



Ruskin Bond as a writer of Millennial: A Critical Study of Bond's The Blue Umbrella

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Abstract: Ruskin Bond is one of the prolific writers of the Indian Subcontinent. His writing involves in every sphere of human live. This paper examines his narrative style, way of characterization, child psychology and also specifically studies the different layers of emotion in his one of the finest short stories 'The Blue Umbrella'. The story didn't enjoy the same critical analysis like his other stories so here in this paper I want to analyze this short story from a critical perspective. Modern literature has evolved exponentially but the simplicity that Bond's story shades is unparallel. This story has also a universal appeal, and also has a sort of Indianness to a great extent.

Key Words—Ruskin Bond, Child Psychology, Indianness, Narrative style.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Ruskin Bond (1934—) is a kind of a writer who doesn't need any Introduction. He is a brand of his own way of writing. He carefully carrying Indian Literature to a great extent. Hardly any Indian school textbooks could be found without his stories, this is the kind of contribution of Ruskin Bond in Indian Literature. He has a great literary career which is almost 70 years span. Throughout these years he had successfully drawn the very Indianness in his literature, its culture, atmosphere, people, heritage and many more. The prime protagonists of his stories are mainly the commoners, those people who are seen around our surroundings, may be a street boy, a woman, a coolie, a school going girl, an old man or even a vagabond. This is the reach of his stories and it evolves around the daily routine of a common man. Which makes these stories interesting is its way of story-telling. He is a master story-teller. In his stories one can go through the roller-coaster of emotions, human sufferings, small moments of happiness etc. It is his narrative style that makes him special among the contemporary writers. Here in this paper, we will try to find out how the story 'The Blue Umbrella' is a story of common readers with the reference of its narrative style, child psychology, and critical evaluation.

Ruskin Bond has an Anglo-Indian origin. His father was a Britisher and his mother was Indian. He was born in India and make it as his home forever. He was born in the year 1934, 19th May, in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. At the age of 10 he lost his father. Most of his childhood was spend in his grandmother's home at Dehradun. He has his schooling from Bishop Cotton School, in Shimla and also graduated from the same. He got his first recognition as a writer with the novel 'The Room on the Roof' which brought him one of the prestigious award John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in the year 1957, he was just 23 years then. He had written more than 500 short stories and few novels. Some of his notable works include—Delhi is not Far, Our Trees still grow in Shimla, A Flight of Pigeons, The Room on the Roof etc. He was also honored Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan in the year 1999 and 2014 respectively. He was also awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for his book 'Our Trees still Grow in Shimla'.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The methods and materials that are used to achieve the objective is mentioned below—

- Ruskin Bond's The Blue Umbrella is used as the primary source for this research paper.
- Except the primary source, various research paper on Ruskin Bond's works, Journals, newspaper article, and recorded interviews is used as a secondary source for this purpose.
- Keeping in mind the objective, i.e., *Ruskin Bond as a writer of Millennial*, the primary observation is used to analyze the characters, plot sequence and the narrative style of the novella The Blue Umbrella.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

a. “The present research paper proposes to study the renowned Indian writer, Ruskin Bond, in terms of his dearly love towards nature. No other Indian writer has expressed his/her love for nature/country in a better way than Ruskin Bond. To put it in his own words, the researcher puts the quote of Ruskin Bond as he himself has said, *I am as Indian as the dust of plains or the grass of a mountain meadow*. The paper also distinguishes Bond’s presentation of nature from other Indian writers. The researcher has taken into account select fiction of Ruskin Bond to ponder his love for nature. The researcher proposes to study the social, cultural, economic and geographical image of North India in the novels and short stories of Ruskin Bond. The researcher proposes to examine in what way Ruskin Bond has been able to do justice to the emotional development of his characters in such a setting. Ruskin Bond’s case is not of dual inheritance but of double inheritance. Bond grew up in changing India and his loyalty always remained with and still remains with India. After the Independence most of the Britishers migrated to their native country but very few who were very old to migrate or who did not have financial support, stayed in India.”—Mr. Yatharth N. Vaidya, 2012.

