

“Constructing Childhood in Indian Children’s Literature: A Comparative Analysis of Nature, Humour, and Social Values in Natasha Sharma and Ruskin Bond”

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Abstract:

Children’s literature occupies an important position in Indian English literature because it reflects the imaginative world of childhood while simultaneously introducing young readers to social values, cultural traditions, relationships and the natural environment. Among contemporary Indian writers for children, Natasha Sharma and Ruskin Bond occupy distinctive positions. Although their literary periods, narrative strategies and thematic emphases differ, both writers demonstrate a deep understanding of children’s curiosity, imagination, emotions and everyday experiences. This research paper presents a comparative study of selected children’s narratives by Natasha Sharma and Ruskin Bond, focusing particularly on childhood, nature, humour, family relationships, cultural consciousness, values and narrative technique. Bond’s stories frequently portray children in close association with the Himalayan landscape, animals, trees, villages and small towns. His child characters learn through observation, friendship, adventure and their interaction with nature. Sharma, on the other hand, employs humour, illustrations, historical settings, playful situations and accessible language to introduce children to Indian history, culture and contemporary experiences. Her *History Mystery* series demonstrates how historical personalities and events can be transformed into engaging narratives for young readers. The paper argues that while Bond tends to discover extraordinary meaning in ordinary experiences of childhood and nature, Sharma often transforms history, culture and everyday situations into lively and educational narratives. Both writers, however, reject excessively didactic children’s literature and instead communicate values through enjoyable storytelling. Their works demonstrate the richness and diversity of Indian children’s literature in English.

Keywords: Natasha Sharma, Ruskin Bond, Indian Children’s Literature, Childhood, Nature, Humour, History, Cultural Identity, Values, Comparative Literature

Introduction

Children's literature is an important literary and cultural space in which childhood experiences, imagination, emotions, social relationships and ethical values are represented. Literature written for children is not merely intended to entertain young readers; it can also encourage curiosity, empathy, creativity and an understanding of the world. In the Indian context, children's literature has developed into a diverse field that incorporates mythology, history, folklore, contemporary life, nature, humour and social concerns.

Ruskin Bond is one of the most prominent Indian writers associated with children's literature. Born in 1934, Bond has written extensively about childhood, nature, animals, friendship and life in the Himalayan foothills. His association with children's literature was also recognised through the Padma Shri, awarded to him in 1999 for his contribution to the field. His writing is particularly notable for its simple language, intimate narrative voice and close attention to ordinary experiences.

Natasha Sharma represents a younger generation of Indian children's writers. She is an award-winning author whose works encompass picture books, early chapter books and middle-grade historical fiction. Her publications include the *History Mystery* series and books such as *Bonkers!*, *Tughlaq and the Stolen Sweets*, *Razia and the Pesky Presents* and **The Good Indian Child's Guide to Eating Mangoes**.

A comparison between Sharma and Bond is significant because both writers engage with the child reader through accessible storytelling while adopting markedly different literary strategies. Bond frequently creates a world in which children discover themselves through nature, friendship and adventure. Sharma frequently combines humour, history, cultural references and contemporary childhood experiences. Thus, their works provide two different yet complementary perspectives on Indian childhood.

The present study examines the similarities and differences between selected works of Natasha Sharma and Ruskin Bond. It focuses on the representation of childhood, the role of nature, humour, family and social relationships, cultural consciousness, moral values and narrative technique.

2. Literary Review

The literary significance of Ruskin Bond has attracted considerable critical attention. Scholars have particularly examined his treatment of childhood, nature, landscape and human relationships. Himanshu Kumar, in his study "Nature and Childhood in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories," argues that Bond's child characters develop an intimate relationship with nature and that the natural environment contributes significantly to their perceptions and experiences. The study also identifies curiosity, innocence, courage and adventure as important qualities of Bond's young characters.

The Himalayan landscape is central to Bond's literary imagination. His stories frequently situate children in small towns, villages and hill environments where trees, rivers,

birds and animals become part of everyday life. Nature is therefore not simply a background against which events occur; it frequently becomes an active presence in the child's experience. Bond's stories have been noted for transforming ordinary encounters with animals, forests and landscapes into memorable experiences for young readers.

Latha K. Reddy observes that Bond's works are particularly successful in their portrayal of child characters, their activities, desires and feelings. His simple and enjoyable language enables his stories to remain accessible to children while also addressing deeper questions of identity and human relationships.

Recent scholarship continues to recognise Bond's importance to Indian children's literature. A 2026 study of Bond's contribution emphasises childhood, nature, storytelling and the educational significance of his writing. It argues that his realistic portrayal of childhood and celebration of nature contribute to the continuing appeal of his work among young readers.

Compared with the substantial scholarship on Bond, Natasha Sharma has received comparatively less academic attention. Her official author profile presents her as a children's writer working across several age groups and genres, including picture books, early chapter books and historical fiction. Her *History Mystery* series is particularly significant because it introduces young readers to Indian historical figures and events through humour, mystery and accessible storytelling. Her works therefore demonstrate an approach in which education and entertainment operate together rather than separately.

