

## CHAPTER TWO

### THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME

#### 2.1 “Home and Not Home”

Jon Stott and Christine Francis make an important statement in their article “‘Home’ and ‘Not Home’ in Children’s Stories: Getting There—and Being Worth It” that the notion of being at home and not being at home forms the core of all children’s stories. They thus categorize all children’s stories

in terms of the relationship of the main character to two places: “Home” and “Not Home.” “Home” to a child is not merely a dwelling place but also an attitude. For a real child or a fictional character, it is a place of comfort, security, and acceptance—a place which meets both physical and emotional needs. Conversely, “Not Home” is a place where needs are not met, for any of several reasons. (223)

They further elaborate on three plausible reasons for a place being categorized as “Not Home”. These include, firstly, the place being initially not an appropriate place for the child to reside, like a slum; secondly, the child’s own attitude towards his/her home making it inappropriate for dwelling; and thirdly, the attitudes of the other inhabitants of home towards the child which inhibits the child in his/her own home (223-224).

The protagonist begins his/her journey at “Not Home” due to various reasons and therefore there is the necessity to explore outside, to find home. The journey does not necessarily mean that the outside world will take over as home but rather it reflects the capability of the protagonist to reconstruct “Home” from the vestiges of “Not Home”. There has been an increasing trend in recent children’s fiction to negate home altogether as a safe place away from the vagaries of the outside world and look at it instead as an unsafe and insecure place to begin with. Melissa Wilson and Kathy Short say that:

In a postmodern metaplot the child leaves from a place the child doesn't (or can't) consider home to go on a journey, psychological or literal, to a new home that the child has constructed. The children don't return to the same home, if they return home at all. The child protagonist constructs a new home because of an absence of home at the beginning or because the home is untenable. The postmodern metaplot signals that childhood is not an idyllic time. . . .Children in these stories can't go home again because their home isn't where they want to dwell. . . .Children must set out to make sense of the past in order to construct a better home, a place of their own creation. (134)

Mavis Reimer, on the other hand, in “‘No Place like Home’: The Facts and Figures of Homelessness in Contemporary Texts for Young People”, says that “while children on the move have been at the heart of children’s literature for a long time, what is different about these recent narratives is that the central child characters do not move inside or settle at the conclusion of their narratives. For them, it appears, there *is* no place to call home” (original emphasis).

We would look at these perspectives from the context of Indian English children’s fiction to find whether there is indeed no place to call home or the home that is created is built on the remnants of a failed home where the child gives up its own position as a child. But it is important to interrogate and analyze the specific conditions involved. We need to ask how the necessity of leaving home arose and whether those conditions could be controlled by the child or not.

## **2.2 The Disruption of Home**

Judy Garland returns home as young Dorothy in MGM’s classic *The Wizard of Oz* exclaiming emphatically that “there’s no place like home” and this phrase has become the catchphrase of most children’s fiction depicting children moving away from home and eventually returning to it. The reasons may be varied for the child leaving home but the importance is placed on the child returning within the folds of home and to its

security. When a child leaves home out of necessity or some unavoidable circumstances, the primary motive remains in relocating and resurrecting home. But to whom does the child return—to an empty and desolate home or to one where the welcoming arms of family members are outstretched in love and longing? It is the family members who make up the concept of home and the initial disruption of home occurs in many cases because of the fissures in family relations. The concepts of home and family thereby are often synonymous in children's literature, where the idea of a safe sanctuary from the evils of the outside world exists at home and, by extension, in the family. The home serves as a miniature world for the members, especially the child, to recognize, conceptualize and prepare themselves for the world that exists outside the precincts of home. This haven of security and love exists while the family exists and then the disintegration of the family leads to the subsequent breakdown of the home. The ideal home is one where the family functions as a coherent structure with bonds of love, respect and care binding the individual members to each other. It forms a staple ingredient of children's fiction and there has been ample literature produced over the years depicting the family, home and its inhabitants.

Kimberley Reynolds in *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2011) says, in general, "the family in question begins as a complete, loving, nuclear family with two happy parents and a happy comfortable life. The story usually charts what happens when family life is disrupted by, for example, the absence or death of one or both parents, a financial crisis. . . ." (85). What happens when there is a disruption to the peaceful family existence and how does the home as a structural unit function then? One of the most typical responses in children's fiction to such a crisis is the children themselves embarking on a quest to undo the wrong and make everything good and happy as before. This formula also functions as a wish fulfillment on the part of the child who desires to regain what has been lost. The loss is signified not only in terms of the family members but also the family home, and most often, the phrase "coming back to home" serves as a cue to the fact that all is fine now and they will live happily ever after. The home is significant in this context as it is the one place, almost a signpost or milestone, from where disruption starts and ends.

Mavis Reimer in the introduction to *Home Words: Discourses of Children's Literature in Canada* (2008) makes an interesting observation that “theorists of children’s literature sometimes use ‘home’ to describe the full narrative closure of conventional texts for children, a sense analogous to its use in the language of games and computers” (xiii). Maria Nikolajeva in *From Mythic to Linear* (2000) also stresses this point by saying that “home in idyllic fiction is the foremost security. Home is where the protagonists belong and where they return after exploration of the outside world” (24-25). This idea reinforces the necessity of happy endings as it can only justify home as a sanctuary to return to. Ann Alston in *The Family in English Children's Literature* (2008) states:

Happy endings in children’s literature often consist of homecomings, and this is a disciplinary technique for it instils in children that home and the family it represents is the only place in which to find solace and that, ultimately, the successful character and family can be recognized by the return to a happy home (73).

Homes therefore function as the repositories of families and family values and returning to its folds embodies a tacit understanding on the part of the child of its importance and the urgent necessity of conserving it. Home is therefore not something which only conserves but is also in need of conservation. Anne Lundin in a review titled “*The Family in English Children's Literature, and: The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal*”, says that “the adult author often reveals a deep nostalgic need for the stability of home that becomes woven into a utopian domestic drama. Womb-like homes with their fantasy of return offer adult-oriented nostalgia and a circular pattern of reinforcement: Home, Away, Home” (247). Going by the clichés associated with home and family, one would wonder as to why a child would even dream of leaving them? Children do so either for the sake of fun and adventure like Max in *Where the Wild Things Are*, or in a dream sequence like *Alice in Wonderland*, only to return to the fact that home has always been there patiently waiting for them to come back to.

A more important and problematic necessity of leaving home arises from the urge to exercise one's own freedom and to explore that which lies beyond home. Maturation therefore is no longer possible within the confines of home and it problematizes the concept of home as a centering force in the life of the child. Most children's literature based on this theme look at the prospects of adventure outside home and its actualization as a character-forming experience for the child only to realize, more often than not, that while the external world symbolizes freedom and liberty from the confines and often suffocation of home, it also implies adult responsibilities which very often the child is unwilling to shoulder at the present moment. The return home thus transforms the adult-like child back into a child again, willing to resume its role as a child. This construction in literature in itself exposes the adult's intention of exercising power and control over the child by painting the outside world as a fearsome place where freedom is curbed through responsibilities. This pattern of a return to home is based on the notion that home will once again be the same as it was before it was left. The leaving of home in a quest for something and the coming back to it in full glory, into the folds of parental love and security provides the plot for many children's fiction. Lucy Waddey in "Home in Children's Fiction: Three Patterns" (1983) terms this pattern as the Odyssean pattern.<sup>1</sup>

The "Home, Away, Home" plot structure works best when children leave their home in quest of a place or thing which probably lures them away and they return home acknowledging the age old idiom that there is no place like home. Perry Nodelman in *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (2008) makes a detailed interpretation and analysis of six children's novels from an adult reader's perspective and identifies this pattern as a recurring one in children's fiction so much so that he feels that "the pattern can usefully operate as a cognitive tool"(223).<sup>2</sup> Laura Bates also reflects on the "separation, quest and homecoming" motif to end with the observation that "parting may indeed be a temporary 'sorrow' whose lasting legacy is truly 'sweet.'" (63).<sup>3</sup> But how do we look at children's literature where the glory of return does not exist for home is no longer the same place they left? The problems that compel the child to leave home might range from parental desertion and abandonment, financial squabbles, environmental disasters to physical ailments and other similar matters. The child does not have any control over these matters and

therefore, when it leaves home, the decision is not self-induced but arising out of specific circumstances. Under these conditions, will the child return home voluntarily? And since the question of what or whom will they return to comes up immediately once the thought of return comes to mind, will the return be to “home” or rather to the idea of home? These questions form the basis of the three texts taken up for consideration here, along with the fact that the concept of home and returning to it is an ephemeral joy not only for the child protagonists but also for the authors of these texts waiting for a home or trying to find a home in the ruins of past history and lineage. We look at three texts to contextualize the questions posited earlier and the attempt to construct or rather reconstruct a home from the vestiges of family life and to question the necessity of a return to home. These texts include Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Anita Desai’s *The Village by the Sea* and Ruskin Bond’s *Angry River*.