b. “Nature and literature have always shared an intimate and amicable relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and the other writers down the ages across the globe. Today this close relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in every sphere under the name of *Bionomics* or *Ecological studies*. It is the study of environmental systems. Environmental usually means relating to the natural, versus human-made world; the systems means that ecology is, by its very nature, not interested in just the components of nature individually but especially in how the parts interact. But, as we can look around, that the whole globe is in the clutches of serious ecological crisis. Rapid environmental changes cause mass habitat extinctions known as Holocene extinction. One estimate is that 1-3% of the species that have existed on Earth are extinct. History has proved that the changes in environment have been so acute that sometimes it has wiped the whole civilization from the face of the earth. Therefore, if we wish to pass on a safe and healthy world to posterity then protection of environment is the issue of immediate concern. Literature could not remain unaffected from this depletion and my paper is related only to this burning issue of ecological crisis but also focuses on the eco-conscious efforts put in by various Indian English writers back in history till date and how the concern for nature changes in Indian literature from reverence to destruction. A detailed study of the writings of Ruskin Bond, a contemporary Indian English writer, brings forth his great concern and reverence towards Nature and therefore his works have been of primary concern in this paper.”—Amrapali Chawla, 2014.

c. “Patriarchy is delineated as that kind of society where the supreme authority is vested in the hands of males. Due to such social system, a type of hierarchy and hegemony is maintained between the two biological sexes. But it is maintained that such a system is not a biological but social construction. In patriarchy, females are perceived through the lens of being mere sexual object with no feelings. They have to undergo a lot of misery and exploitation in different fields and phase. This paper is an attempt to analyze Ruskin Bond’s attempt to portray such a patriarchal system, that which he certainly observes through the eyes of criticism. If explored minutely, one can find traces of feminine suffering depicted inhabited.”—Patrika Handique, 2015.

d. “Man is wildly misusing natural resources, and the exhaustion of these resources is a matter of deep concern. After exuberantly and lavishly misusing the natural resources environmentalists and scientists showed the apprehension about the exhaustion of fresh air and water in the entire globe. It is the time to understand and realize that all beings are crucial to retain the beauty and health of the earth. Man being considered the most powerful social animal, must not turn into terrorist to usurp the territory of other beings to fulfil his greed. Ruskin Bond’s stories echoes his concern towards the devastating environment which is the result of the ignorance of man, and his approach to lead a luxurious life. Bond’s stories are an imaginative and honest revelations of his sensitivity towards nature. In the name of development man plays a mean and wicked game with the creatures and has started invading their homes by cutting mountains and roads. Bond reiterates in almost every story of him about the moral duty of man towards nature and above all his stories inculcate a sense of duty and responsibility towards the nature.”—Dr Archana Singh, 2016.

e. “Death is inevitable and the most frightening fear of all the fears of an, this powerful emotion gives birth to a host of diverse superstitions; one of them is life after death. Almost all the religions adopted the doctrines of survival after death. Many works of literature present various views on life after death or existence of supernatural elements. J. G Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* is full of wealth of colorful myths and enigma of the life beyond. Ruskin Bond the brightest star of children literature and nature lover decorates his treasure of literature with delicate themes like nature, love, Indianness or children. Unlike his contemporaries he believes the main function of literature is to relieve or refresh the souls or readers in the world full of cruelty and harshness. This Indian author of British descent achieved Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014.”—Dr Prachi Dixit, 2017.

f. “The Love stories written by Ruskin Bond are always narrated in the first person; and mostly the hero or protagonist is not named, who is shown falling in love with a young innocent girl. It is a mutual relationship between two completely unrelated and unmatched couples. The male lead characters in Ruskin Bond’s love stories are always depicted as genuine and honest and the female partner are shown as young, immature, erratic and ones who are bound by the restraints of the society. His stories are mostly tragic and therefore you can find in the introduction of his love stories—*Another appeal of tragic love story is that it leaves the doomed lovers forever young*.”—Shweta Sharma, 2018.

