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Adaptiveness or Love for Hills?: Locating Ruskin Bond's Diasporic Voices in *India I Love*

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Abstract

The relationship between Ruskin Bond and India has a historical and colonial seed. After the Independence, when British Raj came to an end, in the process of migration to England, like other British, Ruskin Bond also struggled to make his identity in the new environment of his own homeland. Ruskin Bond as an Indian author of British descent chooses to live in an adoptive family in Landour of Mussoorie, India. Living in the natural world of hills, the history and the acceptance by the Indians make Ruskin Bond feel what he said in an interview taken by M. S. Sharma, Times of India, (8 Oct, 2018): "[...] I am an Indian not just by birth but also by choice." In the collection of poems and essays, India I Love (2004), Ruskin Bond portrays his unique relationship with India and its people from the time he came back to take up the challenge of being a writer in a swiftly changing India. This article aims to show Ruskin Bond's nostalgic feelings for his beloved adopted country which gives us a unique representation of Indian-ness in the cultural identity of Ruskin Bond.

Keywords: Migration, belonging, adopted, Indian-ness.

Introduction

The binary relationship between East and West has a colonial history based on the cultural and geographical difference. In India, a sense of belonging plays a great role in the social and cultural life of Ruskin Bond. Bond tries to find an emotional bridge between the two worlds, and by doing so, his cultural identity gets a root from the route. Ruskin Bond's *India I Love* (2004) is the collection of prose and poetry. In the collection, there are nine poems which are broken up and arranged in the column format. Bond's prose is more convincing than the poems in this collection, and his choice of words makes his representation alive. In this collection, Ruskin Bond talks about his early years in India, a brief journey in England, and the struggle of become a writer thereafter in India, his varied experiences with editors, publishers. Ruskin Bond's life in the hills and love for the natural world-mountains, rivers and the seasons become the subject for this collection.

As an Indian author of British descent, Ruskin Bond spent his childhood in the hill stations of Dehradun and Mussoorie, and now he lives in an adopted family in Landour (situated in Mussoorie). He was the student of Bishop Cotton School in Simla. After the Independence of India, for better prospects, he went to U.K. In England, he stayed for two years in his aunt's house. The emotional detachment from the roots creates a gap in the mind of the Bond, and Ruskin Bond's concept of home and house are based on his cultural acceptance of this land. He has an intimate relationship with the natural world of the Himalayan region. He wanted to be back and live here in the hills. Bond's love for India is because of history, and he wants to live in-between space of the two worlds. As Salman Rushdie says in an interview of the publication of short story collection *East, West* (1994),

"I said to most people when I started thinking of calling the stories *East, West* that the most important part of the title was the comma. Because it seems to me that I am that comma- or at least I live in the comma...I don't feel like a slash, I feel like a comma."

Ruskin Bond becomes the symbolic bridge between the east and west, and in a certain point of time, he experiences the emotional displacement as well as the cultural and geographical. This results in the sense of identity crisis in both the lands. In India, he finds his cultural acceptance and historical belonging in the natural settings of the hills. In this collection, Bond portrays his emotional connection with what he feels for people, places, and things in India.

In collection *India I Love*, through the essays and poems Bond tries to show his emotional bonding with the people, places and things in the hills. In India, he lives with an adopted family. In the part 'Two', entitled "Children of India" of this collection shows his love for the childhood. In the hills, he loves to watch the passing of the boys and girls from the surroundings villages and the outskirts of the hill station. Bond loves the people of this land, and he also shows his concern for the issues of providing education in the hills of this country.

Bond shows his love for the people of the hills, and he experiences the cultural life of the Indian family like Bindra, whose father is a forest guard. He tries to find the cultural assimilation in the game of the elite. The game, 'Cricket' is the symbolic bond between the two countries, and Ruskin Bond portrays children's love for the game.

He loves the cultural diversity of the country. In the hills, he can see children from different communities learn to live and grow together. He hopes for a better future of the children he watches them pass by.