### **2.3 Reconciling Parents: Returning to a Mother in the Home**

Home and homeland form an integral part of Rushdie’s narrative. The search for home and a longing to be back where one belongs is spread across Rushdie’s large corpus of writings. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, though quintessentially considered to be children’s literature, yet reflects Rushdie’s preoccupation with home. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie presents the gendered idea of home where the presence and nurture of the mother makes it a home and her withdrawal from this role leads to its breakdown, too. Rashid is unable to gather the shreds of his life once Soraya has left him and it ultimately leads to the loss of his storytelling powers too. Ann Alston, while quoting John Ruskin, elucidates this fact by projecting the home to be centred on the figure of the mother (78).<sup>4</sup> In naming a portion of a chapter in her book as “Home is where the mother is”, Alston brings forth certain preconceived notions of what the role of the mother is. Haroun’s safe haven is his home and Rushdie outlines the happiness of Haroun in a sad city at the very beginning of the novel. The narrative depicts both of Haroun’s parents as very happy and their household is probably the only one brimming with happiness in the “saddest of cities”:

To his admirers he was Rashid the Ocean of Notions, as stuffed with cheery stories as the sea was full of glumfish . . . . To his wife Soraya, Rashid was for many years as loving a husband as anyone could wish for, and during these years Haroun grew up in a home in which, instead of misery and frowns, he had his father's ready laughter and his mother's sweet voice raised in a song. (15)

The happy and secured home of Haroun shows signs of cracks when Soraya stops singing for the first time. Rashid's inability to see beyond his profession and devote time to home is a premonition of the fact that his life is heading towards destruction. Thus, "Rashid was so often on stage that he lost track of what was going on in his own home. He sped around the city and the country telling stories, while Soraya stayed home, turning cloudy and even a little thunderous and brewing up quite a storm"(16). Rushdie thereby emphasizes at the very beginning the failure of the parents to conserve their home and family. Rashid, being irresponsible towards his duties as a husband and Soraya's subsequent desertion of her family, are indicative of the almost callous and lackadaisical nature of attachment towards family values. In the midst of this tussle between husband and wife, the worst sufferer remains Haroun, who is unable to comprehend the situation—neither his father's preoccupation with storytelling nor his mother's fascination with Mr. Sengupta.

In the country of Alifbay, families are usually large in size and Haroun often wonders about him being an only child. Haroun's questions to Rashid regarding this bring forth Rashid's way of interweaving stories into everything. He answers Haroun in a roundabout manner, talking about "quota of child-stuff" available to his parents, and thus the narrator comments that simple, straightforward answers were beyond Rashid's capacity. Soraya's answers are more sensible and simpler. For her, the child-making business is not an easy task and she asks Haroun to spare a thought for their neighbours, the Senguptas, who have no children at all. Rushdie's differentiation between the two families substantiates Philippe Ariès' argument in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* that the concept of family is intricately connected to that of childhood, and by implication therefore, the child.

Rashid's family is complete because it has a child in the form of Haroun and the Senguptas are incomplete as a family since they have no child. Going back to the idea of homes being constituted where there are mothers, Rashid and Haroun have a home of their own since they have a mother, Soraya, at home. Oneeta Sengupta, not being a mother, therefore cannot provide a home for Mr. Sengupta and thereby his elopement with Soraya can also be termed as his effort to constitute a home through the fecund Soraya. But Rushdie problematizes this concept through Haroun's questions to his parents regarding their inability to extend their family beyond him. Soraya's ability to become a mother thus remains questionable and therefore Mr. Sengupta's fanciful imagination of a "home" remains an imaginary one.

Through the description of the discrete nature of the two families, Rushdie equates a dysfunctional home with Haroun's home to emphasize its disintegration. Mr. Sengupta begins by questioning the very necessity of stories and gradually making Soraya feel that her husband is worthless as stories themselves are worthless. A family as a single unified whole functions and exists when all its components are bound together by the importance, necessity and worthiness of each other. When Soraya begins to question the importance of one of its most basic components, her husband, the breakdown of the family seems imminent. Soraya thus elopes with Mr. Sengupta, leaving a note for her husband which in a way encapsulates the whole problem of the text as follows: "You are only interested in pleasure, but a proper man would know that life is serious business. Your mind is full of make-believe, so there is no room for facts. Mr. Sengupta has no imagination at all. That is okay by me. . . . *Tell Haroun I love him, but I can't help it, I have to do this now*" (emphasis added) (22).

Rashid's agony at this separation is understandable, but what disturbs us is the impact of this separation on Haroun's psychological make-up. Rashid having broken all the clocks at the time of Soraya's departure, which is eleven a.m., causes Haroun to be caught in a web of eleven minutes time-span of concentration. Though Rushdie jests at it by making Oneeta Sengupta call it a "pussy-collar-jeeecal sadness", yet its grave consequences are understood by none better than Haroun himself, who realizes that



“the problem would never be solved unless and until Soraya returned to start the clocks up once again”(24).

Haroun is left, or rather abandoned, by his mother and his predicament increases when he realizes that his father is unable to do the one thing that he is best at; that is, to tell stories. Rashid has lost his story-telling powers and Haroun feels himself responsible for it as he feels that he has asked one question too many by hurling at his father the inevitable question, “What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?”(22). He realizes that even his father has abandoned his parental responsibilities and has withdrawn into a shell, unable to bear the stark reality. What he also realizes is that it is now up to him to undo the wrong, but how that is to be done he has got no idea. The process of the growth of Haroun thereby starts, which makes him turn gradually into a parent; of regaining his home and making it a worthwhile place for his parents. But surprisingly, there is no anger in Haroun against his mother for having deserted him and his father. He even resents his father for telling Snooty Buttoo, the politician, about their family problem. Haroun breaks into a silent rage at Buttoo for having called his mother as a fish. “‘Fish?’ Haroun thought in a rage. ‘Did he say fish?’ Was his mother a pomfret? Must she now be compared to glumfish or shark?”(43). It is as if Haroun has accepted his position calmly and the only thing that now needs to be done is to make things alright for the reunion of his parents. Mellisa Watson and Kathy Short, while terming such plots where children take up responsibilities of parents as the postmodern metaplot emphasize that in the postmodern metaplot both the parents and the children do not perform in the way traditional families are supposed to do so. While the parents fail to discharge their duties, the children too perceive parents as impediments rather than facilitating agencies in the construction of homes. At the same time, they also term abandonment of children by parents as a natural process, without the conventional fairy tales norms of punishment for bad deeds and reward for good deeds (135).

Significantly, Soraya’s desertion of her husband has nothing to do with Haroun and yet it is he who is the worst sufferer. The postmodern metaplot makes home a complex place as this establishment is negated at the very beginning through the failure of parents. Since the home does not exist, a return to it seems hardly possible

and the need to construct a new home arises. This construction makes it imperative for the child to don adult responsibilities of providing love and security to the parents, something the parents themselves have denied the child. In this complex world, children see their parents succumb to their follies and foibles, unable to withstand the pressures of adult parental life. Into such a world the child steps into adult shoes and, with no other option available, starts on a journey for the reclamation of home. The only problem with this journey is that there is neither hope nor promise that the end of the journey will bring to an end all speculations regarding home and that there will be a happy ending with the whole family walking into the sunset and living happily ever after.