g. “Preservation of nature has always been a prime concern since early times. It is an uphill struggle for the present as well as future generations to conserve it. Writers have realized that writing about nature can surely revise our ethical relations with natural world. *The Blue Umbrella* is a short novella by a great writer Ruskin Bond. It depicts life of a small girl, Binya living in close association with the hills of Garhwal. The nature has made her immune to every threat and difficulties and has inculcated in her a sense of confidence and love for nature. The paper presents Bond’s desire to make human beings realize the importance of nature by inculcating in them the ecological modesty and humility.”—Rabia Mukhtar, 2018.

h. "From the groovy hills of Mussoorie two watchful eyes have been observing everyday little events to make them a big reason for many famous literary writings. These are the eyes of an ordinary looking man, always lost in his imaginations. Instead of having an absent-minded attitude, he provided entertainment to children and grown-ups as well. Many people travel up to the hills of Mussoorie just to have a look at him. He actually has become a celebrity for a large number of his readers. Although he has name, fame, popularity and establishment in the world of Indian-English literature but he prefers to a life of person, devoted to nature thoroughly."—Nandhakumar K, N. Shamini, 2020.

4. RESEARCH GAP:

The previous research papers and research scholars very minutely analyze about the treatment of the story and the impact of nature in Ruskin Bond's writing. Rabia Mukhter, 2018, discusses about *Bond's desire to make human beings realize the importance of nature by inculcating in them the ecological modesty and humility*. And there are many papers which dealt with the Filmography and Bond, i.e., Film adaptation of Bond's writing. In this respect one of the films by Vishal Bhardwaj being popular, *The Blue Umbrella* which was released in 2007. But hardly any research scholar tried to analyze the simplistic characterization in *The Blue Umbrella* and also the glimpse of Indianness of this novella. So, in this research paper I will try to draw and analyze how Ruskin Bond throughout his literary career has witnessed tremendous support from his readers across the country and become as a writer of Millennial.

5. DISCUSSION:

Bond is a prolific writer, there shouldn't be any doubt about his writing and contribution towards the Indian Literature. Bond prove himself why he is called and recognize as an Indian writer, it is just because of his plot setting. Many of his stories primarily being set up either in Mussoorie or Dehra or the neighboring places. He lived a life with much experience in the lap of vast Himalayas. So, any keen reader would easily point out many small and minute details about his surroundings, like the flora and fauna and natural set up. He hardly mentioned about their (the people who lived on that particular region) culture their tradition in his writing, he never goes into that much details in his writings. There may be some good reason why he did so, as an Anglo-Indian he brought up in a society where tradition, culture, ethnicity don't bother to anyone. He has a close affinity with his father and it was his father who had a great influence in his thinking and his way of life.

Basically, Ruskin Bond is a nature writer, nature plays an important role in his story building. According to U. Sumathy in his book *Ecocriticism in Practice*, "Nature writing is not just any writing that happens to mention the outdoors, the flora and the fauna. It is born out of love, respect and awe. It finds its subject during days of close observation of the natural world. It is the voice born out of a relationship with nature developed during those days. It is about the interconnections and interrelationships that form this world." Ruskin Bond also treats nature as a remedy, like many other great Nature poets—Robert Frost, William Wordsworth, Rabindranath Tagore, Walt Whitman. If anyone goes through the writing of any one of the above mention poets, they will realize that according to them nature is an entity which has the power to cure human sufferings, demoralization, loneliness etc. Wordsworth once quoted: *For I have learned to look on nature, not as in the hour of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity.*" (Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey). Like them Ruskin Bond also find happiness in nature, except this he also finds happiness among the common people on streets, buses, trains, markets and locality. Another distinguished feather about Ruskin Bond, he loves the innocence of a child, and that's why many of his writings are part of child literature. Children play an important role in Bond's classics, same as with *The Blue Umbrella*, where two prime child characters Binya and Bijju catch all the attention of the readers.

