

**Humanism in Ruskin Bond's *The Blue Umbrella*****Dr. Archana A Gupta**Associate Professor in Dept. of English  
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Affiliated to Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University  
Nagpur, Maharashtra, India**Abstract**

*The Blue Umbrella* is a short novel (a novella) by Ruskin Bond written in a simple yet witty language and is set in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas. The central character of the story is Binya, a girl of ten years of age. The blue umbrella in the story was the reason of conflict amongst the villagers in the village. The story, with the character of Binya, accentuates that human relations are above materialistic things. And the simple characters from the village life become extraordinary showing kindness, generosity and empathy which are human attributes. Binya's character in the story is epitome of humanity at its best. Humanism is a philosophy of life that considers the welfare of humankind and the story through the character of Binya sets the example of humanism.

**Key Words:** kindness, generosity, empathy, humanism

*The Blue Umbrella* is a short novel (a novella) by Ruskin Bond written in a simple yet witty language. The central character of the story is Binya, a girl of ten years of age. Binya lived in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas along with her mother and a brother who was elder to her by two years. Her father died two years after the birth of Binya. Binya, being a mountain girl was quite sturdy, fair of skin, with pink cheeks and dark eyes. Her black hairs were generally tied in a pigtail. She wore pretty glass bangles on her wrist and a necklace of glass beads with a hung leopard's claw pendant. Her family owned three tiny terraced fields on the side of the mountains on which they grew potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, mustard and maize. The crops produced on their fields was not much to be sold in the market but was enough for their family of three to live on. Also they owned two cows; Neelu and Gori, who were left to wander in the forest of the region in the day time. And in the evening these cows would sometimes come back on their own and on other times either Binya or her brother had to fetch them back home.

Binya's village was at a distance of five miles from the town and it was also a pleasure resort for tourists from all over India. Binya was not afraid of the dark forests and lonely hilltops of the region and therefore she wandered in the region a lot, singing to herself while walking over the fallen pine-needles into the forest glade on the spur of the hill. It was then she came upon a party of picnickers from the town. The women were dressed in bright saris, the men wore light summer shirts, and the children had pretty new clothes. Binya stood unnoticed in the shadows of the trees observing them. She was fascinated by their clothes; she listened to their accents which were unfamiliar to her and gazed hungrily at all their foods

displayed before them. And then her gaze fell on the bright blue frilly umbrella meant for women lying opened near to them on the grass.

Binya had never seen before such a colourful and beautiful small umbrella before; so she immediately fell in love with it. To Binya, the umbrella was like a big blue flower that had sprung in the forest. Though she had seen a big black umbrella possessed by her mother and which was not used in her family because rats had made holes in it. Binya move forward to have a closer look of the umbrella. Then she was noticed by an elderly woman amongst the picnickers. The women then talked about the beauty of Binya, her poor state and when Binya came more closer, the women discussed her necklace and pendant as well. They supposed Binya could not understand all that they discussed about her, but she could understand all that was discussed by the women amongst the picnickers. The blue umbrella had cast a spell over her, and therefore she drew closer to it, without caring for the comments of the women.

A young woman amongst them expressed her desire to possess the leopard's claw pendant before her husband. The husband offered Binya money in exchange of pendant to which she refused. Then, without hesitation she pointed the blue umbrella of the young woman in exchange of pendant. This left the young woman shocked. The young woman's desire to possess Binya's pendant was equally strong as compared to Binya's desire to possess the blue umbrella. Therefore, the young lady offers Binya the umbrella and Binya offers the young lady her necklace with the pendant in return. The young woman immediately placed the necklace around her neck. Binya joyfully held the blue umbrella, looked through the bright blue silk of the umbrella at the bright sun, and disappeared into the forest glade.

Binya never closed the umbrella. When she was at home she would leave it lying open in the corner of the room. At times her brother would close it on the pretext that the umbrella occupied space in the room, but Binya would again open it after sometime, mentioning the umbrella didn't look beautiful when closed.

Whenever Binya went out of her house, she carried her blue umbrella with her. Everyone in the village admired her umbrella and was a little envious of it. Ram Bharosa, who owned a tea shop on the road, was more astonished to see Binya's umbrella. He even proposed Binya to sell it to him for twelve rupees and to which Binya refused. Children of the village fully praised Binya's blue umbrella and in return she would let them hold her umbrella for a little while. The bright blue umbrella was too dear to Binya, that she risked her life to catch hold of it when it was carried long and high by the winds of the mountains.

Ram Bharosa, who was desperate to possess the blue umbrella of Binya, permitted his servant Rajaram to steal the blue umbrella of Binya. Rajaram was not successful in getting hold of Binya's umbrella because Binya's brother caught Rajaram and took umbrella from him. This incident brought a bad fame to Ram Bharosa; because of his greed for this umbrella he had to suffer a lot. The villagers stopped visiting his shop and his shop turned to be a

deserted place. The villagers preferred to walk some distance and buy things from the shops near to Tehri bus stand. The children of the village called him as 'Trusty Umbrella Thief'.