Haroun, after he goes to the Valley of K, realizes despairingly that his father has lost all story-telling abilities. With his mother already absent from his life, he foresees his father also gradually slipping into oblivion. After seeing his father talking to himself in the houseboat and accepting defeat, Haroun by chance meets the water genie and learns about his father stopping his subscription to the story water supply. Haroun then takes the most important decision of his life which would change the future course of not only his life but more importantly that of his father's too. He accompanies the water genie to Gup City to stop the Walrus from cancelling his father's subscription to story water. Haroun's decision exemplifies what has been said earlier that the child embarks on a journey to save the adult and therefore his home. Haroun, suffering from a psychological disorder, in need of care and safety from any more potential harm, instead goes about saving his father and, as we know later on, saves the ocean of stories, Gup City and Princess Batcheat, the princess of Gup City, too. Interestingly, Haroun despite asking Rashid a lot of questions regarding his stories, never gets a straight answer and thus the whole concept of the Sea of Stories is kept secret from him and this secrecy in a way prompts Haroun to follow the water genie. Rashid's secrecy keeps a distinction between him and Haroun and re-establishes the main difference between the two worlds of adulthood and childhood. John Stahl terms secrecy on the part of the child as a means of growth through which the child discovers and learns new things (121). But adult secrecy is not only a means of shielding the child from harsh realities but also of hiding one's own dark secrets (Wilson and Short 140). In Rashid's case, though neither is the case yet Haroun not

being knowledgeable about the ocean of stories makes him seem foolish and at times vulnerable too. But Rushdie at the same time interrogates Haroun's scepticism regarding fantastic worlds.

It would be anachronistic to place Rushdie's novel in a simplistic plane of home-away-home existence and to look at Haroun's adventures mainly as an attempt to regain home. Rushdie interrogates the concept of home from a much more complex manner. Tony Watkins in "Cultural Studies, New Historicism and Children's Literature" (1992), makes an important comment on the idea of home in children's literature by relating narrativity with home and also correlating identity formation with the stories that are told to children. He says:

The stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience, constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable our children to make sense of the world. They contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social: narratives, we might say, shape the way children find a 'home' in the world. (183)

Narratives therefore become ways through which, not only do we understand this world, but also find our ways through the maze of reality and fantasy. Haroun's reluctance to accept the fantastic world has been reconstructed as a questioning of the reality of stories themselves. The question in Soraya's letter, Mr. Sengupta's accusation and Haroun's own fatalistic question to Rashid are all actually questions inflicted at the reality and necessity of a make-believe world. But why does Rushdie use a children's story to reflect on the importance of stories and, also, one which involves fantastic elements? The child's world is presumed to be an innocent world which very often accepts the "truth" of the world unquestionably and also adds the colours of imagination to the "truth". Alison Lurie in this context says, "Sometimes we need to have the truth exaggerated and made more dramatic, even fantastic, in order to comprehend it" (xi). The concept of truth is a slippery one and subscribing to one norm or fixed idea will always be problematic. Chris Snipp-Waimsley while commenting on postmodernism says:

The question of authority is, inevitably, a question of temporality. If truth is veiled, do we subscribe to mythic beliefs that offer us a vision before the moment of veiling? Do we accept emancipatory projects that hold out the hope of future unveiling? Or do we relinquish the prospect of the political, moral, and ethical strip-tease altogether for the privilege of remaining in the relative security of an omnipresent now? The true irony of this situation is that none of these authorities can be truly justified by any logical, rational means. We can no more stand at the end of history than we can revisit the origins of the universe, and to divorce ourselves from time, to exist solely in the present, is to live a life in which every experience is new, every truth a metaphysical illusion, and every minute a fleeting moment soon to be forgotten. Choosing between these three moments is always already an act of faith, an act that recognizes and establishes our limits of thought.

(421)

For Snipp-Waimsley then, Rushdie's novel termed as a "cautionary fable" is a middle way that can effectively negotiate amongst "the mythic then, the emancipatory soon, and the postmodern now". Within the context of the novel, the Chupwalas, the Guppees and Haroun represent these three aspects respectively. For the Guppees, the technology that runs Kahani is P2C2E (process too complicated to explain). They have an inherent belief in the power of science but make use of their imaginative power rather than their rational faculty to understand it. At the same time, they have the power of speech to endlessly argue and debate over a point to reach a consensus. There is forever dialogue going on and thereby forever day in their part of Kahani without the silence of night. The Chupwalas are also technologically advanced like the Guppees but for them it is a means of control rather than emancipation. Their cult of silence prohibits discussion and enforces one law which is to be accepted and followed by everyone. Night is therefore predominant in the Chupwalas' side of

Kahani signifying the constant silence. But there are dichotomies as well here in this neat division. When the whole army of the Guppees is engrossed in heated discussion it is only Prince Bolo who remains mute. The Mali, the Floating Gardener, rightfully ascribes his situation to love, a belief in the mythic god Romance. On the other hand, Mudra uses his movements to communicate with the Guppees, an assertion of his freedom of speech if only in signs. Haroun again is a prisoner of his own consciousness with a lot of suspicion for anything that does not fit into his neatly etched concept of “reality”. For Rushdie, the challenge is not only to portray a shift in perspective but also an intermixing of perspectives. He does that successfully, in the context of the novel, by making both the Guppees and the Chupwalas have their equal share of days and nights. But more importantly he makes Haroun realize that all the three modes of existence, our past, present and future, are temporal and what we conceive to be “real” is in fact shaped and changed continuously because of their very temporality (Snipp-Waimsley 421-424).

On a superficial level *Haroun* is no doubt a children’s story with a subtle mix of fantasy and reality and following the age-old tradition of a quest narrative. And it could be read at this level quite comfortably without engaging oneself with the latent rhetoric of the text by just enjoying the “story”. The child’s world is essentially an innocent one, especially one like that of Zafar to whom it was dedicated, who cannot understand what a fatwa is about or why certain stories need to be crushed and others to be put forward for reading. Haroun himself could not understand why Mr.Sengupta or his mother detested the wonderful stories his father told. And what is in a story that appeals so much to a child? A story is basically for a child nothing but a world to where s/he can transport her/himself at ease and even come out easily. It is a world that is both similar to and different than one’s own world and which opens up the possibility of many more such worlds to be made and remade every day. A child is not necessarily gullible when s/he accepts the “truth” of any story but in fact understands that many such make-believe worlds can exist even if only within the imagination. At the same time imagination is not mutually exclusive of reality as the Water Genie points out, “Africa, have you seen it? No? Then is it truly there? . . . Kangaroos, Mount Fujiyama, the North Pole? And the past did it happen? And the future, will it come? Believe in your own eyes and you’ll get into a lot of trouble, hot

water, a mess” (63). Rushdie might have understood at some point of time that it is not only the innocence of the child which is an answer to the hatred of the world but also more importantly it is the child’s imaginative power which can resist a tyrant’s version of the world by imagining several new worlds. Thus Kahttam-Shud’s anguish in *Haroun* is not unjustified when he says: “Your world, my world, all worlds . . . They are all there to be Ruled. And inside every single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all. . . .” (161).

Where does Rushdie place Haroun and his quest in these layered meanings of narrativity? And how does one reconcile the idea of home and narrative within the context of the novel? Home for Rushdie means a return to the freedom that he enjoyed before the fatwa. This can only happen when he goes back to his audience, his readers, and to his son Zafar. The epigraph at the beginning of the novel which ends with “Read, and bring me home” emphasizes this point. But for Haroun, home remains empty bereft of his mother. The walrus asked Haroun if he wants something in return for the great service he has done to Kahani. Haroun’s silence and his belief that what he wants could not be granted by the walrus reinforces his belief that his “home” could not be complete without his mother’s return and that could not be achieved by the walrus. When the walrus said that what he wants is a happy ending, Haroun replies that “the happy ending I’m thinking of isn’t something you can find in any Sea, even a Sea with Plentimaw Fishes in it” (201). This statement of Haroun shows that despite his adventure he is still sceptical of the ability of fantastic worlds to influence real ones. His home and the problem associated with it are very much situated in the real world and so its solution could not be found in the other realm. Jack Zipes on the other hand emphasizes that wonder tales rarely end unhappily and says, “The tale begins with ‘Once upon a time’ or ‘Once there was’ and never really ends when it ends. The ending is actually the beginning” (*Spells* xiii). Rushdie lays stress on just the opposite and the Walrus is in a way Rushdie’s spokesperson in this matter when he says that happy endings are very rare and are rather the exception than the rule.