Sharma's works are especially important in the context of contemporary Indian children's publishing because they introduce history and cultural knowledge through narratives designed for young readers. Her website categorises her books according to age and format, including picture books, the *History Mystery* series for approximately 7–12-year-old readers and early-to-middle-grade works.

The existing scholarship on Bond establishes the importance of nature, childhood and simplicity in his writing. However, there is comparatively greater scope for examining contemporary writers such as Natasha Sharma alongside established children's authors. A comparative study can therefore reveal how Indian children's literature has moved from primarily nature-centred and autobiographical childhood narratives towards more varied forms incorporating history, humour, visual storytelling and contemporary cultural experiences.

3. Childhood in Natasha Sharma and Ruskin Bond

Childhood is the central thematic territory shared by both writers. However, they represent it in different ways.

In Ruskin Bond, childhood is generally associated with freedom, curiosity, adventure and an intimate relationship with the surrounding world. His young characters explore forests, hills, railway stations, villages and neighbourhoods. Their adventures often arise from ordinary events rather than extraordinary circumstances. A walk, a journey, an encounter with an animal or the discovery of a tree can become a meaningful experience. Bond's children are not presented as perfect or idealised figures. They can be mischievous, adventurous, curious and occasionally disobedient. Such characteristics make them realistic. Their experiences gradually develop their understanding of friendship, responsibility, courage and compassion.

Natasha Sharma also presents children as curious and energetic, but her narrative situations are often more explicitly playful and humorous. She uses language and storytelling techniques appropriate to young readers and creates situations in which children can learn without feeling that they are being given a formal lesson. Her historical narratives, particularly the *History Mystery* series, bring historical personalities into a world that young readers can approach with curiosity and humour.

The difference is therefore one of emphasis. Bond frequently reconstructs childhood through memory, landscape and personal experience, whereas Sharma creates narratives that deliberately invite children to explore history, culture and contemporary experiences through humour and accessible storytelling.

4. Nature and the Environment

Nature is one of the most distinctive features of Ruskin Bond's writing. Mountains, forests, trees, rivers, birds and animals form an essential part of his fictional universe. His child characters do not experience nature as something distant from human life. Instead, nature becomes a companion, teacher and source of emotional comfort.

In stories such as "The Cherry Tree," the growth of a tree parallels the emotional development of the child. The tree becomes a symbol of patience, growth and the passage of time. Similarly, Bond's animal stories encourage sympathy towards non-human life. His narratives repeatedly suggest that human beings share the world with other living creatures. Research on Bond's children's stories has particularly highlighted the connection between nature and childhood. His young characters derive knowledge, courage and emotional strength through their interaction with the natural environment.

Natasha Sharma's treatment of nature is comparatively less central than Bond's. Her children's narratives frequently emphasise history, humour, cultural identity and everyday experiences. Nevertheless, her work shares Bond's belief that children learn most effectively when information is presented through engaging stories rather than abstract instruction.

Thus, Bond can be described as a writer who makes nature an essential element of childhood, while Sharma more frequently makes culture, history and social experience the means through which children encounter the world.

5. Humour and Imagination

Humour is an important feature of Natasha Sharma's writing. Her narratives frequently use amusing situations, wordplay, surprising incidents and playful characters to maintain the interest of young readers. This technique is particularly effective in historical fiction because it prevents historical information from becoming dry or excessively academic.

Bond's humour is generally quieter and more observational. It often emerges from the innocence of children, their misunderstandings, their interactions with adults and their encounters with animals. His stories rarely depend on exaggerated comic situations. Instead, humour emerges naturally from everyday life.

Both writers understand that children respond strongly to stories that entertain them. The difference lies in their method. Sharma tends towards lively, contemporary and playful humour, while Bond frequently uses gentle humour emerging from character and situation.

6. Family, Friendship and Human Relationships

Family and friendship are central to the emotional world of both writers. Bond's child characters often develop meaningful relationships with grandparents, parents, friends, strangers and animals. His stories suggest that emotional relationships can exist beyond conventional family structures.

Grandparents, in particular, often play important roles in Bond's children's narratives. They can function as companions, storytellers, guides and sources of emotional security.

Sharma's stories similarly place children within networks of family and social relationships. Her narratives often explore relationships through humour and everyday experiences. In her historical works, interpersonal relationships are also used to make historical characters more accessible to contemporary children.

Both writers therefore resist presenting childhood as an isolated stage. Childhood in their works is shaped by relationships with adults, peers, animals and the wider social environment.

7. History, Culture and Indian Identity

One of the strongest differences between Sharma and Bond is their treatment of history and culture.

Bond's writing frequently reflects the cultural atmosphere of the Himalayan regions in which many of his stories are set. His India is visible through local communities,

landscapes, food, festivals, animals, railway stations and everyday interactions. His approach to Indian identity is often subtle and experiential.

