ .... ‘Only forty’ .... ‘No one realized how serious it was’ .... ‘Devoted to the child’ .... (TSS 11)

The scene unfolds the character of the diseased. The mourners discuss his qualities, both good and bad. Though the boy’s father is not a sociable man, the town’s folk attend his funeral. They express their concern for the unfortunate boy and take care of him. This depicts the humanity of the people who lives in a small-town. Everyone comes together to support

the grieving family. As they all belong to a small town, they feel connected to each other. They feel responsible towards each other. For instance, in this modern life, where the people are running behind technology and money are losing humanitarianism unconsciously. The basic quality of every individual is humanity, but it is just trending in social networks rather than being shown in the real life.

There is also reference to servant and cook who deem themselves as part of the family. The dead person's name is not mentioned and the gardener calls him 'Sahib'. They do not just mourn their master's death, but also stand by his family to honour his funeral. In the house, the gardener and cook were working as usual knowing that they will be out of the job soon. This shows their concern towards the family, "The sahib's death meant that he would be out of the job very soon" (TSS 12). Though they both know the reality of losing their job, they work for the family with humanity. The gardener was looking after the garden and the cook was preparing a big meal to serve the relatives and the neighbours:

In the kitchen, the cook was busy preparing the only bog meal ever served in the house. All those relatives, and the Padre too, would come back famished, ready for a sombre but nevertheless substantial meal. He too would be out of job soon; but cooks were always in demand. (TSS 12)

The boy finds it comforting to distance himself from the death. However, he also desires to witness the last rites. The boy who was staying in the dark room comes out after everyone in their leaves, carrying the coffin of his dead father. He follows them from a distance and he recalls his evening walks with his father. His father has taught him everything about the name of flowers, birds, insects and plants. When the boy comes to the reality, he sees the coffin has been lowered down into the ground, "Padre Lal's voice droned on through the funeral service, and the coffin was lowered—down, deep down—the boy was surprised at how far down it seemed to go!" (TSS 13). He thinks how his father will stay inside the ground and this depicts the innocence of the little boy, "His father was a gentle soul who wouldn't fight too hard against the earth and the grass and the roots of tiny trees" (TSS 13).

After everyone leaves the cemetery, the cooks, the gardeners and the caretakers come to the cemetery to pay their condolence. They all want to pay their respect after finishing their daily labour. Evidently, everyone attends the funeral. The boy does not go near the coffin and starts to walk back towards his home, "The road stretched ahead of him, empty, swathed in mist. He was alone. What has his father said to him once? 'The strongest man in the world is he who stands alone'" (TSS 13). Though he thinks of the constructive words said by his father, he could not feel strong at the time:

For a moment he thought his father was beside him, that they were together on one of their long walks. Instinctively he put out his hand, expecting his father's warm, comforting touch. But there was nothing there, nothing, no one... He clenched his fists and pushed them deep down into his pockets. He lowered his head so that no one would see his tears. There were people in the mist, but he did not want to go near them, for they had put his father away. (TSS 14)

The boy knows his father is dead but he could not accept the reality. He is left alone and apprehensive. He is unable reconcile with the reality or even grasp its gravity. It accompanies him in his grief and also tries to keep him away from sorrow. However, the community support he receives gives him something to hang on. The loss of his lovable

father makes him to be a strong person in his young age. In the novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Harper Lee says, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view”. It is hard for the boy to accept his father is no more in this world. He is broken and tears start to roll down his eyes. Finally he makes himself up, and makes his mind strong that he will lead a good life, ‘He’ll find a way out,’ the boy said fiercely to himself. ‘He’ll get out somehow!’ (TSS 14).

### Humanitarianism: A View point

According to Hornby (2015) humanitarianism is the principles and practices of people who are concerned with reducing the suffering and enlightening the conditions that people live in. Also, Darcy (2004) says that traditional humanitarianism is based on a belief in a widespread duty to act in the face of human suffering and that it derived from a sense of empathy and common humanity: “The principle of impartiality is central, but stress is also put on neutrality and independence” (Darcy 2004,10).

However, the important point which the paper argues is that both life and death in a small town are celebrated. Nobody is left out, and everyone comes together in the spirit of humanity. Nonetheless, it is not the same in city life, there are only the friends and family who come on such solemn occasions. Through the short story, “The Funeral” one can understand the basic quality of every human being, that is their “humanity”, and there is a saying by Martin Luther King, “Life’s most important persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”. In this modern life, people are running behind technology and money as they are losing their humanitarianism unconsciously. They should value the life of each and every individual. Every small thing matters in this world and people should understand the value of humanity as smaller the possessions, the bigger must be ones love. The purpose of worlds’ refinement depends upon as long as a decent average of living for all human kind. For human it is a kind of responsibility. It might be small-town life or modern life, humanity is the basic quality which every individual should possess.

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