Rushdie in a conversation with James Fenton titled “Keeping Up with Salman Rushdie.” says that “Actually it’s very hard to write a happy ending that feels

right...*actually*, it was lovely to write...sometimes in life things do turn out okay, and its wrong of writers to deny this fact” (original emphasis). Rushdie therefore contrives through the walrus to engineer a happy ending. Haroun being almost pestered by the Walrus to ask for something big asks the Walrus to make the people of his city happy and thereby bring a logical conclusion—a happy ending—to his story. The walrus while granting Haroun’s wish for a happy ending warns him that happy endings can “cheer things up for a while”(202) only to which Haroun replies, “That’ll do” (202). But Haroun does not believe that something of this sort could happen only to find on his return to the city that the people have remembered the name of the city which is coincidentally Kahani itself and are elated and happy at this. But there is hardly any happiness in Haroun for the happiness of the city means nothing to him compared to his own private grief. Haroun’s unhappiness is intensified when he sees others including his own father happy. The term “whole wide motherless world” (209) that is used to express his angst at everything in general poignantly captures the pain and suffering in the heart of Haroun. He is even happy for Miss Oneeta’s sake but he feels that there is hardly anything to celebrate in their life. He yearns for only one thing and that is the return of his mother which would complete his family and home. Interestingly, that is what happens when he returns home and finds his mother back to welcome them. Soraya’s return is unquestionably accepted by the Khalifas but Oneeta Sengupta has got rid of Mr. Sengupta. This somehow problematizes the concept of family and home as Oneeta Sengupta’s family seems to be even more disintegrated now while that of Haroun’s is complete. The mother’s return is in a way symbolic of the wayward nature and subsequent return to the folds of home that the questioners of the relevance of stories face in the narrative. Thus, Haroun’s adventure is that of Soraya too since she understands her husband’s necessity for telling stories. But the ones like Mr. Sengupta, who coincidentally bears a striking resemblance to Khattam-Shud, are no longer allowed any space within the narrative to either accept stories or reject them.

Rushdie’s narrative does not allow a Dickensian sort of change of heart for the poisoners of the repositories of stories, the “home” of stories, and willingly relegates them to the margins of the text. But at the same time, he allows the ending to be open ended, keeping space for further such adventures. Haroun while talking to the

miniaturized Hoopoe accepts that though there is no necessity of any adventures now it is good to know that it will be there if any need arises. This by itself facilitates the path for further adventures and the fact that it may be necessary for Haroun to go away from home only to come back again. Home therefore remains a transit point from where adventures begin and end and the metafictional aspect of the narrative makes the idea of a fixed home ephemeral in nature. Home remains in a state of fluidity and the notion of a home which is fixed in time and place, a home of the memory, is impossible to return to. Haroun's return home and that of his mother too is tinged by the adventure that made the return possible. The very fact that the adventure has happened will perhaps forever bring with it the memory of the necessity of the adventure and so Haroun's return home is to a home where though his mother is there to welcome him back yet there is always the possibility that like the return, departure can happen again.

#### **2.4 Returning Home to Adaptation and Change**

While Haroun's necessity to leave home is grounded in the reality of parental desertion, in *The Village by the Sea*, Hari's departure is based on the poverty of his home and the undue responsibility that has fallen on his young shoulders. Home finds itself reflected in the novel in a dual way. The first home refers to the one that Hari and Lila are trying their mighty best to save. The second home refers to Thul, their homeland, and the efforts by various parties to save it from the onslaught of industrialization. Both these homes are dependent on each other with respect to the two main protagonists of the novel. While struggling to sustain the fragile nature of his home against the poverty that gnaws its inside, Hari is also conscious of the winds of change that are blowing in Thul and threatening its very existence. The children are forced to take up the reins of the household with both their parents dysfunctional in performing their duties towards their family. Parental abandonment therefore takes place not through direct abandonment of the children but through the parents' inefficiency in their job of parenting. Hence, poverty acts as a detrimental factor to the construction of family and home. While stressing on the negative aspects of poverty and home, Elizabeth Segal and Michael Niles say that poverty affects the ability of parents to successfully perform their parental duties. Along with it, poverty also



affects parental interactions with their children and is characterized by “lower overall ratings and parental sensitivity and by more hostile, intrusive and erratic responses” (102). Also, poverty affects parenting quality with higher instances of substance abuse and drunkenness. These factors act as the prime reason for the disintegration of family and by implication the home in the novel. Thul is representative of many villages across India where poverty rents apart homes and families, and the members struggle to keep up the semblance of home. In Hari and Lila’s case, home is characterized by an ailing mother, a drunken father and the constant feeling that there is not enough to feed everyone.

In a fishing village like Thul where the majority of population depends upon a boat for their livelihood, Hari’s father has to sell his own to pay off his debts. Drunken and oblivious to the world, the father symbolizes the absent father frequently portrayed in Victorian children’s literature. Hari’s angst and frustration against his father is justified as he is neglected not only physically but also psychologically. In *Connecting Children: Care and Family Life in Later Childhood* (2000), Julia Brannen, Ellen Heptinstall, and Kalwant Bhopal, in an interview with a large group of children, asked them about parental responsibility. The answers they received mainly emphasized the division of roles between the mother and the father.<sup>5</sup> The children visualized the mother as a provider of “a sense of ontological security signified in the language of ‘being there for them’, together with a range of support of an expressive kind—someone to turn to, someone who understands, someone who cheers you up” (98). At the same time, the boys looked upon the fathers as someone who is “there to help their children manage in the public world outside the family” (99). Importance is also laid by children on “gender matching by which boys turned to fathers for support and girls to their mothers” (99). Lila and Hari’s parents are found lacking in both the roles described above. Hari finds himself inadequate in the world outside his home where affluence is measured by the number of boats owned. His father neither owns a boat nor does he try to earn for his family. The bread-winning responsibility of the father is taken up by Hari and he is deprived of the education that he should have rightfully received. Instead he is compelled to think up new ways to earn the two meals a day for his family.

Lila, on the other hand, willingly takes up the responsibility of the household tasks. She has to look after her ailing mother and also her two younger sisters Bela and Kamal. She too has to forego her education in the interest of her home and family and also because of economic constraints. The mother, though portrayed to be ill and bedridden, runs the household by proxy through Lila. She is concerned about the family matters and takes an account of the duties performed and to be performed. A typical discussion between mother and daughter at the very beginning of the novel portrays this succinctly:

‘Lila, have the girls gone to school?’

‘Yes.’

‘And Hari to the fields?’

‘Yes, Hari to the fields.’

‘Then you must sweep and go to the market and cook, Lila.’ (8)

This discussion proves that the mother has neatly divided the role of the parents between her two elder children. There is hardly any mention of the father in this discussion and it is thereby presumed that the father has shed his responsibilities as a parent. Interestingly, just before this discussion takes place, the narrator introduces the father into the novel and the description captures Lila’s disgust and apathy towards her father as: “She kept her head turned away from the heap that lay on a mat in a corner of the dark, shadowy room. The heap did not stir but made a grumbling sound of obstructed breathing and also stank” (7).

Both Hari and Lila are plagued by the same problems albeit in different ways. While Lila is worried about her household in general, Hari’s anger is directed more against his father for not doing anything. Both of them try to maximize the small resources they have and somehow make the family move on in its daily existence. And yet they know that it will not be sufficient in the long run. Their ailing mother could not be properly treated because of this lack of money, the sisters could hardly be sent to school next year because of the expenses of education and above all Hari is worried about his sisters’ future marriage and dowry too. Lila’s anguish and frustration is evident when she keeps on prodding Hari about what more can they do and it is this

questioning that makes Hari suddenly say that he might find work in Bombay. Hari's decision relieves Lila for a while but she knows that any significant change in their household is a long way off. She has to keep believing and probably something would turn out for the better. Hari, on the other hand, is filled with doubt at his own decision. This decision to move beyond the boundaries of home for greener pastures finds reflection in many poverty stricken areas all over the world. Hari's problem is similar to what Harriot Beazley refers to in her survey of young boys who are not properly educated for any particular job or have not completed their education at all. She, in a survey of Malayasian boys, finds that the boys are aware of their limitations when they remain confined to their native places. Going overseas not only presented lucrative opportunities of a better future and escape from the quagmire of poverty but also a change in their powerless position within their own community. The sense of freedom that pervades their mentality regarding work somewhere outside their own precincts makes them realize the grim chances of succeeding within the locally available resources (116).

