IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

# Nature, Nostalgia, And The Everyday: A Comparative Study Of Ruskin Bond's And R.K. Narayan's Short Stories

**Author: B.Neethu Prathyusha, (Research Scholar, P.R. Research Centre)**
**Lecturer in English,**
**A.S.D.Government Degree College for Women Autonomous, Kakinada**

**Abstract**

This paper offers a comparative analysis of the short stories of Ruskin Bond and R.K. Narayan, two major Anglophone writers from India whose work—while equally accessible—reveals markedly different literary sensibilities. Using close reading of representative stories (Bond's *"The Eyes Are Not Here"/"The Eyes Have It," "The Night Train at Deoli," "The Blue Umbrella,"* and *"Panther's Moon"*; Narayan's *"An Astrologer's Day," "A Horse and Two Goats," "Engine Trouble,"* and *"Lawley Road"*), the paper contrasts their themes, narrative strategies, characterization, humor and irony, treatment of place, and language. It argues that Bond's lyric humanism and nature-centered intimacy create moments of tender melancholy, while Narayan's comic realism and gentle satire construct a moral universe grounded in the rhythms of small-town life. Both develop a distinct Indian idiom in English and celebrate ordinary people, but they diverge in the textures of memory, landscape, and social critique they bring to the short form.

**Keywords:** Ruskin Bond; R.K. Narayan; Indian short story; Malgudi; Himalaya; realism; nostalgia; satire; nature writing; postcolonial literature

## 1. Introduction

Ruskin Bond (b. 1934) and R.K. Narayan (1906–2001) are among the most widely read Indian writers in English. Their short stories—often taught in schools and colleges—have formed many readers' first encounter with Indian English fiction. At first glance, they share much: an uncluttered prose style, compact plots, ordinary protagonists, and an interest in moral feeling over spectacle. Yet their visions diverge. Bond's stories are intimate portraits of fleeting connections and landscapes, frequently set in the Himalayan foothills, where children, drifters, and strangers search for belonging. Narayan's Malgudi cycle, by contrast, presents a comic-ethical microcosm: traders, clerks, priests, and dreamers whose small ambitions reveal the social energies of modern India. This paper maps convergences and divergences in their short fiction to illuminate how each author extends the possibilities of the Indian short story.

## 2. Method and Corpus

The analysis draws on comparative close reading. For Bond: *"The Eyes Have It"* (also published as *"The Eyes Are Not Here"*), *"The Night Train at Deoli," "The Blue Umbrella,"* and *"Panther's Moon."* For Narayan: *"An Astrologer's Day," "A Horse and Two Goats," "Engine Trouble,"* and *"Lawley Road."* These selections balance well-known anthology pieces with stories representative of each writer's range (romance and memory; child-centered fables; suspense; and gentle satires of bureaucracy and fate). The paper also considers secondary scholarship on Bond's nature writing and Narayan's Malgudi as a fictional ethnography of small-town India.

## 3. Background and Literary Context

Both authors write in a postcolonial milieu, yet their primary orientation is not overtly programmatic nationalism but the human-scale worlds of everyday life. Bond's oeuvre grows out of the Anglo-Indian experience and Himalayan domesticity; his narrators often inhabit thresholds—boarding houses, trains, bazaars—sites where strangers meet briefly. Narayan constructs Malgudi as a self-sufficient universe through which national transitions (colonial rule to independence, modernization, consumerism) ripple indirectly. If Bond's geography is vertical—hills, mists, precipices—Narayan's is horizontal—streets, bazaar, river, railway station—mapped by routine and community memory.

## 4. Themes

### 4.1 Epiphany and the Everyday

Bond fashions epiphanic moments from chance encounters. In *"The Night Train at Deoli,"* the narrator's recurring glimpse of a basket-seller becomes an emblem of yearning; the unfulfilled meeting intensifies the story's sweetness and ache. Narayan's epiphanies tend to be comic reversals exposing ordinary self-deceptions. In *"An Astrologer's Day,"* the protagonist's faux-prophetic authority collapses into a darkly humorous recognition when past guilt resurfaces; the twist reorders our ethical understanding without romanticizing the character.

