

Human Nature - Materialism, Greed and Kindness Unveiled through Ruskin Bond's *The Blue Umbrella*

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Abstract. Ruskin Bond is a proficient Indian author of British descent who writes in multiple genres and is best known for his short stories for children. Bond's short novel *The Blue Umbrella* is centered on diverse aspects of human nature. In this novel, demonstration of human nature includes materialism, greed, selfishness, kindness and innocence. Being great children's authors of modern times, he often shows the mind-set of adults through their relation with children. In this novel he successfully does so through the young girl named Binya (Binyadevi). He has also thrown light on children's mental development through the process. The novel *The Blue Umbrella* elaborates how ten years old Binya faces numerous problems because of her blue umbrella. Though she had many problems in her life, she managed to spread to love by giving her beloved umbrella to the RamBharosa – an old shopkeeper because of whom she faced assorted problems late on. But even being a child, she is well aware with the fact that merely love can bring a smile on someone's face. This novel of Ruskin Bond also focuses on the behaviour of people in our society which aids to develop a child emotionally. Outstandingly, it plugs the fact that greed, selfishness and materialistic outlook can destroy a society, but love and kindness can structure a better society.

Keywords: Nature; culture; greed; materialism; kindness; innocence; fantasy; children's psychology.

Ruskin Bond was born on 19 May 1934 in Kasauli, Punjab, British India. Though Bond is an Indian author of British descent, he is considered to be an icon among Indian novelists and children's authors. His contribution to children's literature is dominant. He believes writing for children undertake certain responsibility and that's why he always endeavours to bestow a positive note to children through his writings. However, for adults, it doesn't matter; you can easily hit a negative note because by that time they have grown up and lose their innocence. (Bond, IANS, Google)

Ruskin Bond's short novel *The Blue Umbrella* is one of the finest examples of children literature, manifests numerous clashing

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emotions resembling materialism, greed, innocence, love etc. The *Blue Umbrella* is a short novel about a poor 10 years old girl Binya, who amazingly epitomizes everyday life of people in Garhwal, India. She owns a tiger's claw necklace which according to her mother is not merely precious but as well brings good luck for the little girl Binya. It is quite common for the people of Garhwal to wear such lucky charm with a belief to keep away evil spirits :

‘A necklace of sorts’. A necklace of sorts.
“It’s a pendant—see, there’s a claw hanging from it!” “It’s a tiger’s claw,” said the man beside her. (He had never seen a tiger’s claw.) A lucky charm. (*The Blue Umbrella*, 11)

Bond's *The Blue Umbrella* as well shows the culture of the people of Garhwal. One day when Binya went to the forest to fetch her cattle named Neelu and Gori, she came across some visitors there and among those one of the visitor blue umbrella fascinated her. One of the lady picnickers offered Binya to buy her lucky charm made of leopard's claw in exchange of an appealing umbrella. Binya willingly gave it to her. Soon, she gets emotionally attached to the umbrella, which later on became a reason in emerging a number of problems.

Through his novel, *The Blue Umbrella*, Ruskin Bond prides to show that children are not greedy as such. Greediness and materialism in children are mainly a learned behaviour. As children are innocent by heart and this is the reason when they ask for something that cannot be called greed but it's quite different in the case of adults. In the *The Blue Umbrella*, the protagonist Binya already has a beautiful materialistic thing – the tiger's claw necklace. So, it is likely for her to develop some captivation about magnificent materialistic things. As she is a child, it is very natural for her to get easily attracted towards bright, fancy thing and that is blue umbrella for her. Instead of stealing it innocently from the visitors, she preferred to exchange her lucky charm necklace to get alluring blue umbrella. Here, it shows, being a child, she is so innocent and does not even hesitate to give her lucky necklace for the umbrella which left her undergo many different unexpected circumstances. But it is quite different in case of the picnicker woman whose umbrella Binya gets in exchange because that woman first had argument with Binya to get her necklace and later gets angry when she refused to give it, ‘My umbrella!’ yelled the young woman. ‘She wants my umbrella. What cheek!’ (12)’.

This depicts that an adult can be dishonest to meet his/her desire. Ram Bharosa is another adult character of the novel who as well remained astonished witnessing the charm of the blue umbrella and has an eye on it for some time and therefore he offered Binya some money to own it, 'I have an idea, said the shopkeeper. It's no use to you, that umbrella. Why not sell it to me? I'll give you five rupees for it'(17).

Ram Bharosa becomes greedy enough for the umbrella that he even tried to steal it in unethical manner with the help of a young boy named Raja Ram who has been also helping him in his shop. However, at the end, the little girl Binya gives her precious umbrella to him seeing his plight, which eventually proves children are not greedy as such.

Here, the differences can be glimpsed clearly. Though Binya is very poor and need money for her family, she refused to take money from the lady and Ram Bharosa respectively. It won't be wrong to say that being a child, she is not matured enough to know the value of money which the picnicker lady and Ram Bharosa know. For her, what exactly matter is the enticing blue umbrella, because we know children are easily attracted to beautiful things. Instead, the lady and the adult behaves like a child, because she is completely propelled by how her greed. She is selfish enough that she is not willing to give an umbrella to the little girl simply. She is so selfish that she aspires to own both the umbrella and the necklace.