Hari suffers from the same restlessness and wants change. His encounter with Ramu and the caretaker of the factory that is about to come up in Thul makes him realize the opportunities that his home itself is opening up for him. But Hari is also worried about the heavy impact it will have on the village, the surroundings and the hill. Despite not knowing much about environmental studies or such other thing, his upbringing in the vicinity of the sea has made him realize the importance of nature in his daily life. It is what he subsists on. But his penury compels him to think about getting a job even at the cost of environment. He becomes besotted with the idea of finding work despite knowing fully well that his limited education will not allow him to get a proper job. Even then he harbours hope that the factory will need men to run the machines and if he could teach his hands to do other things, he could teach them to run machines too. The dilemma is between choosing to oppose the factory because of environmental concerns or to find work. The choice between his own home which needs to be supported at any cost and his homeland, Thul, which will face extinction from its traditional ways if the factory comes up is one which Hari finds difficult to make. The difficulty of choosing between either homes makes Hari want to inhabit an alternate space. Hari's frustration and feeling of being squeezed out in a place where he does

not belong is described thus: “Everything blended here, everything blended together—except for himself . . . . he couldn’t settle down to belonging”(59 - 60).

Biju, the smuggler of the village, has a conversation with the caretaker and Hari too listens to this conversation. Biju is indignant that the government has decided to set up factories in fertile areas like Thul and thus destroy arable lands. But the caretaker is indifferent to Biju’s concerns and also makes it known that there would not be jobs for locals as Hari and Ramu and others like him are hoping for. There will be engineers and other skilled men brought from various parts of the country to set up the factory and make it running. This further confuses Hari and Ramu but at the same time it in a way prods Hari to find his alternate space as soon as possible. This space turns out to be Bombay, the land of dreams and hopes, where he seeks a future which would put an end to all his miseries. But he has got no means to go there having never ventured beyond his village and the only people he knows in Bombay are the De Silvas who come to their house “Mon Repos” in Thul during the holidays. The protest movement against the government becomes the only way in which he could reach Bombay. His support is thus stemmed by the fact that it would give him a chance to go to Bombay. He has got neither land nor boat to fight for and so the only thing that fascinates him is Bombay. What would happen beyond that he does not have any idea but a vague picture of getting work at any cost. Hari thus leaves home without informing anybody and moves out of the squalor of poverty, disease, drunkenness, responsibilities and hunger that symbolizes his home. He has also parted ways with his homeland that is Thul and instead of coming back with the protestors he stayed back to find his way out in Bombay.

But life is not going to be so easygoing in a city like Bombay where thousands struggle to find their footing. Very soon Hari finds himself yearning for the familiarity of home amidst the busy streets of Bombay. His hope of meeting the De Silvas is also extinguished when after much hard work he reaches their apartment only to learn that they have moved to Thul that very morning. The unexpected kindness of the watchman of the apartment lands him with Jagu, the owner of Shri Krishna Eating House. He eventually finds himself a job in the eatery itself and this also serves as his dwelling in Bombay. Hari also strikes up an acquaintance with Mr. Panwallah, the

proprietor of Ding Dong Watch Works, which helps him in passing off the little time that he gets besides his heavy workload. At one time, unable to sleep on the hard benches in the eatery, he moves to a nearby park to pass the nights. Hari therefore moves through various dwellings but there is hardly any “home” for him in Bombay. The city therefore serves as the middle passage from which he hopes of a return to home. In his letter to his mother Hari writes that he would bring her his earnings thereby obliquely referring to his intentions of going back to the folds of her love. The same home from which he was so anxious to run away now seems to be his destination. But the text actually refers to the opposite—the fact that he should be earning meant that he should stay put in Bombay and not go home. Life in Bombay throws up snippets of images which reminds him of his family and the home that he left behind. The nostalgia that Hari feels for his home is surprising too since the home that he has left behind hardly offered him with any pleasant memory to fall back upon. Roberta Rubenstein feels that this nostalgia for a return to home can never take place in the exact terms since the home that is left behind exists only in memory and not in actuality(4).<sup>6</sup>

The narrative also juxtaposes the realities of the other members of the eatery to foreground the concept of home for them. Jagu singing in an unknown dialect makes Hari realize that like him Jagu too has probably got a village somewhere which he called home, the memory of which makes him happy. On the other hand, there is no other home or probably if there is a home no memory of it exists other than that of the eatery for the two boys working there. The cruel intervention of fate has deprived the boys of their parents and it is Jagu’s kindness which gives them a roof over their heads. There is an interweaving of different definitions of home for the different characters of the novel. For Hari, home is very much there, at least a physical structure exists, and there is hope too of return to it. For Jagu, home is somewhere there in limbo probably never to be reclaimed except in memory and for the two nameless boys, home is nowhere but here which again is ephemeral in nature. The exposition of different notions of home actually makes the reader aware of the significance of what has been left behind and what is there.

Mr. Panwallah's unexpected intention to teach Hari watch-mending opens up new avenues of thoughts for him. But life should come full circle before it allows Hari some respite from his labour. The adversities of city life come to the fore during the monsoon and Hari realizes this to full extent. The sudden spurt of customers due to the onset of monsoon and the fact that he could not sleep outside in the park because of the rains make Hari feel like a prisoner for the first time inside. The narrative thus reflects on the gradual deterioration of the idea of home for Hari—from the open spaces of Thul to the confines of the eating house, back again to the openness of the park and then to the jail-like cloistered existence inside the eatery. Devoid of Mr. Panwallah's friendship too because of his illness, Hari feels more and more like a prisoner. He himself is ill and so Jagu gives him an invitation to his own home. Though this proves a disaster, the invitation actuality highlights the commonality of poverty everywhere, be it the village or the city, and the effect of toddy in the breaking of homes. Jagu's home is a ramshackle one and Hari realizes that the problems faced by Jagu's wife are so similar to his own problems and as such there is not much that Jagu could do for him. The problem of existence in poverty is so similar for all who face it and there is hardly any way out of it. "Home" for such a race will always exist in these makeshift tin cans like houses which will probably never live up to the expectations of a home.

In a twist of fate, it is the monsoon itself which makes Hari feel the oneness with his homeland which he probably has never felt as much before. When the Sikh driver says that search parties are being sent to Alibagh to search for the lost fishing boats, Hari cries out, "Alibagh! . . . That's my home! That's my land!"(196). Hari's association with his homeland comes to the fore during desperate times and this proves that even uprooting and dislocations from our homes cannot erase the bindings of the heart. Though his father did not have a boat and so there is no fear of him being in the lost boats, yet the fact that it might be one of his neighbours, someone he knows, makes him worry about their safety. Hari revisits Thul in his mind's eye and realizes the intensity of his connection with the place and the understanding that despite having no land or boat, the place is his own, it's his home, the ties of which are yet not severed. Mr. Panwallah assures him of his return, "You'll go back one day, boy, don't you worry . . . You've not come so far away—you can go back" (205). This

assurance underlines the bond that is yet to be broken between his home and himself; he has not moved too far away that the passage of return becomes impossible or the bridges that connect him are burnt thereby making it impossible to return. Hari's letter to his mother is in fact the first attempt at maintaining ties and the physical ties are strengthened through the emotional bindings. At the same time, Mr. Panwallah instills in him the knowledge about the transient nature of everything in this earth. All life forms are in a perpetual state of change and this change itself is life. People need to adapt themselves to the changing landscapes and only then can they survive. With the imminent change that will come to Thul, he asks Hari to mould himself according to the necessity of the situation. Youth is on his side and youth helps in assimilation with anything new. Home and homeland will keep on changing but the important element of life is to reconstruct according to the changes.

Hari ultimately returns home on Diwali and as he approaches he could already see the signs of change. The only unalterable landscape is probably Thul itself and he sits under a casurina tree to feel the static rootedness of his place. He wants to see if it is exactly as he remembers it to be and for once his memory has not deceived him. But the first thing he thinks when he sees his house, its dismal appearance still intact, is to change it. Thus, we can see that Hari has integrated into himself the ideas of change and the first place to begin it is his home itself. Home remains static, at least the physical nature of it, and this sameness is what he wants to change. Home will not be the same again. At the same time, Hari, when he meets with his sisters, is trying to remember what he has left behind. Hari's one small utterance, "I forgot too much", encompasses within itself the migrant's pain and inability to connect on return.

