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The Portrayal of Girl Child in Ruskin Bond's *The Blue Umbrella*

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond, Indian author of British decent, was born on 19 May 1935 at Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. He was raised at Jamnagar (Gujarat), Shimla and Dehradun. He is a well-known Indian writer in English. He has written more than hundred short stories, six novels, three collection of verse and over thirty books for children. He is considered to be an icon among Indian writers and children's author and a top novelist. He received Sahitya Academy award for his book; *Our Trees Still Grow at Dehra* in 1992, and was honored with Padam Shree in 1999 for his lifetime contribution to Indian literature in English. He was awarded with Padam Bhusham in 2014. He has been writing for the last fifty years in different genre of literature. His stories and novels got wide publicity worldwide in India. Various directors produced films on his novels. He was also appreciated by various prizes and awards at national level. In 2005, the Bollywood director Vishal Bhardwaj made a film based on his popular novel for children, *The Blue Umbrella*. The movie won the National Award for best Children's film. It is a fine specimen published in 1992. This novella has also been filmed in 2007. It is set in a small village of Garhwal, where a little highland girl, Binya lives. She trades her lucky leopard claw pendent with a picknicker lady for a pretty blue umbrella.

Keyword- Kindness, Fantasy, Imagination, Adventure, Facts, Fiction, Empathy, Redemption

The Blue Umbrella is the most interesting novella written by Ruskin Bond. It is a timeless fiction. The character of Binya is always remains immortal in the heart of readers. *The Blue Umbrella*, published in 1972, became more popular and was made into a film. Binya is the central character of the novella. In the novella, the blue Umbrella Binya is a little girl of about ten or eleven year old. She is very beautiful girl in her village. It is a story of a little girl Binya who lives with her mother and brother in the hilly village of Garhwal.

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The Blue Umbrella is a humorous and novella set in the hills of Garhwal. It is a very popular children's novella. Binya is the main character of this novella. There are other characters also in the story but the story revolves Binya and her beautiful blue umbrella. She is a poor little hilly girl who fights with the internal and external forces of life. *The Blue Umbrella* is written in simple and witty language. In this short story the ordinary girl becomes heroic.

Binya is a poor little girl of hills of Garhwal. Her full name is Binya Devi. She has her brother whose name is Bijju. She has two cows- namely Neelu and Gori. Her mother sells cow milk to the villagers. Binya is very fair, strong and has dark eyes. In this story Ruskin Bond has portrayed the strong possession for the blue Umbrella for the poor little hilly girl Binya. He has shown the true fantasy of a girl child for beautiful Blue Umbrella. Binya is very much fascinated by Blue umbrella which she exchanges it for her lucky leopard's claw pendent with a picnicker lady for a pretty blue Umbrella. None in the village had such a fine Umbrella and wherever Binya goes the Umbrella goes too.

The Blue Umbrella is a beautiful story about a girl, Binya and her adventures with a bright blue silk Umbrella, which she exchange with her lucky leopard claw pendent to the a city woman who came to the village for a picnic. This story takes place in a village called Garhwal located in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is cleared that "The Umbrella was like a flower, a great blue flower that had spring up on the dry brown hillside" (*The Blue Umbrella*, 19).

The story starts in a simple manner with Binya procuring the Umbrella from a city lady and showing it off to the entire village. The villagers get jealous of her Umbrella and desire to have similar too. Though the novella is written for children, it can be equally enjoyed by adult too. *The Blue Umbrella* is divided into seven parts. The first one of the novella is completely on Binya. She is an innocent hilly girl and has very much charm and fascination for the blue umbrella. She is so much attracted to the umbrella that she is ready to exchange her lucky charm- the tiger claw pendent to the picnicker for the blue umbrella. She does not mind even for the slightest bit to settle the bargain. She even did not think twice for exchanging her tiger claw pendent for the fancy of the blue umbrella. She is in the seventh heaven of happiness. She is so much happy because it is an item of rich lady and it is a bright blue silk Umbrella. Soon it becomes a topic of conversation for villagers and children. Her umbrella is so much beautiful that everyone wants to touch or hold it. In hills there is no hot Sun, it is only useful in rain. She is completely a village girl belonging whole heartedly to her village. She knows to everyone in the village and roams in the lap of nature. She has an elder brother, Bijju who is two-year elder to her. She has two cows, Neelu and Gori- the grey and fair cows. In the very chapter she is returning from the hills to the village with her cows. Binya is an independent girl. She often takes cows to graze. She is a nature loving person. Cows also like Binya because she allows

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cows to wander in the valley. Her elder brother, Bijju pulls them with their tail and fetches them to the village. Binya is a simple and honest girl child of mountain and the whole village knows her. She is also adept at climbing trees, as in case of the cherry tree. She wanders in the whole village with the blue Umbrella without fear. She is a fearless girl and “had cast a spell over her, drawing her forward almost against her will” (*The Blue Umbrella*, 20).

