

## PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN SOCIAL CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS AND GODS IN THE WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND

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### ABSTRACT

Ruskin Bond - the name conjures up hills, green valleys, forest walks, small-town antics and of course, Dehra Dun. Ruskin Bond is a writer who has, with intense depth and sensitivity, absorbed the essence of the multilingual person and culturally synergetic contemporary Indian society. An exemplary novelist, short story writer and children's author of repute with a writing career spanning forty years! In his works he has recreated the Indian-ness in depth with true and significant understanding. He portrays the Indian Festivals and its social relevance from the divine to terrestrial entities and its impact on the history and the civilization of contemporary society.

In this research paper researchers have explored the Social Customs, Festivals and Gods in the works of Ruskin Bond. Ruskin Bond not only loves India, but also the people and tradition of all the religions of India and gives due respect to them. In his works, Ruskin Bond often gives us ample description about Indian social customs, festivals and religious gods. Despite being a Christian, he is familiar with Indian conventions, as he has seen and enjoyed this very closely. India is a very big country inhabited by the people of different religions and customs. Bond mainly focuses our attention towards the festivals celebrated in North India.

Ruskin Bond's depiction of Indian customs and festivals is faithful and without any kind of prejudice. The researchers propose to explore Ruskin Bond's description and mythological connotation of Indian God in its true spirit and sense.

**Keywords:** Social Customs, Festival, God.

## INTRODUCTION:

Ruskin Bond - the name conjures up hills, green valleys, forest walks, small-town antics and of course, Dehra Dun. Ruskin Bond is a writer who has, with intense depth and sensitivity, absorbed the essence of the multilingual person and culturally synergetic contemporary Indian society. In his works, Ruskin Bond often gives us ample description about Indian social customs, festivals and religious gods. Despite being a Christian, he is familiar with Indian conventions, as he has seen and enjoyed this very closely. His depiction of Indian customs and festivals is faithful and without any kind of prejudice. Ruskin Bond not only loves India, but also the people and tradition of all the religions of India and gives due respect to them. India is a very big country inhabited by the people of different religions and customs. The researchers aim at studying in this research work what way Bond has depicted Indian customs, festivals and Indian Gods in the light of Indian culture and Indian mythology in his novels.

## INDIAN CUSTOMS AND RITUALS:

In Bond's works we come across the frequent reference of Indian customs and Indian rituals. Ruskin Bond was born and brought up in India therefore he is well familiar with the Indian culture, social rituals and customs. He loves India and has roamed in North India with his Indian friends. His keen observation of India and the people of India have enabled him to be aware of the various customs and the rituals of India. Indian customs and rituals are described in many of his works. These descriptions reveal the sound knowledge of Bond about Indian conventions.

It is customary in India that when the funeral procession passes on the road, people who meet on the way pay due respect to the dead even if they do not respect a man when he is alive. The body of human beings is not as important as his soul. In *Delhi is not Far* Bond describes at length a funeral procession that is on its way to cremation ground.

“As Suraj and I walked over a hill near 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. Others hurried on, without glancing at the little procession.”( 1)

In *Delhi is not far* Bond also comments on the problems of loud speakers. In India, especially in rural areas or small towns during marriage functions and some religious gatherings people like to play music, film songs or religious songs so loudly that spoil many people's sleep at night. He further discusses about this disturbance that does not care for others. So people have to get used to it. Here Bond does not criticize this custom but presents the real picture.

“It is difficult to fall asleep some nights. Apart from the mosquitoes and the oppressive atmosphere, there are the loud speakers blaring all over Pipalnagar-at cinemas, marriages and religious gatherings. There is a continuous variety of fare-religious music and film music.”( 2)

In *A Flight of Pigeons* he describes an ancient Indian custom of piercing nose and ears among Indian women to wear ornaments. Indian women are fond of wearing different kind of jewelry on different occasions. Bond discusses about this custom through the conversation between Kothiwali and Mariam. According to the Indian custom a wife or husband is not supposed to call each other by name. Bond comments this custom in *A Flight of Pigeon*, when he describes the domestic affairs of Lala Ramji Lal's family:

“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 a husband or wife to call the other by name; but her mother- in- law would address her as *dulhan*, or bride.”(3)

Indian people love watching films than anything else. Most of the Indian cinema houses are always overcrowded as the people of all class are fond of watching movies. It is very difficult to secure tickets because there is a chaos at Indian cinema houses. Bond satirically comments on the craze of Indians of watching films through the character of Kishen in *The Room on the Roof*: “There was a crowd in front of the bazaar's only cinema, as there was no organized queuing for booking.”(4)

It is a common sight in Indian streets where we find cows wandering here and there. People of India consider cow as “Mata” (the mother) therefore pays due respect to her and do not harm the cow. In his story ‘*The Blue Umbrella*’, Bond describes the cows of different colours. Normally we find in the hilly areas. People in India give different names of women to different cow according to the colour of their body and these cows are known by these names only.