Sharma, in contrast, frequently brings Indian history directly into children's literature. The *History Mystery* series is an important example of this approach. Historical personalities and events are transformed into narratives suitable for young readers. Her works on figures such as Tughlaq, Razia and other historical personalities make the past approachable through humour and adventure.

Consequently, Bond often makes culture visible through everyday life, whereas Sharma more consciously converts historical and cultural knowledge into children's narratives.

8. Moral Values and Educational Dimensions

Children's literature has traditionally been associated with moral education, but both writers avoid excessive preaching. Their values emerge through narrative experience. Bond's stories communicate values such as kindness, compassion, friendship, courage, patience and respect for nature. The lessons are rarely stated directly. Instead, readers discover them through the experiences of the characters.

Sharma also combines entertainment with educational value. Her historical fiction encourages children to become interested in India's past while her humorous narratives develop curiosity and imagination. Rather than presenting history as a collection of dates and facts, she transforms it into a story.

This approach is pedagogically significant. Young readers are more likely to remember information when it is connected with characters, humour, mystery and narrative conflict. Sharma's work therefore demonstrates the potential of children's literature as an alternative mode of informal education.

9. Narrative Technique and Language

Ruskin Bond is well known for his simple, lyrical and descriptive prose. His language is accessible without being simplistic. Descriptions of landscapes, weather, trees, birds and mountains contribute to the atmosphere of his stories. His first-person and third-person narratives often create intimacy between narrator and reader.

Bond's narrative technique is generally understated. He does not depend on elaborate plots. Instead, he gives importance to characters, atmosphere and small events. His stories demonstrate how apparently ordinary experiences can acquire emotional significance.

Natasha Sharma's narrative style is more contemporary and often more playful. Her books are designed for different age groups and formats, and she makes use of humour, dialogue, visual elements and accessible vocabulary. Her author profile confirms that her work ranges from picture books to early chapter books and middle-grade historical fiction.

Therefore, while Bond's style may be described as lyrical, reflective and nature-oriented, Sharma's style is frequently energetic, humorous and educationally engaging.

10. Discussion

The comparison demonstrates that both writers recognise the importance of meeting children at the level of their imagination. Neither writer depends entirely upon direct moral instruction. Instead, they create situations through which children can discover values themselves.

Bond's literary world is strongly connected with place. His Himalayan landscape provides both the physical and emotional setting for childhood. The environment influences the development of his characters and frequently becomes a source of knowledge and companionship. His treatment of nature has consequently attracted significant critical attention.

Sharma's literary world is more diverse in terms of genre and subject matter. Her work moves between picture books, early chapter books and historical fiction. Her use of humour and historical narratives demonstrates how contemporary children's literature can make cultural knowledge accessible without sacrificing entertainment.

The two writers can therefore be understood as representing different stages and tendencies within Indian children's literature. Bond's works are deeply rooted in landscape, memory and the experience of childhood, whereas Sharma's works reflect contemporary approaches to children's publishing in which history, humour, visual storytelling and age-specific narratives are combined.

Their difference should not be viewed as a contradiction. Rather, it demonstrates the variety of Indian children's literature. Bond shows how a simple encounter with a tree, bird, animal or friend can become a meaningful story. Sharma demonstrates how history, culture and everyday experiences can be transformed into engaging narratives for young readers.

11. Conclusion

The comparative study of Natasha Sharma and Ruskin Bond reveals two distinctive but complementary approaches to Indian children's literature. Both writers understand the emotional and imaginative needs of children and employ accessible storytelling to create meaningful reading experiences.

Ruskin Bond's greatest strength lies in his representation of childhood in close relationship with nature. His mountains, trees, birds, animals and small communities form an inseparable part of his children's world. His stories celebrate curiosity, friendship, simplicity and compassion while quietly encouraging readers to respect the natural environment. Contemporary scholarship continues to identify childhood and nature as central elements of Bond's literary achievement.

Natasha Sharma represents a more contemporary and genre-diverse approach. Her work includes picture books, early chapter books and historical fiction, and her *History Mystery* books demonstrate the possibilities of combining historical knowledge with humour and narrative entertainment.

The major difference between the writers lies in their thematic emphasis. Bond frequently uses nature, place and personal experience to explore childhood, whereas Sharma uses humour, history, culture and contemporary storytelling techniques to engage young readers. Yet both writers share a fundamental commitment to making literature enjoyable, accessible and meaningful for children.

The comparison ultimately establishes that Indian children's literature is neither homogeneous nor limited to moral instruction. It is a dynamic literary field capable of representing nature, history, culture, imagination, humour and childhood in multiple forms. Ruskin Bond and Natasha Sharma, despite their different literary strategies, contribute significantly to this diversity. Their works encourage children not merely to read but to observe, imagine, question, remember and understand the world around them.

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