Binya is a cheerful young girl who is always ready to smile. She did not feel bad when Ram Bharaso comments at her for the umbrella that it is meant for rich ladies. She is also very much determined to get the umbrella. She runs after the umbrella and climbs down the treacherous cliff and onto the cherry tree just to get her umbrella. Binya is a kind hearted girl. The village children know her to be a kind person. She comes face to face with a snake. She has a presence of mind to hit the snake with the umbrella and save herself from a snake bite. Binya is a positive minded girl.

In the next three chapters the story focus on the old man named Ram Bharosa- who is the owner of a tea shop in Tehri Road. He sells food items, grocery, and soft drink without refrigerator. He is a rich tea shopkeeper. But as he sees the Umbrella, he is so much jealous of it and wanted that Umbrella also. He tries every trick to get it. Wherever Binya goes she takes the umbrella with her. She seldom closes the umbrella. Ram Bharosa has avarice for it. He tries every way to get the Umbrella but all in vain. Ram Bharosa offers Binya five rupees in exchange of Umbrella but Binya refuses the amount. He wanted to give more money for the umbrella but she does not sell the umbrella at any price. She loves the blue umbrella very much. Ram Bharosa is very much jealous of the blue umbrella that he wants to get it in any way. So, he took the help of Rajaram who is the servant of his shop to steal it.

Everyone in the village is jealous of the blue umbrella. The villagers are very much jealous of the bright blue silk umbrella because they have never seen such a beautiful blue umbrella in the village. The school master wife also wants to possess the same blue umbrella and also jealous of Binya blue Umbrella because it is very costly and Binya is a poor village girl. The school master wife is second class B. A. pass. She is very much jealous of blue umbrella. Pujari is also envious of the umbrella. Adult starts criticizing Binya for possessing umbrella. But children admire the blue umbrella. Here Bond contradicts the innocence of children with materialistic approach of adult. Bond writes, “Unlike the adult, the children didn’t have to pretend. They were full of praise for the Umbrella” (*The Blue Umbrella*, 29).

Rajaram makes a fail attempt to steal the umbrella and is caught by Bijju and Binya ultimately revealing the truth about Ram Bharosa’s evil intention to steal Umbrella as a result his business get affected. “You mean to steal it, don’t you, you wretch? What a delightful child you are! I’m glad you are not my son or my enemy” (*The Blue Umbrella*, 34).

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Ram Bharosa has kept Rajaram as a servant in his shop. Ram Bharosa and Rajaram both make a plan to steal the Umbrella. One day when Binya is coming from the hillside, a long-legged boy started coming after her. At the same time Bijju is also coming from another direction. Bijju had also a bundle of sticks for kitchen fire. As he reaches near the path, he sees Binya is going down the hill side. Bijju asked her about the matter. She cried that Rajaram has stolen her umbrella. Bijju kept down the bundle of sticks and runs after Rajaram and catches him. Rajaram is a taller boy but Bijju was much stronger. Bijju catches Rajaram red handed. Bijju and Rajaram fight with each other. Rajaram throws the umbrella in the river and Binya finds it from the river. Bijju gets the umbrella from Rajaram. Bijju is successful and wins the fight. Rajaram loses the combat. Binya gets the umbrella back by her sister. At last Rajaram tells Bijju that he had stolen the umbrella otherwise he would lose his job.

Bond has also portrayed the vivid description of nature in the novella *The Blue Umbrella*. He has given the description of cheery trees, palm trees, oak trees and hills Bond narrates the pine forest of the Himalayan region throughout this story. These pine forest are the largest in the Indo-pacific areas. He shows the intimacy of Binya and cows with the pine trees. In the fourth chapter of opening paragraph starts as:

The rain set in, and the sun only made brief appearance. The hill turned a lush green. Ferns sprang up on walls and tree-trunks. Giant lilies reared up like leopard from the tall grass. A white mist coiled and uncoiled as it floated up from the valley. It was a beautiful season, except for the leeches. (*The Blue Umbrella*, 31)

In the sixth chapter the month of October is started and rain-were stopped. Weather is changing and winter is approaching. Now the umbrella has turned pale in color and there were patches on it several places. But still it is the prettiest umbrella in the village. Binya carries her wherever she goes in the village.

Ram Bharosa, the rich shopkeeper, has left all the hopes to get the umbrella. Now he realizes that he should not keep eye on the umbrella. Due to this blue umbrella he has suffered a lot. He has jealousy, hatred, possessiveness was there in the attitude of Ram Bharosa. Now he become lonely because people has stop coming to his shop. When villagers come to know that Ram Bharosa tries to steal the umbrella but people get him red handed. Now villagers did not trust on Ram Bharosa. The villagers do not buy any soap, tea or matches from his shop instead they would like to prefer to go walk extra kilometers from another shop near Tehri bus stand. Children also start making fun of Ram Bharosa.