In the collection, the poem "Come Roaming With Me" Bond shows his love for the hills. He portrays the imageries of the hills which shows the charms and magic of village life, and he finds a friendly space in the natural setting of the hills:

Out of the city and over the hill,
 Into the spaces where Time stands still,
 Under the tall tress, touching old wood,
 Taking the way where warriors once stood;
 Crossing the little bridge, losing my way,
 But finding a friendly place where I can stay. (Bond 1)

In the poem "Boy In A Blue Pullover" childhood joys of the village urchins have been the focal point of Ruskin Bond. Bond finds pleasure in watching the thin smiling boy, who has found the shining five rupee on the road of the hills:

He ran off laughing, bright.
 The coin I'd lost an hour ago;

But better his that night. (Bond 10)

In the poem "Our Local Team" Bond represents the game which connects the two worlds, east and west. His representation of the local cricket team has a symbolic token of the colonial history of India, and he is fond of the excitement of the game in the cricket match of the local teams:

Here comes our batting hero;

Salutes the crowd, takes guard;

And out for zero (Bond 11)

In the part 'Five' entitled "And Now We are Twelve", we can see Bond's emotional journey of staying in Mussoorie. He talks about his love for the hills, and his journey of staying with an adoptive family of Prem, who worked with him in 1970. At the very beginning of this chapter, he talks about the reason for his choosing to live in the hills, which is very evident in the following lines:

People often ask me why I've chosen to live Mussoorie for so long – almost forty years without any significant breaks. "I forgot to go away," I tell them, but of course, that isn't the real reason. The people here are friendly, but then people are friendly in a great many other places. The hills, the valleys are beautiful. People often ask me why I've chosen to live in Mussoorie for so long – almost forty years ... (Bond 13)

Here he shows different phases of life with the family he has grown up. In the journey with his adoptive family members, Prem, Rakesh, Beena, Binita, and Savitri, he finds a long period of domestic bliss. In this chapter, he also tells us about his difficult year, when a criminal charge was brought against him for a story he had written for a Bombay magazine. Bond does not see his cultural name as problematic rather he makes fun of it: "My first name was Owen, which in Welsh means 'brave'. As I am not in the least brave, I have preferred not to use it. One given name and one surname should be enough." (Bond 18)

His Indian-ness is reflected in the choice of cultural name of 'Savitri' (Dolly). The girl child of Prem and Chandra (Rakesh's mother) shows her dissatisfaction of the given name:

... When Dolly grew older, she was annoyed at having been named Savitri (my choice), which is now considered very old fashioned; so we settled for Dolly. (ibid 18)

Ruskin Bond loves the soil of this country, and he shares his experience of meeting with a lissom Australian lady who has tried to drag him away from his beloved country.

In the modern age, he still does not want digital version of writing, and he is always comfortable with his pen. When he plays with the next generation of his adoptive family, Atish, Mukesh's little ten-month old infant soon tired of playing with Bond. When they came to Ivy Cottage in 1980, the family members were six, now, twenty-four years later, they are twelve. When Goutam, the youngest of Rakesh's three musketeers (in Bond's words) had absconded with his pen, he gives us his writing journey, and he is free from the influence of modern age.

In the poem "Spell Broken" we can see Bond's intoxication of imagination in exploring the essence of the childhood and natural imageries:

We crouched before the singing fire / As the green wood writhed and bled

And the orange flames leapt higher / And your cheeks in the dark glowed red

Alone in the forest, you and I; and then, / Came as an old gypsy to warm his feet

And shouting children, and two young men (Bond 26)

In the part 'Seven' entitled "Simple Living", Ruskin Bond describes his thoughts and observations noted in his diaries through the 1980s. He remembers the natural beauty of the hills during his time in December, 1981:

On the night of the 7th, light snowfall. The earliest I can remember it snowing in Landour. Early morning, the hillside looked very pretty, with a light mantle of snow covering tress, rusty roofs, vehicles at the bus stop. (Bond 30)

In India, he can feel himself, and in the month of February, 1982, he shares his boyhood journey. In the family, children bring him joy. He thinks that the small children are the sacred thing left on this earth. When we go through the period 'Mid-May' of 1982, we can see his historical relationship with India. After the Independence of India, he still stays in this land:

Raki (after reading my bio-data): "Dada, you were born in 1934! And you are still here!" After a pause: "You are very lucky." (Bond 33)

Ruskin Bond shares about the journey of the short story "The Last Tiger". According to the writing during 'December' of 1982, Mr. K .S. Varma finally completed his film of the story 'The Last Tiger, but he could not find a distributor for it.