“Neelu—Blue—was the name of the blue-grey cow. The other cow, which was white, was called Gori, meaning the Fair One. They were fond of wandering off on their own, down to the stream or into the pine forest.... The cows preferred having Biniya with them, because she let them wander. Bijju pulled them by their tails if they went too far. (5)

## INDIAN FESTIVALS:

In *Room on The Roof* Bond presents the festival of Holi which is very famous in Hindu community of North India. Holi is the festival of colour. This is the day on which people celebrate the coming of spring by throwing colours on each other and shout and sing in order to forget their misery. He also mentions the significance of the festival of Holi through the mouth of Ranbir who invites Rusty to play Holi with him.

“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 our misery, for the colours mean the rebirth of spring and a new life in our hearts... You do not of it!”(6)

As the festival is of Hindus, the others do not celebrate this festival. When Rusty asks Somi about his participation in Holi, Somi informs Rusty that it is not possible for him to join with them because he belongs to a different community called Sikh who have their different festivals and customs and do not play Holi. “I do not play Holi. You see, I am different from Ranbir. I wear a turban and he does not, also there is a bangle on my wrist, which means that I am a Sikh. We do not play it (7 ).

Further, he describes in *The Room on The Roof* how people enjoy the festival. Children and young men of the town form groups, well- equipped with stock of colours. They also use bicycle pumps and bamboo stems, from which was squirted liquid colour. Children come out of their home the whole day, shouting and making noise in the streets. Generally, if anybody does not come out of his house to play Holi, his friends reach the home and tries to make him play Holi by any means. As Bond mentions, “Suri is hiding” cried someone. “He has locked himself in house and won’t play Holi!”(8)

This day people forget their homes and work and all problems of life as Rusty who also forgot at least for one day his guardian and his home. Thus, Bond describes the significance, importance and purpose and the way of celebration minutely in this novel. His description is quite realistic and interesting.

His novel *Delhi is not Far* presents the depiction of well known festival Janmashtami. Lord Krishna’s birthday is celebrated on this day. When Lord Krishna was born, there was a tremendous rain and storm. As Bond describes, “It was Lord Krishna’s birthday, and the rain came down as heavily as it must have done the day Krishna was born in Brindaban”(9 )

In *A Flight of the Pigeons* Bond describes the monsoon festival especially celebrated in North India by women during the rainy season. They put on their new colourful dresses and swing to release their feelings. It seems to us that Ruskin Bond is thoroughly familiar with this festival chiefly celebrated in the rural part of the North India.

“It was the day of the monsoon festival observed throughout northern India by the women folk, who put on their most colourful costumes, and relax on innumerable swings, giving release of feeling of joy and abandon.”(10).

Moreover, Bond acutely mentions the procedure of the Monsoon festival how womenfolk make swing. It is the festival that provides a thrilling experience while swinging watching the raising clouds above in the sky. Bond’s description of this festival is vivid and delightful. This description reveals his sound knowledge about this festival.

“Double ropes are suspended from a tree, and the ends are knotted together and made to hold narrow boards painted in gay colours. Two women stand facing each other, having taken each other’s ropes by catching them between their toes. They begin to swing gently, gradually moving faster and higher,

until they are just brightly coloured blur against green trees and gray skies. Sometimes, a small bed is fixed between the ropes, on which two or three can sit while two others move the swing, singing to them at the same time.(11).

In *Vagrants in the Valley* we find the reference of the festival of the Full Moon. He also gives us the detail about the evil effect of it. It is strongly believed by the people that the Full Moon does strange thing to some people. When the Moon is full, it is not advisable to sleep in the moon light. Here Bond comments on the supernatural Indian belief about the Full Moon.

