

3

Nostalgia Unveiled: Ruskin Bond's Ode to the Heartwarming Past in *The Golden Days*

Shruti Das¹ and Ranjit Mandal²

1 Professor, Dept. of English, Berhampur University, Odisha, India

2 Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Berhampur University, Odisha, India

Bond, Ruskin. *The Golden Years*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2023, pp. 153, ₹ 399, P-ISBN: 978-93-5699-061-6/ E-ISBN: 978-93-5699-050-0.

Ruskin Bond's *The Golden Days: The Many Joys of Living a Good Long Life* is an exploration of nostalgia and enduring moments from the past. Through his evocative storytelling, Bond transports readers to a vivid mosaic of recollections, where the memories of bygone days resonate deeply. Renowned for his enchanting tales set in the scenic landscapes of the Indian Himalayas, Bond's latest offering, *The Golden Years*, diverges from his typical works, taking a unique and introspective turn. This book stands out as a distinctive addition to his literary repertoire, offering a profoundly personal journey. Returning as the venerable storyteller of the Indian Himalayas, Bond's narrative is both a gentle embrace and a testament to the grace of aging. In *The Golden Years*, he weaves together wisdom, fond memories, and insights, providing readers with a touching and insightful exploration of the art of living well in later stages.

The author explores the last two to three decades of his life in the book, sharing the wisdom and experiences gained in his 60s, 70s, and 80s. This work transcends mere memoir, evolving into a heartfelt guide for embracing the latter stages of life with openness. The narrative centers on the protagonist's journey from youth to old age, vividly brought to life by Bond's descriptive prowess and keen observations. His writings serve as a beacon of hope for those concerned about their own golden years, portraying a life rich in experiences and embracing aging with grace. Bond offers a profound

perspective, asserting that these later years can be some of life's most fulfilling.

Structured into 60 brief chapters, Bond's narrative captivates readers from the very first page. Each chapter is like a short story in its own right, serving as a microcosm of Bond's life experiences, thoughts, and lessons. He peels back the layers of his existence, sharing not just the highs but the lows, the challenges alongside the triumphs, and in doing so, presents a holistic picture of what it means to grow old with contentment. The narrative is a gentle, meandering stream, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the stories, anecdotes, remembrances, observations, and witticisms. While the narratives flow smoothly, there are moments when the pacing feels fast. Nonetheless, this hurried tempo makes reader feels the intricacies and sentiments that Bond masterfully portrays. His storytelling is a soothing salve for the soul, evoking laughter, tears, and an unshakable sense of nostalgia. As he reflects, "White, purple, magenta, those fresh-faced flowers nodded to me as I played on the lawns of the Jamnagar palace grounds and today, more than eighty years later, whenever I see the cosmos in bloom, I go among them, for they are eternal, even if I am not (71)." Through first person narration, the writer nudges us to rekindle our love for the simple pleasures, be it in a good book, a leisurely walk, or the embrace of nature. In one poignant moment, Bond reflects on the beauty of his surroundings, expressing, "I would go for long rambles, exploring the hillside, a mountain stream, hilltops and meadows, and I would often come across flowers that I had not seen before - clumps of wild primrose, traveler's joy, balsam commelina, periwinkle, buttercups..." (103). This vivid imagery not only encapsulates the tranquility he finds in nature but also underscores the profound connection between his personal experiences and the broader themes woven throughout his narrative. Bond's ability to find joy in the simple yet exquisite details of life becomes a powerful testament to the enduring beauty of the human spirit, inviting readers to join him on a reflective journey of appreciation and fulfillment.

What distinguishes *The Golden Days* is Ruskin Bond's adept ability to capture the essence of growing up, chronicling the follies and learned lessons that shape an individual's journey. Against the backdrop of this coming-of-age narrative, Bond imparts a timeless

wisdom: “Egotism, self-esteem is a self-destructive folly that has eaten away at the minds of men over the centuries, producing tyrants and dictators who can see and admire no images other than their own” (127). This serves as a poignant reminder of the destructive nature of unchecked egotism and self-absorption, a theme seamlessly woven into the fabric of the characters’ experiences as they navigate the complexities of life and self-discovery. The memoir highlights various other themes, including love, loneliness, dreams, food, and notably, the sheer joy of reading. Bond’s reflections on reading are particularly delightful, portraying it as a consolation, a lifelong intoxication, and a remedy for the restless mind, resonating with fellow bibliophiles. In one introspective moment, he humbly shares, “To be honest I am more a reader than a writer, but I will not read anything that I thrust upon myself; I like to make my own discoveries” (54). This candid revelation not only unveils Bond’s personal approach to literature but also underscores the profound connection between the acts of reading and a journey of self-discovery.