Ram Bharosa's reputation has gone into vain. No customer comes to his shop. He becomes all alone. All day he sits in his shop but no customer comes to his shop. He also loses

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his health and eats very less. No money is coming to him by his shop. He has some saving in the Tehri bank. He felt repentance for his deeds.

Everyday Binya and Bijju pass from the Ram Bharosa's shop. Now Binya feels miserable for the condition of Ram Bharosa. She feels due to the blue umbrella Ram Bharosa is facing such situation. So, whenever she passes his shop, she does not open her umbrella thinking that the sight of umbrella will hurt him further. The umbrella is responsible for the ruinous condition of Ram Bharosa and his shop. She looks at the misery of the old man, which she feels to have been caused by her love for the umbrella. She closes down her umbrella every time when she passes the shop and opens it only after she is far from it. The whole set of circumstances arouse every emotion in the story be it love, temptation, greed, possession, viciousness, pride, fear, fulfillment, regret, loneliness, happiness, care and selfless motives.

One day in the end of October Binya goes to the shop of old man Ram Bharosa with ten paisa in her pocket. As there is no customer come in the shop. She is the first customer in his shop after two weeks. He is very much surprise to see Binya at his shop. Ram Bharosa does not believe himself than Binya keeps a coin on the counter. First, Ram Bharosa thinks that it must be a bad coin than Ram Bharosa picks it up and check it. It is a good coin. He gives Binya the toffee for her coin.

As Binya leaves the shop, she knowingly leaves the umbrella in the shop. Ram Bharosa sees the closed umbrella on the counter. Firstly he is very happy to see it because he always wanted the umbrella. He hides it at the back of the shop. Now he thinks that no one could know that Binya had left it in his shop. He opened the umbrella with his trembling bony hand and opens it by the handle. He stands under it in the dark shadow of his shop. In his shop there is no sun or rain could ever reach. So it is of no use to me. "What use is an umbrella to me?" (*The Blue Umbrella*, 40).

Ram Bharosa come out from his shop and runs after Binya and shouts that she has left her umbrella in his shop. Binya does not take the umbrella and she says that he should take the umbrella. She does not need it anymore. Ram Bharosa says that it is a pretty umbrella and the best umbrella in the village. Binya gives the umbrella to Ram Bharosa and says, "But an umbrella isn't everything" (*The Blue Umbrella*, 40).

She leaves that place giving the umbrella to Ram Bharosa and tells the futility of material possession. An umbrella is however beautiful and precious it may be, but cannot ensure peace and amity. Such realization and maturity is beyond her age. Binya's sacrifice brings back happiness and calmness. Her broadness of mind touches the old shop-keeper.

In the seventh and last chapter Ram Bharosa occupies the blue umbrella from Binya as a gift. He is very much delighted and happier than ever. Now he can go into sun and rain. Now he

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is healthier than before. He uses the umbrella to chase away pigs and goats. It is always kept open outside the shop in this way that it has become everyone's umbrella. But as the time passes the Blue umbrella is not remain as bright as before. It is now faded and patchy but it is still the best umbrella in the village.

Now the reputation of the shopkeeper has come back. People sit and purchase items from the shop. Binya and Bijju also drink cup of tea from the shop. Ram Bharosa gives them extra milk and sugar in the tea because they like tea milky and sweets.

One night a bear entered the shop of Ram Bharosa. In the high ranges of Himalayas there was snow. And bear couldnot find any food to obtain. So he came near the village. He was on the tin roof of Ram Bharosa shop, he ate huge pumpkin which were ripening on the roof of the shop. As he climb off the roof the bear lost his claw. Next day when Ram Bharosa came to his shop he found the claw just outside the door of his shop. He picks up and keeps in his pocket because bears claw was a lucky charm.

Next day he went to the market with the claw and gave it to silversmith to make locket for the claw and also gave a thin silver chain. When Ram Bharosa came he paid the silver smith ten rupees for his work. He gift Binya a silver pendent with bear's claw. One day Binya is passing from his shop then Ram Bharosa called her out that he wants to give something to her. He showed the bear's claw pendent to her and said it is luckier than leopard's claw. This humble act of kindness leads Ram Bharosa to gift Binya a bear claw pendant in a silver chain. She gets her lucky charm back for an unintentional gesture of her exchange of umbrella. All the characters turn round invoking an unworked importance of people and relation of life.

Bond effectively blends the tradition and canon of India and English Children's literature in this story. By portraying Binya's free spiritedness, her heroic adventure to save her umbrella from a thief and her possession for blue umbrella. Bond focuses the individuality of a child as does the English children's literature. The story highlights the innocence of children and communicates the lesson of kindness, sympathy and brotherhood like the traditional children's literature in India does.

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