### 4.2 Childhood, Innocence, and Moral Education

Bond privileges child perspectives—*"The Blue Umbrella"* stages envy, generosity, and community reconciliation through a fable-like form. Children apprehend nature and emotion directly; adults often learn from them. Narayan is less child-centric; his moral pedagogy emerges from adults' foibles. In *"Engine Trouble,"* an unwitting man's prize (a road-roller) triggers a chain of absurdities that lampoon civic institutions, yet the lesson is social rather than sentimental: fate and bureaucracy conspire to teach humility.

### 4.3 Nature, Place, and Belonging

Nature is an active presence in Bond: mists conceal and reveal; trees, rain, and animals (as in *"Panther's Moon"*) shape human rhythms. Place offers refuge from urban alienation. Narayan, by contrast, renders a cultural ecology: grocers, municipal officials, temple festivals, and local myths constitute Malgudi's 'nature.' Rivers flood, statues are relocated (*"Lawley Road"*), but the drama is civic, not pastoral. Belonging is earned through participation in community rituals rather than through solitary communion with landscape.

### 4.4 Love, Loneliness, and the Unsaid

Bond's narrators often dwell in loneliness softened by tenderness. *"The Eyes Have It"* builds intimacy through dialogue and misperception; irony reveals the narrator's blindness while preserving the encounter's beauty. Narayan treats love tangentially in these stories; his focus is on desire's social consequences. The famous culture-crossing miscommunication in *"A Horse and Two Goats"* underscores how language and class mediate contact.

## 5. Narrative Technique

### 5.1 Point of View and Voice

Bond frequently uses a first-person voice—confessional, conversational, and observant. This voice fosters trust and immediacy, vital for turning small incidents into resonant memories. Narayan favors a third-person limited or omniscient narrator who orchestrates irony with deadpan restraint. The distance enables gentle satire: the narrator often knows more than the characters and invites readers to participate in the joke without cruelty.

### 5.2 Plot Architecture and Pacing

Bond's plots are slender, sometimes circular, ending with a soft fade rather than a conclusive resolution; the point is the feeling distilled. Narayan's short stories often hinge on a single decisive turn—an accident, bureaucratic mix-up, or unexpected confession—after which equilibrium is restored or humorously altered. The result is a clockwork neatness—cause and effect compressed into anecdotal arcs.

### 5.3 Dialogue and Register

Bond's dialogue is economical and mood-driven; silences carry weight. Narayan deploys idiomatic speech patterns to capture Malgudi's social textures—traders' bargaining cadences, officials' circumlocutions, the astrologer's faux-mystical patter. Both subvert British-English decorum by domesticating English to local rhythms, but Narayan's speech registers are broader, serving his satiric ends.

## 6. Characterization

Bond's characters are often solitary figures—students, orphans, shopkeepers—whose psychological depth emerges through gesture and setting more than through backstory. Even antagonists (the petty shopkeeper in *"The Blue Umbrella"*) are redeemable. Narayan's figures are social types—astrologers, municipal clerks, moneylenders, down-on-luck villagers—individualized through quirks. He relishes exposing their rationalizations, yet he rarely condemns; reform arises from embarrassment, not tragedy.

## 7. Humor, Irony, and Tone

Narayan's signature is a dry, situational humor that unmasks pretension while honoring human frailty. The road-roller episode in *"Engine Trouble"* or the statue fiasco in *"Lawley Road"* typifies his comedic engineering. Bond's humor is gentler, often self-deprecating, and secondary to mood; when irony appears—*"The Eyes Have It"*—it produces tenderness rather than satire. Overall tone: Narayan—urbane and amused; Bond—wistful and compassionate.

## 8. Language and Style

Bond's prose is lyrical in its restraint: concrete imagery, sensory detail, and unadorned sentences yield a clarity that feels like mountain air. He is a master of the precise vignette. Narayan writes with classical simplicity and syntactic balance; his diction is plain, but his irony is intricate. Both cultivate readability without sacrificing art.