In his "Garhwal Himalaya" Bond has celebrated the natural and mountainous imageries in the Indian Subcontinent. He loves the natural surroundings of the mountains: forests, 'the snow-leopard moans', 'short winter grass', 'the small stone houses of Garwal', 'thin fields of calcinated soil torn' etc. In nature, the children find pleasure in the natural beauty of the sunset:

There is hunger of children at noon; yet

There are those who sing of sunsets

And the gods and glories of Himachal,

Forgetting no one eats sunsets. (Bond 54)

In the nine part entitled "India I Carried with Me", Ruskin Bond goes back to a period when he was caught between the two worlds:

I am now going back in time, to a period when I was caught between East and West, and had to make up my mind just where I belong. I had been away from India for barely a month before I was longing to return. (Bond 55)

In this part, he shares his sense of belonging. In the Channel Island of Jersy, he found himself alien among his own people, and he feels his sense of alienation. His literary journey from India to England is reflected in the following lines:

I had come to England with a dream; but in between there were to be four years of dreary office work, lonely bed-sitting rooms, shabby lodging houses, cheap snack bars, hospital wards, and the struggling to write my first book and find a publisher for it. (ibid 55)

He started work in the departmental store called 'Les Riche'. In the busy life in England, Bond could not find his bond in this land. In England, he tried to settle himself as an author. He took his subjects of his first novel from the characters and incidents based on the journal he had kept during his last year in India. His sense of nostalgia and longing for the natural world of hills is reflected in his writings, and this paves the way for his sentimental friendship with the soil of India. In England, he can find the striking contrasts:

...a small cinema showing English pictures (a George Formby comedy or an American musical) and only a couple of hours away thousands taking a dip in the sacred water of the Ganga. (Bond 57)

In Jersy, He found an old cycle belonging to his cousin, and he rode from St. Helier where he lived, to St. Brelade's Bay, at the other end of the island. He finds the difference between the Jersy and Dehra :

...But returning after dark, I was hauld up for riding without lights. I had no idea that cycles had also to be equipped with lights. Back in Dehra, we never used them! (ibid 57)

In his diaries, he expresses his desire to get back to India. He did not want to stay with relatives who were unsympathetic, not only to his feelings for India but also his ambition to become a writer. In England, he could not articulate himself according to him.

Ruskin Bond did not make many English friends. According to him, they were a reserved race. They were very economic in using words than the Indians. He talks about this in this way:

In England, people will take the initiative, they lose no time in getting to know you. Not so in England. They were too polite to look at you. And in that respect, I was more English than the English. (ibid 59)

Ruskin Bond shares the memorable incidents of his friends of his youth, Sudheer, and Bibiji. In his poem "Midwinter, Deserted Hill Station" Bond has tried to connect his sense of loneliness with the amazing silence of nature:

I see you every day
Walk barefoot on the frozen ground.
I want to be your friend,
But you look the other way. (Bond 87)

Conclusion:

In *The India I Love*, Bond has represented his Indianness, multiculturalism and ambivalence. Ruskin Bond experiences the socio-cultural experience in India. In the hills, he finds his identity, and this cultural identity can be understood in terms of location, relocation, and dislocation of the home-culture. The peace and serenity in this collection shows his blissful state of living his life in the adopted land. He registers each moments living in the hills, and he pens down the things getting observed in the natural world of the Himalayas. Amidst nature, Bond prefers solitary walks, and he tries to engage in a lively conversation with the nature. He thinks himself as a part of this natural presence.

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