

**UNDERSTANDING INDIANNESS IN *LONE FOX DANCING***

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ABSTRACT:

Indianness is the representation of the culture and traditions of India underlining the socio-political, religious, cultural and spiritual connections deeply constituted in the mind of a native Indian. The present article is an attempt to understand the very sense of Indianness in the autobiography by famous Anglo-Indian Ruskin Bond entitled Lone Fox Dancing. The book is an reflection of Bond's deep sense of being an Indian, his socio-cultural understanding of India and his deep sense of identity as an Indian.

Keywords: Indianness, Tradition, Culture, Anglo-Indian Society, etc.

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Ruskin Bond is one of India's most revered children's writer; writing career spans over six decades, he has written over 400 short stories and novels including the most celebrated 'Room on the Roof', and 'Vagrants in the Valley'. His stories 'The Blue Umbrella', 'A Flight of Pigeons' and 'Susanna's Seven Husbands' have also been adapted into successful movies. He received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993, the most honoured Padma Shri in 1999 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014 for his tremendous contribution in the field of literature. Ruskin Bond is deliberated as a major writer of children literature in India. Most of his writings: novels, essays and stories are mainly autobiographical or semi- autobiographical expressing his yearning to live a happy and gratified life near mountains and are simple, direct, more frank, open minded and emotional.

Lone Fox Dancing published in 2017 by Speaking Tiger Publication is a memoir of the hills that speak about Bond's eventful life, often taking readers back in time to the origins of some of his memorable works which has been awarded the 2017 Atta Galatta-Bangalore Literature Festival Book Prize in the non-fiction category. It captures iconic moments from Bond's life depicting simple and innocent folks, misty mountains, birds and beasts, trees, jungles, ghosts and lost loves, rain and snow in a simple and direct language.

Ruskin Bond has voiced his intense love for India in almost every work with unsurpassable skill and care feeling the pulse of the marvellous diversity of Indian life. His brilliance has brightened

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the distant and dark places of the Garhwal region in India. He is an Anglo-Indian who witnessed India's trail and tribulations of Indian Independence and partition. He is so deeply rooted in the soil of India that even after decolonization and opportunities to settle in London he resolved to reject his English identity and embrace India in a complete sense. Therefore, his identity as an Indian is uncompromising; colour, race and religion did not make him an Indian but his convictions did and he is widely accepted by Indians as their own. He was born here and grown old with the mountains around with emotional attachments.

"Being Indian, and Feeling Indian, has little to do with one's place of birth or one's religion. While I was still at school I wasn't particularly conscious of being anything in particular. It was only after, I had left India, in 1951, at the age of seventeen, that I realized that I was Indian to the core and could be nothing else.

It wasn't family that brought me back, it was the country, the land itself, and all that lived and grew upon it. It is India that has made me. I have loved it, and for the most part, it has loved me back." (Bond Ruskin, 276)

Ruskin is very sure about his aspirations and clear about his aim that he wants to settle in India and be a writer. *Lone Fox dancing* has many evidences of this as it is a reflection of Ruskin's memories and the roots of his writing aspirations and ventures. The memoirs include his early childhood in Jamnagar, Dehra, Delhi, his schools in Shimla and Mussourie, his Jersey and London days, and then back to Dehra, Delhi, Mussourie and Landour. He has not only described the people around him, his parents, friend and relatives but everything around him including trees, birds and animals which have become a part of his personality. The book is Bond's journey from a small boy to a young man who went to England to pursue his career and his coming back to India his permanent abode. Many incidents in the book demonstrate Bond's longing for India as he is Indian to the core. When he was in London he describes,

"The botanical gardens at Kew always attracted me, because there I could return to the tropics simply by entering one of those steamy hothouses where tropical plants grew in profusion. It was the Amazon basin rather than the Ganges plain that was re-created here, but that was good enough for me; anything to get away from the London drizzle and the fogs that came in from the Atlantic." (Bond Ruskin, 166)

Even though Bond was in London he craved to be near to the mountains where he spent most of his childhood. He admits,

"Surely I could do as much, if not more, back in India, where I would at least have friends to cycle around with, and the freedom that comes from being a nobody in the great grey multitude that makes up the country." (Bond Ruskin, 170)


