



## Indianness in the literary works of Ruskin Bond

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### Abstract

Ruskin Bond - the very name envisages snow-capped peaks, hills, green valleys flora and fauna, the captivating town of Dehra-the city where the heart and soul of Ruskin Bond lies. An exemplary novelist, short story writer and children's author of great repute with an extraordinary career spanning more than forty years, Bond acquires an eminent position in English Literature. In his noteworthy works he has imbibed the true spirit of the 'Indianness', the real zeal and spirit of India despite all its cultural and social disparities. The beautiful and lively description of the Jalebis, Deodar tree, the festival of Holi etc. are a testimony to the fact that Ruskin Bond is every inch an Indian though belonging to the British blood. His literary creations are pure gems and bring us in proximity with the real India\_ the India in total contrast to his contemporaries who considered India only as 'a land of magic and snake-charmers'.

I am as Indian as the dust on the plains or the grass of a mountain meadow.

This line is in itself a testimony of the unconditional love and adoration for India in Ruskin Bond's heart. His literary works discern the true spirit of India in every possible way they can in contrast to the different contradictory fact as drawn by the different foreign writers as well as his Indian contemporaries. Bond holds an absolutely different notion of India in his heart.

**Keywords:** Indianness, rituals, festivals, magnificence

### Introduction

Many British writers wrote at length about the myths and mysteries of India during the colonial era but their writings seem superficial as they seldom went beyond the boundaries of 'Civil Lines' reaching the 'native towns' to local 'Bazaars' and home of the local commoner. The perception of Indian life was strictly limited to the *Dhobi*, the *chaprasi*, the *bearer*, the *Babu*, the *clerk* and others in the 'servants' quarters of their palatial bungalows.

### Mulk Raj Anand writes in this regard

A few of them shaking hands with the Raja or Nawab. But seldom had they met the men, the women and children in the families and groups of villages, small towns or walled cities.

The charm of Himalayan hills replenishes his blood and so he finds himself at great ease discussing India comprehensively. He was at home among native children, language, customs, manners, rituals and festivals. This research paper is an attempt to explore the social customs, festivals, rituals, worshiping of Gods and religious deities in the works of Ruskin Bond. His unconditional love for India in his heart is reflected through his writings.

Despite being a Christian by birth he is very much familiar with Indian social customs and traditions. Bond started his literary career on a foreign soil but soon after his short stay in New Jersey he felt nostalgic and India began to haunt him incessantly. As a result, he left the foreign land and came back to his home India where his heart and soul dwells. His depiction of Indian customs and festivals is free of exaggeration and without any kind of prejudice. The readers come across the frequent reference of Indian customs and rituals in his stories and novels which is a result of the quick

and close observation of this celebrated literary figure. His deep insight and reverence in his heart for the festivals, gods, sacred notions of worshipping has enabled him to be aware of the very customs and rituals of India.

### Indian customs and rituals

Bond discusses that it is customary in India that when a funeral procession passes on the road irrespective of the religion, caste, creed, of the deceased the people who meet on the way pay respect to the dead. In *Delhi is not Far* he describes at length a funeral procession that is on its way to the cremation ground:

Suraj and I walked over the hill over the limestone quarries, past the shack of the Bihari labourers, we met a funeral procession on its way to the cremation ground. Suraj placed his hand on my arm and asked me to wait until the procession had passed. At the same time a cyclist dismounted and stood at the side of the road.

Bond has laid emphasis on a common problem that is of raging, blaring loud speakers in Indian marriages, family functions and gatherings as well as religious gatherings especially in rural areas or small towns, sometimes so devastating that it spoils many people's sleep at night. He does not intend to criticise but presents the real picture:

It is difficult to fall asleep some nights. Apart from the mosquitoes and the oppressive atmosphere, the loudspeakers blaring all over Pipal nagar, at cinemas, marriages and religious gatherings. There is a continuous variety of religious music and film music.

Bond at length discusses the Indian custom of piercing nose and ears in Indian women in the novel *A Flight of Pigeons* which was also made into a film *Junoon*. Indian women are greatly fond of wearing different kind of jewellery on

different occasions be it personal or religious. Another customary thing is a husband or wife not supposedly calling each other by name. In this context Lala Ramji Lal's domestic affairs are discussed:

Lala's wife was a young woman, short in stature with a fair complexion. We didn't know her name, because it is not customary for husband or wife to call the other by name; but her mother-in-law would address her as *dulhan* or bride.

Bond is well aware of the fact that cow is considered as a sacred figure in the Indian religious books especially in the Hindu religion and therefore termed as *Mata*. Hindu community pays huge respect to the animal and does not harm the cow in the story. *The Blue Umbrella* he describes cows of different colours and affectionately calls them *Neelu* and *Gori*.

### **Indian festivals**

Ruskin Bond in his maiden novel *The Room on the Roof* present the significance of Holi - the festival of colours. The spirit of the festival of Holi is explained thoroughly by the character Ranbir who is the mouthpiece of Ruskin Bond.

### **Ranbir explains Rusty the protagonist of the story**

You do not know about Holi! it is the Hindu festival of colours! it is the day on which we celebrate the coming of spring, when we throw colour on each other and shout and sing and forget the misery, for the colours mean the rebirth of spring and the new life in our hearts. I am surprised you do not know of it.