## 9. The Ethics of Attention

A shared ethical project underlies both bodies of work: attention to the ordinary. Bond dignifies small feelings—first love glimpsed from a train, a villager's envy—suggesting that moral life resides in tiny choices (returning the umbrella, keeping a promise). Narayan dignifies small institutions and professions, revealing how ethics emerge from negotiations—credit, reputation, ritual—in a small town. Each thus offers a counterpoint to grand national narratives: human flourishing is local, relational, and often comic.

## 10. Case Studies: Close Readings in Contrast

### 10.1 *"The Night Train at Deoli"* vs. *"A Horse and Two Goats"*

Both stories stage cross-cultural or cross-class encounters under constraints (a brief train halt; a language barrier). Bond's plot refuses closure—the narrator never meets the girl again—making memory itself the meaning. Narayan's story culminates in a transactional misunderstanding that nonetheless produces a benign outcome; humor, not nostalgia, governs the final note.

### 10.2 *"The Eyes Have It"* vs. *"An Astrologer's Day"*

Each features a concealed truth. Bond's twist—both travelers are blind—reframes the earlier flirtation as a celebration of imagination and sensory substitution. Narayan's twist reveals the astrologer as a former assailant; the surprise sharpens moral ambiguity and critiques the commodification of 'spiritual' services.

### 10.3 *"The Blue Umbrella"* vs. *"Lawley Road"*

Bond's fable pits desire against generosity, ending in forgiveness that restores community harmony. Narayan's civic comedy pits municipal pride against historical confusion; the final adjustment is bureaucratic rather than ethical, emphasizing how public memory is managed.

### 10.4 *"Panther's Moon"* vs. *"Engine Trouble"*

Both stories involve public disruption (a predator in a village; a massive road-roller). Bond heightens elemental danger and the textures of night, producing a tale of communal fear and courage. Narayan turns a mechanical white elephant into a farce about responsibility, luck, and officialdom.

## 11. Comparative Synthesis (At a Glance)

| Dimension | Ruskin Bond | R.K. Narayan |
|---|---|---|
| Dominant Mode | Lyric realism; nostalgia; nature-centered vignettes | Comic realism; social satire; civic microcosm |
| Typical Setting | Himalayan foothills; small hill towns; railways | Malgudi (a South Indian town); markets; municipal offices |
| Protagonists | Children, solitary travelers, outsiders | Shopkeepers, clerks, priests, villagers |
| Plot Movement | Epiphanic, open-ended, mood-driven | Anecdotal, twist-driven, equilibrium restored |
| Tone | Tender, wistful, compassionate | Wry, amused, gently ironic |
| Language | Sensuous imagery; first-person intimacy | Plain style; deadpan narration; idiomatic speech |
| Ethics | Personal kindness, forgiveness, quiet courage | Social responsibility, humility, exposure of pretension |

## 12. Contribution to Indian English Short Fiction

Together, Bond and Narayan broaden the Indian short story's horizons: Bond refines the lyric vignette and the child-centered fable; Narayan perfects the civic anecdote and the ethical comedy. Their different geographies—Himalaya and Malgudi—become laboratories for the Anglophone Indian sentence: supple, local, and humane. They demonstrate that 'simplicity' is an artistic choice that can yield high emotional and moral complexity.

## 13. Conclusion

This comparative reading suggests that the apparent simplicity of Bond and Narayan conceals divergent aesthetic programs. Bond pursues intimacy with place and fleeting human contact, crafting stories where nature and memory collaborate to midwife meaning. Narayan engineers comic plots that expose self-importance and mediate conflict through community norms. Read together, they offer complementary grammars of hope: the kindness of strangers and the sanity of everyday institutions. In classrooms and beyond, pairing them trains readers to recognize the poetry of small things and the comedy of human arrangements.

## 14. Works Cited (References Selected)


- Bond, Ruskin. *Collected Short Stories*. (Various editions).
- Bond, Ruskin. *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*.
- Bond, Ruskin. *The Blue Umbrella*.
- Bond, Ruskin. *The Eyes Are Not Here / The Eyes Have It*.
- Narayan, R.K. *Malgudi Days*.
- Narayan, R.K. *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories*.
- Narayan, R.K. *Lawley Road and Other Stories*.
- Critical essays and introductions in Penguin/Indian editions of both authors. (Instructor may add local scholarly sources.)