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It was clear to author that his stay in London will boost further the achievement of his dream to be a successful writer, as it was the hub of all the leading publishers, he didn't feel any emotional attachment to the land of his grand-father. Ruskin's father wanted to settle in England as it was natural to him to settle there because he thought there was no future for them in India. He decided to come back and settle in India leaving behind the great prospect of settling in London,

"I began to think seriously of returning to India; although, when I mentioned this to anyone-Indian students, my mother, or friends back in India, they expressed alarm at the thought and did their best to dissuade me. What was the point in coming all the way to England if I was going to return home because I felt lonely and because I thought I was a failure?" (Bond Ruskin, 171)

Bond never thought of settling in London though there was better prospect as compared to India and that to living in the mountains without much luxuries and modern amenities. He was not up to living a luxurious and comfortable life but wanted a peaceful life.

"'Home'- that was the magnet. Not the 'home' of my mother and stepfather, but the larger home that was India, where I could even feel free to be a failure. The Land of Regrets, someone had called India; but for me it was a land of acceptances. For hadn't I, a mixed-up colonial castaway, an accident of history, found" (Bond Ruskin, 171)

Bond longed back to be in India-his home, not a particular place but the place in mountains surrounded by nature. He is the true son of the soil, nearer to nature than his inward sense of feeling as an Indian is reflected in his autobiography. The scenic beauty of mountains, the workmen, laymen, the folks from mountain, shepherds, the simple and humble rustics are described freely in the writing as they shape the author's experiences.

Bond makes free use of Hindi words used in day to day life without using alternate English words or do not translate them in English for example, *tonga, chhota-sahib, mashalchi, baba, ayah, kofta-curry, motor-gaadi, Nawab, begums, jungle, jahannum, Bundar, saanp, paan, pari, bhishti, khus, the Puarana Quila, rikshaw, Hanuman, chowkidars, sahib, bachcha, pyjama, shikar trip, Maharaja, Lal Bandar, samosas, pakoras, holi, bazaars, Bibiji, paranthas, sabji, dhaba, daal, asli, chaat, shabash, jhaaroo, chulhas, bhabiji, angrez, mynahs*, etc. There are abundant examples of the colloquial words used directly into the writing.

Indian English writing of course represents Indianness and it is taken for granted that it is the representative of Indian tradition and culture. English language is considered to be unsuitable to convey the Indian sensibility, Indian traditions and culture, the socio-cultural feature as the English language originated in England which is totally different from India and unfamiliar to Indian soil. However, as Bond uses Hindi words freely in his writing it makes the writing very Indian to the core.



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“On the streets, the milkmen on their bicycles were making their rounds, reminding me of William Saroyan, who sold newspapers as a boy, and recounted his experiences in *The Bicycle Rider* in Beverley Hills. Stray dogs, and cows were nosing at dustbins. A truck loaded with bananas was slowly making its way towards the mandi. In the distance there was the whistle of an approaching train.

One or two small tea shops had just opened, and stopped at one of them for a cup of tea. As it was a special day, I decided to treat myself on omelette. The shopkeeper placed a record on his new electric record player, and the strains of a popular fil tune served to wake up all the neighbours—a song about girl’s red dupatta being blown away by a gust of wind and the retrieved by a handsome but unemployed youth. I finished my omelette and set off down the road to the bazaar.” (Bond Ruskin, 171)

One could witness the sense of the soil in above extract from the book. English basically is foreign as it is nurtured in different culture therefore totally indifferent to Indian culture. But, as Bond—an Anglo-Indian, is born and brought up in India, never has the feeling of distinctiveness or alienation from Indian culture or the indifference to Indian sensibility. He is quite successful in creating the very Indian atmosphere.

Conclusion:

Ruskin Bond is inseparable from the Indian soil, the great Indian tradition. He continues the inheritor of Indian English Literary tradition. The book *Lone Fox dancing* echoes Ruskin’s struggle for identity—English, Anglo-Indian or Indian. The author meditates upon his identification with the English and Indian cultures, but he feels his inclination towards India is a binding force of culture, traditions, heritage, history, ecology and the socio-economic life. He creates atmosphere which is very much Indian. He has a close connection with Indian nature and finds solace and great pleasure in mountains.

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