The Golden Years serves as a poignant reminder that age need not signify the end of creative pursuits. Bond acknowledges social tendencies for retirement or reduced ambitions in old age but firmly asserts that creativity and passion need not wane with the passing years. To him, “the nice thing about growing old is that it gives us more to write about- all those years of love, friendship, adventure, achievements, a changing country, a changing world, changing ways of life, history in the making” (1). In a world often engaged in celebrating youth while fearing aging, Bond’s perspective is refreshing. He argues that the later years can be a treasure trove of experiences and wisdom, providing an opportunity to indulge in childhood nostalgia and appreciate the beauty in life’s small, often overlooked details: “Gradually those flowers and trees and the mountain stream found their way into my stories- ‘The Cherry Tree’, ‘A Prospect of Flowers’, ‘Rain in the Mountains’- and instead of being distractions, they were now a part of my work as well as part of my life” (105). This illustrates Bond’s philosophy, revealing how the seemingly mundane aspects of life, like flowers and trees, have evolved from mere distractions to integral components of both his storytelling and his existence. Through this integration, he not only

finds a harmonious balance between the past and present but also transforms his personal experiences into literary creations. He encourages readers to rekindle their inner child, revel in simple pleasures, and stay engaged in their life's work, whatever that may be. The narrator's reflections offer solace and inspiration to readers of every age bracket. Whether standing at the threshold of these years, firmly entrenched within them, or still a distant prospect, Bond's storytelling possesses the ability to cultivate an appreciation for the present. He advocates savouring life's beauty, relishing simple joys, and discovering contentment in each moment, irrespective of age.

Bond's lyrical prose captures the essence of his well-lived life, portraying vibrant adventures, misadventures, and unforgettable moments that shaped crucial life stages. His words, filled with authenticity and optimism, express a timeless truth: "When all the wars are done, a butterfly will still be beautiful...nature will reassert itself and gradually, over a period of time, the trees will recover and will come into new leaf" (139). His writing reminds us that beauty and renewal persist, even after tough times. It stands as a testament to his genuine love for unpretentious love for optimism. His passion for storytelling shines through every word, encouraging readers to pursue their interests for the sheer joy of it. "For you are a reader of the printed word, and those who have read widely- of philosophers, saints, great men, failed men- have acquired a knowledge of human nature and are better placed to make the right choices" (123). A notable quality of the book is the simplicity and elegance of Bond's prose. While undeniably eloquent, his writing is devoid of the ostentation often associated with literary works. His words flow naturally, akin to a conversation with an old friend, focused not on impressing but on sharing, enlightening, and uplifting.

Ruskin Bond's *The Golden Days* echoes the spirit of Diana Athill's *Somewhere Towards the End* (2009) as both share a common theme in their reflections on aging and life's journey. Both books draw from the authors' rich life experiences to explore the challenges and joys of growing older. Athill, with her candid and reflective style, and Bond, renowned for vivid storytelling, impart wisdom and life lessons for navigating the later stages of life. Emphasizing the importance of cherishing the present, both works encourage an appreciation for life's simple pleasures. Nostalgia and recollections are integral,

painting vibrant portraits of experiences and people who have influenced their lives. Athill takes a more philosophical stance, delving into existential aspects, while Bond's approach is marked by unique charm; however, both authors contribute to the literary exploration of aging, providing varied perspectives on the subject.

The Golden Years is an ideal choice for those wishing to relive the enchantment of their own golden days and looking for a sincere guide to embracing the later stages of life with openness. Nevertheless, it goes beyond age distinctions, providing timeless wisdom and inspiration to appreciate life's golden moments. This book stands as a cherished contribution to Bond's distinguished literary legacy, gently prompting us to welcome life's journey with open hearts and open eyes.

Thus, Ruskin Bond's *The Golden Years* is an extraordinary literary expedition, a heartfelt tribute to the latter phases of life, and evidence of the enduring allure of a seasoned storyteller. It transcends being just a book; instead, it extends a sincere invitation to embrace the golden moments of life, relish its subtle intricacies, and value the delight of aging gracefully. Ultimately, it stands as a repository of wisdom, poised to be explored and cherished by all who delve into its pages.

Works Cited

- Athill, Diana. *Somewhere Towards the End*. W. W. Norton and Company, 2009.
Bond, Ruskin. *The Golden Years*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2023.