The values of money or precious things are widely acknowledged to the adults but not to the children. This can also be seen in the novel *Leela's Friend* by R. K. Narayan and *Fisherman and his Wife* by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm's novel characters. Leela being a child is unaware of the value of the chain which her mother finds the chain from a turmeric pot. She does not have the greed for materialistic things as her mother have. For Leela, it is merely a toy for playing or an appealing thing to wear, 'He is a thief. He has taken away your gold chain.' 'Let him. I will have a new chain', Leela said, and all of them laugh (*Leela's Friend*, 11).

Here Leela's mother appears as the character of the lady in the novel *The Blue Umbrella*. On the other hand, in the story – *The Fisherman* the wife of the fisherman becomes so greedy that she cannot think of anything except the materialistic things like a selfish person. This is the way adults have more greed than children. Also, the things that suit a child do not suit an adult. Moreover, adults merely remain engaged in

meeting their greed. Thus, it proves, children are not as greedy and materialistic as adults.

When it comes to greed, the character of Ram Bharosa is portrayed beautifully. The boy Rajaram who is the classmate of Binya's brother Bijju pass the idea of stealing the umbrella from Binya. The time Rajaram tries to steal the blue umbrella, he put all the blames on Ram Bharosa. He even threatened him by saying that if he fails to steal the umbrella for him; he will be thrown out of the job, 'It was that skinflint Ram Bharosa', said Rajaram. 'He told me to get it for him. He said if I didn't fetch it, I'd lose my job' (*The Blue Umbrella*,48). But this is not the fact as Rajaram lies to Bijju to save himself. His thinking that time about losing job converted into reality. It makes a direct impact on trust. The guilt feeling weaken and disappear the boldness of own character and this is proven in the case of Rajaram.

The theory of children psychology is seem here. As per children psychology, social factors as well plays crucial role in the process of children's mind development. Generally, a child learns everything from what they see in adults. The reason behind Rajaram telling lies to Bijju is to please his employer and earn some rupees. He learned from Ram Bharosa how he has been manipulating the children to get the materialistic objects that he sells in his shop. Also guts to tell a lie in him came from his boss Ram Bharosa. His encouragement to steal the umbrella made Raja Ram brave to do unethical things and definitely it made him become more fearless to do anything to protect himself. Here, we can see how society and adults play a crucial role in shaping the characters of a child, for either good or bad. Though sometime, lies become essential to protect ourselves but we can overlook it do not harm anyone.

In *The Blue Umbrella*, we could not remain away appreciating the kindness on Binya's part towards a man who proves to be a deceitful one. In this novel, the deceitful person is Ram Bharosa. He is opposite of his name in the beginning of the story of *The Blue Umbrella*. He tries to steal the materialistic object-blue umbrella by the help of the Rajaram. If he has aspired, he could have not inspired Rajaram for performing such act of stealing the blue umbrella. On the contrary, he himself becomes desperate to have such materialistic thing. Even, he remained ready to do anything for that. Because of his act, the little girl Binya had to undergo arrays of problems and also she has to remain careful throughout to protect her precious object.

The news of the umbrella being stolen from Binya by Ram Bharosa spread in the village like bonfire. Because of his act, people from the village stopped coming to his shop. Everyone in the village turned against him and this made him realize what he has actually done. Though, seeing him in pitiable state, Binya gradually started feeling sorry for him. She is a kind of girl who always remained happy in making others happy, "Binya gave the umbrella a twirl and smiled at Ram Bharosa. She was always ready with her smile, and would willingly have lent it to anyone who was feeling unhappy". (17)

Ultimately, she has taken a firm decision to bring back the smile on Ram Bharosa's face. For that she left her precious yet pretty umbrella at the shop of Ram Bharosa. As he is repentant by his act of stealing the blue umbrella, he now intends to return it. He could do so because he realized his mistake now. On the other hand, Binya gave the umbrella to see a smile on his face. The little girl sacrificed her happiness. Though, she is small by her age, she knew how to sacrifice her happiness symbolized the blue umbrella for the happiness of Ram Bharosa.

The novel *The Blue Umbrella* teaches Binya the best lesson of sacrifice, kindness and purity. It displays how we can make someone happy by letting go precious things that we cherish. The best thing about her is that she happily gives it to someone who tries to steal it. Her sacrifice is appreciable because it transformed Ram Bharosa into a better person. Hence, we can see at the end of the novel that he gives her a lucky charm necklace. This novel of Ruskin Bond shows the ways we can truly eliminate hatefulness from within and from the society by love.

Children's characters change with the change in time. It is proven through the development of Binya's character in this story through every situation from the beginning to the end. In the beginning of the novel, she gave her lucky charm necklace in exchange to the blue umbrella to the lady for her own happiness. But in the end, she gives away her precious umbrella for the happiness of Ram Bharosa. She showed maturity beyond her years and learned to deal with every situation. Now, she realized the fact that materialistic objects could not bestow her real happiness. Even love for such things will definitely fade away after some time but the love between people will never fade away.

The novel depicts that everyone needs materialistic things for the functioning of everyday life and it's quite obvious to have some degree of obsession about some of them. But excessive obsession is certainly a kind of disease. Greed, selfishness, materialism, deceitfulness

are theme but we have the power to change the things. The little girl Binya proves it with her action that love and kindness have potential to craft an ideal society.

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