Holi marks a new beginning for Rusty as well. He releases his pent up emotions by responding to the instant beat of the drum. Reckless colour throwing, abandonment of social decorum because there was something wild and emotional that belongs to his 'dream world'. Rusty after being beaten up by his guardian Mr Harrison runs away to the *Bazaar* the very womb of life. Ruskin in another celebrated novel *Delhi is Not Far* depicts the beautiful and mesmerizing description of well-known festival Janmashtami celebrated on account of Lord Krishna's birthday. When Lord Krishna was born there was tremendous rain and storm. As Bond described:

It was Lord Krishna's birthday and the rain came down as early as it must have been on day when Krishna was born in Vrindavan.

In *A Flight of Pigeons* he describes monsoon festival especially celebrated in North India by women during rainy season named as *Teej* when womenfolk put on their best clothes which comprises of colourful dresses and the swings on the trees mark the festivities and the happiness of the festival. The women on swings feel exuberated. Different examples from different stories and novels of Ruskin Bond make us fully aware that he is thoroughly familiar with the chief festivals celebrated in the different parts of North India. The description of this festival is vivid, colourful and delightful.

Double ropes are suspended from a tree and the end are knotted together and made to hold narrow board painted in gay colours. Two women stand facing each other, having taken each other's rope by catching them between their toes; they begin to swing gently, gradually moving faster and higher until they are just brightly coloured against green trees and grey skies.

Bond give special reference of the festival of Raksha Bandhan which is considered to be a symbol of love and affection between brother and sister. On this auspicious day

the sister ties the Rakhi to her brother's wrist pledging to protect her and the brother gives a gift as a symbol of his love to his sister. In the novel *Delhi Is Not Far* Sita ties Rakhi to Arun and Suraj as she has adopted them as her brothers.

### **Indian Gods, deities and belief**

Though belonging to the British descent Ruskin Bond has keen observation and immense regard in his heart for Indian festivals and gods. Many novels of his covers minute detail of the mythological tales related to Indian gods and deities. In the novel *Delhi Is Not Far* discusses the mythological tale about the blue throat of Lord Shiva and how Lord Shiva eventually came to be known as *Neelkanth*. *Neelkanth* Shiva has a blue throat as he drank the entire poison out of compassion for the human race; the deadly poison which was meant to destroy the world.

Krishna is considered to be the most popular God among the Indians of all ages. Krishna is the most beloved of all the Gods. Young mother loves to hear about the tales of his childhood, young men wanted to be as tall and strong as Krishna, young girls dreamt of a lover as Krishna to carry them off like Rukmani in a war chariot, grown up men envy his wisdom and statesmanship.

There is also the mention of a interesting mythological tale about the three lines on the back of squirrels.

Krishna loved them, he would take them in his arm and stroke them with his long gentle fingers; Krishna was very dark skinned and the lines are the marks of his fingers.

Bond comments on the supernatural Indian belief about the full moon which is considered to have an evil effect.

I strongly believe that full moon does strange thing to people... lose all their inhibition and dance in a frenzy, some love more ardently and few kill more readily. Do not sleep in night of a full moon, warn the Pandit, it will be with you and turn your beautiful but evil thoughts.

### **Indian Food and Cuisine**

Undoubtedly Ruskin Bond presents Indian culture in the most colourful manner. His style of description of scenes is convincing and acceptable by any Indian. These descriptions are a testimony that Bond loves India to the core and considered himself as a true Indian; not a single soul can challenge his devotion and unconditional love towards India. Indian food and cuisine Whenever you read about the mouth watering jalebis, golgappa, Chaat papdi and Imarti in the novels of Ruskin Bond, instantly we forget the fact that by birth Ruskin Bond is of English blood. The discussion of various savouring dishes at length epitomize his love for India.

### **Significance of Trees in Indian Mythology**

Bond discusses the significance and importance of trees since times immemorial. The Tulsi plant is considered as the beloved of Lord Krishna- plant full of medicinal qualities. Indian women ardently believe that tulsi plant protect their family from various diseases and bring bliss in their lives. This is a symbol of purification both of the spirit and environment as well. Neem tree from the ancient time is considered to be a wish fulfilling tree in the folklore of Garhwal. Another example of the most sacred tree in the mountainous region is the Deodar, its magnificence among the Himalayan trees is unsurpassable. The Jackfruit tree reminds the little protagonists in his different stories the

pleasures of boyhood, the dense trees providing a suitable place for playing hide and seek to the tiny tots. Trees emerge out to be the most sacred thing in Bond's stories. Therefore, one can sum up that Bond's literary work touches many aspects of Indian culture and its rich heritage and religious beliefs.

### **Indian Family System**

Bond strongly reflects the spirit of diversity of faith in Indian culture, the remarkable authenticity with which Bond paints the interiors of an Indian village house; photo frame of Lord Ganesh, a string cot, a clock - the most prominent corner of the house brings forth Bond as the writer who definitely truly belongs to India with 'Indianness' running all over his veins.

Bond has portrayed real Indian society in most of his works. There are no strangers in India, they meet, exchange thoughts and pleasantries according to their age, political scenario etc. Strong bonding of friends, brother, sister mother- son relation, father- daughter relation are strongly and elaborately depicted in most of his stories. Sitting and dining together brings closeness and warmth in the relation of the family members. The local Bazaar, railway platform, streets, gardens, theatre and cinema hall even cremation grounds, all the places have been portrayed in a very native colour by Bond. His literary genius has painted the Indian life in varied colours.

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