Ram Bharosa sat all alone in his shop from morning to evening. He wondered if ever customers will come to his shop. Because of this his financial condition too got affected. After some days he wasn't left with enough money to buy food for himself and as a result he reduced his diet. All this affected his mental as well as his physical health.

Binya, along with his brother, passed by the shop of Ram Bharosa every day. His brother went by the shop whistling, without any difference; but Binya crept quietly past the shop looking to the other side. She considered herself responsible for Ram Bharosa's miserable condition. Her mind was crowded with many thoughts. She thought if Ram Bharosa loved her blue umbrella and was jealous of it then it's not her fault. It was his greed that had led to his ruinous state. But then Binya could not see his wretched condition, she felt bad and therefore every time she crossed his shop she made it sure to close his umbrella. She opened it again only when she was out of the sight of Ram Bharosa. This reflects upon Binya's kind and generous nature.

Later one day, Binya approached the shop of Ram Bharosa with a ten paise coin and keeping on the counter she asked for toffee. Ram Bharosa was sceptical of Binya's action. He thought Binya had come to taunt him and flaunt her umbrella on his face. He gave Binya toffee; Binya took them and left the shop. But while leaving the shop she intentionally left the umbrella on the counter of the shop of Ram Bharosa. Ram Bharosa at first was very delighted to see the umbrella. A thought came to his mind to secretly hide the umbrella at the back of his shop and then no one will come to know of it. In his state of happiness he opened the umbrella, stood underneath it while standing in his shop. He realised the umbrella is of no use to him as he cannot take it out in the sun or in the rain. Therefore he hurried out and ran in the direction of Binya shouting to take her umbrella which she had forgotten in her shop. Binya refused to take back the umbrella saying, "You keep it. I don't need it anymore." Ram Bharosa protested, "But it's such a pretty umbrella!" and "it's the best umbrella in the village". Binya's sensible answer to it was, "But an umbrella isn't everything." And she left the place with Ram Bharosa holding the umbrella. This shows Binya holds human attributes over materialistic things and is empathetic to the sufferings of Ram Bharosa as she could see things from Ram Bharosa's perspective and feel his emotions, think and experience his situation. She could understand to his perspective which led to her act of compassion towards him. In doing so, she could reduce his distress as well as her own and could get rid of conflict amongst the villagers and Ram Bharosa and build stronger relationships with him and with the villagers in turn.

Now Ram Bharosa was holding the umbrella which was a gift from Binya. He was so happy with the umbrella that he was persuaded to get into the sun or rain with the umbrella. He sometimes used the umbrella to chase the pigs and goats. He always kept the umbrella open in his shop, and anyone could borrow the umbrella from him. The umbrella was faded

and had patches at many places, but still it was the prettiest umbrella in the village. People of the village had started visiting his shop again. All this made Binya happy and contented.

Few days later a bear visited the shop of Ram Bharosa at night, scrambled on the tin roof of the shop and while leaving the shop it lost its claw outside the door of the shop. The villagers consider the bear's claw more auspicious than the leopard's claw. Ram Bharosa picked up the claw as it was lucky to find the claw of the bear. He went to the market in the town, gave it to the silversmith to make a silver locket for it and a thin silver chain to hang the locket. It all cost him ten rupees. He then offered the silver chain and bear claw locket to Binya. Binya took the chain and locket, wore it, she looked quite beautiful wearing it. Ram Bharosa expressed that he would never forget the smile Binya gave to him while leaving his shop. Binya walked back home through the darkening glade, singing and the entire environment surrounding her was ecstatic.

In the story Binya possess the quality of innocence and simplicity which are characteristics of children and therefore she shows kindness and generosity to Ram Bharosa even though he tried to procure her blue umbrella. With her act of gifting her umbrella to Ram Bharosa she united the villagers and brought harmony amongst the villagers. Also she played an active role to overcome the misery of Ram Bharosa. The story highlights how greed on the part of Ram Bharosa had destroyed his character and had brought loss in his life.

The blue umbrella in the story was the reason of conflict in the village. The story, with the character of Binya, accentuates that human relations are above materialistic things. Thus, in the story *The Blue Umbrella* the simple characters from the village life become extraordinary showing kindness, generosity and empathy which are human attributes. Binya's character in the story is epitome of humanity at its best. Humanity which is defined by American Humanist Association as, "Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfilment that aspire to the greater good" and by the Bristol Humanist Group as "Humanism is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity, recognizing that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone". Thus 'humanism' is a philosophy of life that considers the welfare of humankind and the story through the character of Binya sets the example of humanism.

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