How do we contextualize Lila's experiences in this attempt to save and nourish their home within the narrative of Hari? The narratorial technique keeps the gender divisions intact by making the brother go away and the sister stay back. Lila, who has to see to the household affairs, who has to tend her ailing mother, who has to fend off irritated and angry neighbours in search of her father, has only Hari to fall back upon. Hari is her support, someone to whom she can confide her fears regarding their poverty stricken home. But that support too is taken away from her and she is left to face the situation at home all alone. Hari, in leaving home, has virtually turned his

back to the actual problems in search of a hopeful future which can change his present. But Lila stays back not only because she has to but also because, unlike Hari, she has nowhere to go. When she at last hears about Hari having left with the man for Bombay, she is unable to believe her ears. She herself would have never run away and now she realizes that the care of her family is in her hands and she has to do just that. Lila's taking over the reins of home from her mother is common in literature spread across the globe where the eldest daughter steps into the shoes of the absent or sick mother. This relegation of Lila into the same domestic sphere outside which there is hardly any space left for her to negotiate is something which feminist critics have often referred to in their discussion of homes. Home therefore remains a site of oppression, violence and emotional upheavals for women and the idea of home as a sanctuary exists only for the men who "come home to" from work and the public sphere. At the same time, the domestic labour that she engages herself in is never given proper recognition and it is not considered to be work proper as it is not wage labour and it remains confined to the domestic realms (Blunt and Dowling 16). Significantly, the allocation of roles is also subverted after Hari leaves home when Lila becomes the man of the house and manages to get help for her family. On the other hand, Hari becomes the one who is domesticated through his work in the kitchen in the eatery. This reversal of roles also serves to justify the choice of those who stay back at home only to reinvent it in a newer context. For Lila, after Hari departs, home remains to be reconstructed differently from what it is and for this she takes the work of the domestic sphere outside, to "Mon Repos", so that she can subsist her own home.

Hari goes to meet the De Silvas and fails to do so and thus his hopes are dashed, but their arrival at Thul brings relief for Lila unexpectedly. She immediately takes up the cleaning and other matters of the house and forms a plan too of seeking help from them for her mother. She uses the first opportunity when Mr. De Silva decides to go to Alibagh to ask him to take her mother to a hospital there. Lila's act can be interpreted as a first step towards reconstruction where the foremost importance is given to the mother. As Alston says "Home is where the mother is", Lila's initiative is in the right direction. Surprisingly, as things begin to move in the right direction with the mother admitted in a hospital and taken care of, the father makes a dramatic



change in his activities. Knowing that his wife is in Alibagh, he suddenly decides to visit her and not leave her alone. For long, the mother has been neglected and ill-treated but her absence creates a void which probably could be fulfilled only by being near her. Though this action seems improbable to justify logically, yet it in a way keeps up with the happy ending associated with children's literature. Along with it, fortune has also secured for Lila a means of income for the coming monsoon months. A friend of the De Silvas, Sayyid Ali, is coming to stay there for the monsoon and she and her sisters will work there and earn some money. The same monsoon which troubles Hari so much now acts as a boon for Lila. It is as if the narrative is trying to position the binaries between the brother and sister pair to highlight the differences in their fortunes. Though Lila's longing for Hari is not diminished by her newly found financial security and despite her ability to handle things and take them in the right direction yet her yearning for family remains. Mr. Sayyid Ali's stay there has made Lila and her sisters earn enough money to stock up their home with the necessary commodities for the first time in years. Home feels like home because there is enough now to feed them. The plenitude of the material things, especially an essential commodity like food, emphasizes the material culture in homes and how it appropriates the idea of the outside world within the home and vice versa (Miller 1).<sup>7</sup>

Hari, when he meets Mr. Sayyid Ali, comes to know that the protestors have lost the case to the government and Thul is eventually going to be industrialized. His interest in birds amazes Hari and the concentration he is giving to the homemaking process of the baya birds. Though he has never paid attention to them before, Hari suddenly realizes how the birds build their nests with care and pain to protect their young ones. One of the last images of home in the novel is therefore of protection and security. At the same time, Mr. Sayyid Ali too inculcates in him the confidence that adaptation is the only way of life and the change that is going to sweep Thul in recent future will bring in a lot of changes. The only way out is to adapt.

## **2.5 Returning Home to Reconstruct**

The adaptation to changing environments forms the basis of many of Ruskin Bond's works. The socio-political scenario after Indian independence left no other option for those Anglo-Indians who stayed back but to adapt and merge themselves into the

Indian cultural landscape. *Angry River* can therefore be seen as a metaphor of Bond's own existence and search for rootedness in India. Like the protagonist Sita, Bond himself has lost both his parents—to divorce, death and estrangement. Partly brought up by his grandmother, Bond's search for an identity in a post-independence India forms the basis of many of his works. Being part of the Anglo-Indian community, the problem of Bond and many others like him is what Lionel Caplan termed as the "paradoxes of belonging".<sup>8</sup> The Anglo-Indian community was born out of a long process of intermixing between the Indians and Portuguese, Dutch, British traders. In the early days of foreign rule, particularly British, intermarriage was encouraged to increase the population but after the firm establishment of British rule in India, this practice was discouraged due to the fear that the British population might get outnumbered by Anglo Indians. The fortunes of the community kept changing over a period of time—sometimes favoured by the British and sometimes discarded. Neither completely British nor Indian, they formed an in-between race which neither community wanted to embrace. The British looked down upon them as half-caste and the Indians considered them to be an ally of the British. The dilemma became more intense once India gained independence. Those who can afford their passage to far-off shores left India for England, Canada, New Zealand and such countries. But for many, the expenses were too high and the thought of uprooting themselves from a country they were born and bred in was a painful one. Surprisingly, the Indian constitution provided them with unimagined security and thereby integrating them into mainstream India. The forming of the constitution in 1949 saw the community as the only one amongst the minority groups to fight and secure special provisions not only in education, appointments to certain services but also representatives in the both state and national assemblies. Despite this, there has been a huge exodus of the community members to other countries which greatly diminished the population in India. The uneasiness and fear of belongingness after the independence and the availability of friends and relatives overseas made the passage to other nations a relatively easy process (Gist and Wright 20). But for those who stayed back, home remained a contested space of being uprooted despite there being no dislocation. Ashcroft et al in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* in their definition of dislocation refer to Heidegger's term *unheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit* which literally means 'unhousedness'

or ‘not-at-home-ness’(65). This term probably in a way captures the sense of home for those Anglo-Indians who remained at India. J.R. Minto in “Anglo-Indians: The Dilemma of Identity” makes an apt remark describing them as people who “lived in an unrealistic world and many of them escaped into a Walter Mitty-like ‘white world’ called England, where they imagined everything was plentiful and everyone was kind. It was ‘home’ in a sense which India could never be” (qtd. in Sheila Pais James).

The idea of home and rootedness to it therefore pervades the Anglo-Indian sensibility and Bond’s early works are very much located within this cultural dilemma. Bond’s father tried to buy the passage to England after India’s independence but his death foreclosed that option for the family. For many Anglo-Indians, this inability to go “home” to England made them feel stranded in an alien nation. Sara Ahmed et al complicate this question of going away and staying back by blurring the distinction between here and there. “Where or what is ‘there’? Is it necessarily *not* ‘here’? How long is ‘there’ a significant site of connection? And for whom? How far away is ‘there’?”(original emphasis) (4). These questions form an integral part of Bond’s questioning of self and the longing for rootedness in an India where he remains an anachronism. But at the same time, it would be wrong to assume that Bond was searching for his English roots or desperate to go back where his ancestors belonged. According to Catherine Nash, the association to a place because it is connected to one’s ancestors or relatives is nothing extraordinary or remarkable. But it depends on how we conceive “kinship and particular ways of framing the relationship between identity, culture and geography” (179). Bond’s anxiety is therefore more about his claim to Indian identity than to a reconstruction of his English lineage. Though he tried out a brief stint of time at Jersey, his homesickness was too intense for him to remain there long. As he mentions in his autobiography, *Scenes from a Writer’s Life* (1997):

even though my forefathers were British, Britain was not really my place. I did not belong to the bright lights of Piccadilly and Leicester Square; or, for that matter, to the apple orchards of Kent or the strawberry fields of Berkshire. I belonged, very firmly, to peepal trees and mango groves; to sleepy little towns all over India; to hot sunshine, muddy canals, the pungent smell of marigolds;

the hills of home; spicy odours, wet earth after summer rain, neem pods bursting; laughing brown faces; and the intimacy of human contact. (154 -155)