“When the Moon is at the full, some converse with spirits, others lose all their inhibitions and dance in frenzied abandon; some love more ardently’ and few kill more readily. ‘Do not sleep in the light of a Full Moon,’ warn the pundits, ‘it will bewitch you, and turn your beautiful but evil thoughts.”(12 )

In *Delhi is not Far* we observe the reference of the festival of Raksha Bandhan. This festival stands for as the symbol of love between brothers and sisters. On this day the sister ties Rakhi to her brother to seek protection and the brother gives a gift to his sister. In the novel Kamala ties Rakhi to Arun and Suraj as she has adopted them as their brothers.

### INDIAN GODS:

Ruskin Bond loves to portray the image of Indian gods. In many of his novels, he not only describes their personality but also their importance and popularity among Indians. Along with this, he also refers to the mythological tales related with these Indian gods. In *Delhi is not Far*, he mentions the mythological tale about the blue throat of Lord Shiva and how Lord Siva is known as Nilkanth.

“Both blue jay and Lord Siva are called Nilkanth. Siva has a blue throat, like the blue jay, because out of compassion for the human race he swallowed a deadly poison which was meant to destroy the world. He kept the poison in his throat and would not let it go any further.”(13).

In *Delhi is not far*, he also portrays the image of lord Krishna. In his opinion Krishna is perhaps the most popular god among the Indians of all ages. He reflects the personality of Lord Krishna as:

“Krishna is the best beloved of all the gods. Young mothers laugh and weep as they read or hear about the pranks of his child hood; young men pray to be as tall and strong as Krishna was when he killed Kamas’s elephant and Kamas’s wrestlers; young girls dream of a lover as daring as Krishna to carry them off like Rukmani in a war chariot; grown up men envy the wisdom and statesmanship with which he managed the affair of his kingdom.” (14)

Besides, he mentions a mythological tale that is also an interesting tale about the dark line on the back of squirrels. Lord Krishna is connected with this mythological tale.

“Krishna loved them. He would take them in his arms and stroke them with his long, gentle fingers. That is why they have four dark lines down their backs from head to tail. Krishna was very dark-skinned, and the lines are the marks of his fingers.”(15)

Ruskin Bond has thus presented Indian culture very faithfully. His description about Indian customs, festivals and God is convincing, credible and acceptable by any Indian. It is an undeniable fact that Bond loves India and considers himself an Indian. No one can challenge his fidelity and devotion towards India as he says: “I am as Indian as the dust of plains or the grass of a mountain meadow.”

Nothing can express the love for a country in a better way than these words by Ruskin Bond. We find various images of India by different writers in the realm of Anglo-Indian English literature which present contradictory facets of Indian plethora. Some of them like V.S. Naipaul, R .P Jhabwala, Arundhati Roy and Mulkraj Anand have commented on the multiple problems and plights of India.

During colonial period many British writers presented India as a land of ‘Sadhus and snake charmers’. Wilkie Collins in his the *Moonstone* presented Indians as having clairvoyant abilities even Rudyard Kipling also came up with the portrayal of India in his work but India was always looked through the glasses of a colonizer and therefore not very credible. Writers like Raja Rao were content with presenting the ‘Vedantic’ India only. Writers like Khushvant Singh were busy talking about the preceding and succeeding events of the

partition. British writers seldom went beyond their narrow world when they wrote about India. Ruskin Bond's portrayal of Indian culture is incomparable because many writers of Indian origin have also written under the influence of the British ideology but Ruskin Bond accepts India in Toto. As Usha Bande writes,

(Bond's) India lives and breathes in the hills. To him trees, mountains and rivers have a special appeal and have as much beauty and as many problems as humans have. He is not attracted by the glitter of over expanding cities, nor is he unduly moved by the over present social problems. (16)

Ruskin Bond grew up in changing India and his loyalty always remained with and still remains with India. After the Independence most of the Britishers migrated to their native country but very few who were very old to migrate or who did not have financial support, stayed in India.

"Though most of English and Anglo Indian families returned to U.K., many of these families chose to remain in India. Ruskin Bond and his mother's family were among such 'whites' settled into peaceful town Dehra. When others were passing through post colonial trauma of displacement, of loss of country, Friends and parents, of insecurity and of finance, Bond, it was only a trauma of a loss of identity. He tried to search his roots in India." (17)

For Bond, India has never been just a piece of land. It has meant love, simplicity, unity and acceptance. As Bond has always selected north India as the background for his works, one can very clearly see that north India merges in the end into an Indian spirit. Bond himself considers India as a living organism. He writes, "To love it through the friends, I made and through the mountains, valleys, fields and forests which have made an indelible impressions on my mind. For India is an atmosphere as much as it is a land"

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