It would be apt here to quote from the often quoted treatise on Anglo-Indians, *Hostages to India* by Herbert Stark, regarding the choice of home by people like Bond. He says: “If England is the land of our fathers, India is the land of our mothers. If to us England is a hallowed memory, India is a living verity. If England is the land of our pilgrimage India is the land of our homes” (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay 24). The concern now is not of distinguishing between the two homes but rather of integrating and immersing oneself into the Indian culture. This is a conscious and deliberate effort on Bond’s part, of assimilating himself into the Indian cultural milieu and scenario and his writings reflect his efforts to emphasize his rootedness to the place. As Meena Khorana comments with reference to *Angry River* regarding this process of assimilation, that woven into “the linear narrative are episodes and ‘invisible cultural codes’” (“River”258) which reflect Bond’s interweaving of the Indian milieu into the narrative. This sustained writing involves a generous reference to Indian myths and legends without much of a questioning of their validity. This aspect of Bond’s writing leads to his reverence for the importance of trees in many of his works. Trees form an essential part of Indian mythology and are worshipped as godheads. The tulsi, neem, mango, peepal and deodar are all trees revered not only for their intrinsic values but also because they are a part of nature, which again is worshipped in India. The peepal tree assumes significance in the context of *Angry River* because the tree is quintessentially considered to be the abode of Lord Vishnu—the preserver. Vishnu preserves and thereby the tree is symbolic of preservation—in this context, of family, home and rootedness. Debashis Bandyopadhyay sees the significance of trees in Bond’s works as symbolic of being tied to a place and its memories. He feels “that the authorial intention is to combine ancestry with location in search for a sense of belonging” (23). The peepal tree in the novel is said to be “older than the grandfather, it symbolizes an emotional chain that binds many generations together” (Aggarwal 81). The grandmother attributing the shape of the leaves to that of Krishna’s bodily shape makes the tree repository of the myths of Indian culture. The abode of Vishnu emerges as the protector too when the need for security from the flood arose. But Bond’s narrative does not allow the tree to be the only symbol of belongingness.

Though the tree supports Sita and stays rooted for sometime yet the deluge is so large that it too is uprooted and takes away Sita with it. But Bond brings in another legend from Indian mythology to show the continuity. As Krishna says in the Geeta that amongst trees he could be found in the peepal, the uprooting of the tree makes Krishna himself emerge in the form of Krishnan to provide support and security. The idea is further enhanced by the fact that Vishnu is the preserver and Krishna is considered to be one of the reincarnations of Vishnu. On a metaphorical level, the island and Sita are analogous to India and the Anglo-Indian community respectively and the tussle between creator and creation is much exemplified here.

Sita has lived peacefully and happily in the island with her grandparents and though life has not always been easy yet it is filled with love for her. Her grandfather is proud of her and he feels that she can do everything that a grandson would have done and sometimes she does them better. Devoid of a mother at a very young age, Sita has found maternal love and care in the bosom of her grandmother. She is taught everything that a girl ought to know by her grandmother and though she does not know how to read and write yet the island provides her with all the knowledge and there is much to do on the island. Sita's grandmother's illness makes it imperative for her grandfather to leave her alone and take her grandmother to a hospital at Shahganj. Her grandfather acknowledges that she might be left alone but Sita understands his concern and the fact that she has been alone before makes it easier for her bear her loneliness. She is not afraid of being alone, "but she did not like the look of the river" (68). She needs a reassurance for her fears and so she keeps on asking him various questions:

"Grandfather, if the river rises what shall I do?"

"You will keep to the high ground."

"And if the water reaches the high ground?"

"Then take the hens into the hut, and stay there."

"And if the water comes into the hut?"

"Then climb into the peepul tree. It is a strong tree. It will not fall. And the water cannot rise higher than the tree!" (68)

Though Sita's fears are momentarily assuaged by her grandfather, yet that night the incessant rain does not allow her to sleep. Sita's companion that night is her doll Mumta, which seems to understand her and feel for her too. Mumta is a part of Sita's life, her friend and sharer of secrets and thereby almost family for her. For Sita, her grandfather's decision to leave her alone has a note of foreboding for her. She is constantly assaulted by the thought of the rising river and an impending doom. Her feeling of loneliness is enhanced by the narrator's description of the parting glance of the boat that carried her grandparents away from her, "It bobbed about on the water, getting smaller and smaller until it was just a speck on the broad river. And suddenly Sita was alone" (72).

Interestingly enough, in Sita's discussion with her rag doll, Mumta the question of eternal abandonment comes to the fore. Sita is worried that the gods are angry with her and the reason she puts forward is loaded with metaphysical anguish at the smallness and insignificant status of man in this world. When Mumta asks her as to why the gods should be angry with her, Sita replies: "They don't have a reason for being angry. They are angry with everything, and we are in the middle of everything. We are so small—do you think they know we are here?" (74). In her conversation with Mumta, Sita also emphasizes the fact that being the creator of Mumta, unlike the gods and probably unlike her grandparents, she will not desert her in the eventuality of the river rising and flooding the island. But this very aspect of the creator, be it the gods or be it parents, of not abandoning one's creation or child is poignantly negated when Sita, perched on the top of the peepal tree, sees a plastic doll floating by and it reminds her of Mumta. When the need arises to save her own life, Sita abandons her creation Mumta, and thereby breaks the promise of providing safety and company when the river rises high. Sita's reflection makes her own self insignificant in front of the gods. "Well, thought Sita, if I can be careless with someone I've made, how can I expect the gods to notice me, alone in the middle of the river?"(79).

Like Sita, the creators of the Anglo-Indian community—that is the British—have abandoned them when the need arose to choose between their own kind and others. Bond uses the analogy of the island to not only reflect on the secluded nature of the community but also uses Sita as an autobiographical reference to comment on the

necessity to integrate oneself into one's roots. If we go back to the idea of association with India's culture, then we find that the narrative interweaves within itself subtle assimilation and acculturation to show the submerging of the community into the idea of India. Sita's longing for home, the island, is negated very deftly once she leaves it and she is portrayed as being engrossed in the here and now—eating of the mango—and the thoughts of home are set aside. The narrator muses, reflecting Sita's thoughts: "It was no use wishing she was at home—home wouldn't be there any more—but she wished, at that moment, that she had another mango" (85). While Sita engages herself in the journey with Krishnan, she visualizes and dreams of him as the blue god in a flight with him in the Himalayas. Her sojourn with the boy ends soon and, as they reach safer grounds, the longing for home returns along with the gnawing fear that probably home will no longer be there. But before she searches for home, the search now is for family—her grandfather and grandmother. When she at last meets her grandfather she instinctively realizes that her grandmother is no more and Sita assumes the role of the parent for her child—her grandfather. The narrative covertly reflects on her parenting ability as she guides her grandfather through the busy market-town of Shahganj: "She forced back her tears, and took his gnarled and trembling hand, and led him down the crowded street. And she knew then, that it would be on her shoulder that Grandfather would have to lean in the years to come" (90).

When Sita and her grandfather ultimately return home to the island, it is no longer the same place. Home has changed its identity and, like Bond who reclaims India after coming back from Jersey, Sita too tries to reclaim and reconstruct it from scratch. This process termed as "homing" by Sara Ahmed et al demands the necessity of building up home again (9). They use Eva Hoffman's term "soils of significance" to define the manner of (re)creating a home from the qualities that define home and the memories associated with it along with the "concrete materialities of rooms, objects, rituals, borders and forms of transport that are bound up in so many processes of uprooting and regrounding . . . reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted—in migration, displacement or colonization" (Ahmed et al 9). As reiterated here, associated with the idea of home is the memory of habits and objects and their reclaiming, in a sense, marks a step forward in the

reclamation of home. In the case of Sita, the everyday mundane activities like her grandfather bringing a Mahseer fish for her to cook marks her association and reclamation of home. Along with it, familiar objects, once part and parcel of home, revive the idea of home. Sita, in a desperate attempt to save a few objects during the flood, succeeds in packing a few items into a trunk. Though most of the food and clothing are spoilt in the water, the one thing that survives is her grandfather's hookah. This hookah serves as a connection between the world that was and the present that is. Grandfather, sitting and smoking the hookah in the evenings with an old air of contentment and telling Sita stories of other times, recaptures the lost time and place. Edmund Sherman and Joan Dacher look at this cherishing of objects as an essential part of later life. Home is a repository of the cherished objects and it symbolizes a connection between both home and objects. For Sita and her grandfather, when nothing else survived to remind them of home, the hookah is significant in the sense that it is a reminder of the home that existed. But at the same time, the most cherished object of all is perhaps home itself and so Sita unable to secure it from the ravages of the flood, tries to reconstruct it. One of her first attempts at reconstruction and continuation of life, family, lineage and most importantly home is the planting of "a mango-seed in the same spot where the peepal tree had stood" (91). The mango tree is not only symbolic of the continuation of life but also reminiscent of the time she had spent with Krishnan. This act of Sita shows that she is not trying to obliterate that painful memory of the flood but is instead trying to reintegrate it with her earlier memories of home and belonging.

Life returns to normal gradually and Sita accidentally finds a wooden toy, a coloured peacock, in the sand. She tries to incorporate this peacock into the role of Mumta and therefore re-establish the earlier relationship that she had with her other toy. The act here is of not being a creator again and abandoning it but of associating with a past memory to reconstruct and resume an abandoned relationship. This process is further exemplified through her attempt to play the flute and Krishnan coming back to meet her. The conversation between Sita and Krishnan regarding the nature of the river highlights the metaphysical nature of home and life. The river, sometimes "angry" engulfs all life within itself, and, sometimes calm actually sustains the plenitude of life. With each such turn of the river, home and life are either destroyed or sustained.



The necessity is to come back to home each time and the process of reclamation will always be a part of human existence.

## **2.6 Can Home be Reclaimed?**

All the three children, Haroun, Hari, and Sita, return home with the hope and expectation that the homes to which they have come back will secure for them future happiness and security. But this initiative also brings forth a plethora of associated questions. Have the specific circumstances out of which the necessity to leave home been sufficiently resolved through their agency? More importantly, have the adults, because of whom the children have to leave home, been chastised enough to realize the precarious nature of the situation that they have pushed their children into? And, have the children put their childhood behind them and gained early adulthood through their actions of securing their homes? Any definite answers to these questions cannot be achieved, primarily because the answers lie within situations which are particular to each child and are not general in nature, and so cannot be applied homogenously to all children. At the same time, certain answers which are construed within the text may not be achieved in real life situations and therefore they reflect on the unreality of narratives too.

Haroun returns home to find his mother already back with an understanding of Rashid's abilities and it brings a closure to the narrative. But questions can arise on situations which are posited outside the text. Does Soraya's return justify her going and can Haroun reconcile himself to this question? Haroun's return to his home has been possible through the initiatives of many, including the walrus who grants him a temporary happy ending and therefore this ending contains within itself the possibilities of a future where things may not be the same. At the same time, Haroun returns with a sound knowledge of his father's secret world and this knowledge in a sense erodes the innocence and wonder that he has earlier regarding his father's storytelling abilities. The Valley of K and the subsequent Kahani to which Haroun travels are certainly not a child's world and therefore Haroun's perceptions of the adult world are laced with his experiences in this world which include war, political rivalry, disagreements, tyranny, disbelief. The temporary nature of his happy ending makes him realize that the boundaries of home that all three of his family members

have transgressed will perhaps be repeated again and again. Haroun returns with the miniaturized Butt the Hoopoe in his pocket and he knows that he can go again to Kahani if he wishes to do so. But as Haroun tells the hoopoe, “Please understand, it’s really good to know you’ll be here when I need you. But *the way things are just now*, I honestly don’t need to go anywhere at all” (emphasis added) (211). The narrative thus raises within itself the possibility of future voyages and adventures and thus it remains an ongoing process where the thresholds of home will be crossed again and again.

If we move on to Hari’s case, he returns home to find that Lila has managed quite competently in his absence. There are a lot of changes that have occurred in his absence most of which are on the positive side. His mother is on the mend and his father has also turned over a new leaf. But there are a lot of changes that are sweeping Thul and these changes are the harbingers of hope for Hari. Lila, on the other hand, has never left home and has held on tight to the rein of household affairs as she has always done over the years. It is through her actions that the changes in the household have mainly taken place. Hari’s journey outside home has made him earn some money but within the framework of the narrative the changes at home through his initiative are yet to be perceived. The fragility of the home and its affairs has been controlled and strengthened through Lila’s endeavours rather than Hari’s journey. Hari’s venture outside his home probably might have made him realize the importance of home but it is yet to bear any fruitful changes in his household. When the reader is introduced into the narrative, the fractured structure of Lila and Hari’s family life has already pushed them to the fringes of childhood and propelled them into an adult world where they are misfits. It is only Bela and Kamal who we find still in their childhood but that is also going to end soon. Thus, we find that the end of childhood has already taken place for the protagonists and their initiatives to restructure their homes cannot be read as an attempt to regain childhood. In this light, Hari’s return home can be contextualized as not a return to the notion of a unified family eagerly waiting for him to be reintroduced to the folds of security and love that home signifies. Instead he returns with the understanding and knowledge that home is there with all its problems, dissatisfactions and grimness of poverty. And yet he returns because he does so actually to a memory of home which has compelled people

to return home across places, time and cultures. The dismal and poverty-ridden nature of home does not deter Hari and many others like him from returning because it is the one place with which they can associate a sense of belongingness and rootedness. The changes in circumstances do not necessarily mean that Hari and Lila will be relieved of their duties and they can revert to their enjoyment of childhood. It is only a change which involves some amount of financial security but the responsibilities of household are not to be relieved. At the same time, the change in Thul that Hari wishes for, in fact, is going to change his homeland forever. Hari's return therefore conceals within itself problematic concepts as the return to sustain one home envisages a change and destruction of another. For Lila, having never crossed the boundaries of home, her responsibilities and necessity to hold the family together will always remain her prerogative and the narrative never makes an effort to portray her with any of the characteristics that we associate with a child. For Hari, the return home merely signifies a return from one dreary situation to another one and the narrative emphasizes, that for the likes of Hari, there cannot be any home which can bring them comfort and luxury because poverty by itself is a destructive factor in the construction of home. It is poverty which has relegated the mother to the grip of illness and the father into the vicious circle of drunkenness and irresponsibility. Hari thus returns just to the concrete structure called home, albeit one which is ramshackle, as compared to the dispersed nature of home in Jagu's eatery. We can hereby conclude that home for Lila and Hari is fraught with the tensions of everyday demands and, though there is hope of a better future, that hope by itself is built on the destruction of another home that is Thul.

The destruction of home is a reality for Sita and she struggles with it literally. Home for Sita is already a contested site with both her parents missing and her grandparents acting as stand-in parents. Her efforts to sustain home in the absence of her grandparents are influenced by her understanding of household matters taught to her by her grandmother. The flood that engulfs her home and everything that she possesses is in a way cleansing her previous existence, so that when she returns to the island she needs to start anew. This process of starting anew actually signifies the lot of human existence also where human beings often have to uproot themselves and start afresh. The reason that Bond puts forward symbolically through Sita is that man

is a mere puppet in the face of the great destructive forces of nature and is also abandoned by gods in this pursuit of finding home. The only possible way out for Sita and humankind as a whole is the necessity to live in the here and now and build and rebuild home again and again.

The hope that is sustained despite the failure of homes is a general trend in children's literature and it is this hope, perhaps, rather than anything else that keeps home intact at least in fiction. Thus we can arrive at an understanding of children's necessity to reclaim home through the concluding remarks of Wilson and Short:

Children don't leave home on a lark, they are thrust out. These children are not wild things . . . .These postmodern children want what adults want, the mythical home, with warmth and love and safety... This longing can be explained (at least in part) by the modern influences in these novels that position the child as the hope that will lead us, the readers and adults, to a better place. And the child must do this while taking on traditionally adult roles in the vacuum created by adult abandonment and adult/child alienation. The child is the modern figure in the postmodern mess, the scientific, rational, and reactionary figure who must find a way through a field of cacti without being cut by the thorns of amorality and needy adults. (141-142)

When the child takes up adult roles it also inhabits adult spaces in the process of regaining home. The child's occupation of external spaces also brings in to play adult power equations and how the child has to reconfigure its own space within adult spaces. At the same time, the following questions arise: does home by itself provide the child with its own space and how does a child visualize the space available or not available to it? Can external spaces also resemble home for the child? These are the questions that are analyzed in the next chapter.