By the term 'novella' we understand, a prose piece which is shorter than a novel but longer than a short story in length. M. H. Abrams in his book *A Handbook of Literary Terms* (9th Edition, 2011, p 283), describes the term 'novella' as "...the status of middle length between the tautness of the short story and the expansiveness of the novel is sometimes indicated by the name novelette or novella".

This is Binya's story. Binya is a small mountain girl of ten years old. She lived with her twelve years old brother Bijju and her mother. She lost her father when she was just two years old. Binya had a great past time with her two cows—Neelu and Gori. She roamed through the woods, hill and mountains. She went in distant with her cows that's why cows are also love to roam with Binya. Binya's full name is Binyadevi and Vijay is more common by Bijju. The loss of her father didn't affect much to the family as "*they had three tiny terraced fields on the side of the mountain, and they grew potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, mustard and maize.*" Which is enough for them to live throughout the year. One day when she was roaming with her cows, she caught the sight of the picknickers, they were basically holidaymaker, people from the plain land. Her eyes were caught on a blue umbrella which was lying beside them. Somehow, she managed to get that blue umbrella by exchanging her lucky charm, the pendant holding a tiger's claw. Now from here the story actually begins, the journey of Binya with her blue umbrella. From now on Binya has the complete possession over the umbrella. The umbrella has become the matter of discussion in the village, as it is the most beautiful umbrella in the village. The people were getting more curious and also started to feel jealous about her. Because according to them she didn't deserve to hold that umbrella. Ram Bhorosa, the shop keeper, the schoolmaster's wife, the priest of the temple all are in want to have that umbrella. Binya and Bijju were busy with that umbrella and they remained it open whenever it was possible, because they thought that it was much beautiful when it was open. Days were passing like this and old Ram Bhorosa still wanted that Umbrella by hook or by crook. All the efforts of him were in vain. Because it was not just a simple materialistic possession for Binya, it was more than that for her. On this way the umbrella became a matter of pride in their village. Time rolled on and the rain came, many of the villagers predicted that the fancy umbrella won't survive the rain. But to amaze everyone it has survived and Binya and Bijju had become the proud owner of such a beautiful umbrella. During the rain, the school remained close so Bijju helped his mother in the field and everywhere there was lush greenery. Ram Bhorosa offered Bijju to work on his shop but Bijju knew that it might be the trick for him. So, Ram Bhorosa hired a boy from the adjacent village to help him in his shop, whose name was Rajaram. One day, Rajaram proposed to give Ram Bhorosa the desired umbrella instead of that umbrella he wanted three rupees. After much bargain Ram Bhorosa assured him to give three rupees only

after he handed over the umbrella to him. So Rajaram was in search of chance to steal the Umbrella from Binya as it was hard to steal it from her because she hardly left the umbrella alone. But one day while Binya was busy in collecting the porcupine quills, Rajaram stole the umbrella and fled but somehow Binya got the hints and chased after him and informed Bijju also. After much toil and moil, they rescued the umbrella from Rajaram and he confessed that he was sent by Ram Bhorosa. When the matter spread among the villagers, they refused to buy anything from Ram Bhorosa. From now on Ram Bhorosa faced the real trouble, there were hardly any visitor in his shop and he was numbed and regretted for his deed. Many days past and winter came, one day when Binya and Bijju were passing his shop, Binya stopped and peeped over his shop and found that Ram Bhorosa was lying on his cot. She went inside the shop and wanted to buy toffee, and put her coins. She was the only customer within two months and strategically while leaving his shop Binya left her umbrella there. And when he noticed that Binya had left her umbrella in his shop he ran after them and told Binya that she had left her umbrella inside the shop. Binya smiled and replied he could have the umbrella; she gave it to him. Now, Ram Bhorosa was changed to a completely new man, and when in the winter a bear jumped to his shop and somehow its claw broken and fallen inside the shop, he kept it and make a silver pendant for Binya. He placed it around her neck and said it suited her the best. Binya was so happy to have it and returned home with a great mood. After that whenever Bijju and Binya went to Ram Bhorosa's shop he put some extra milk and sweet to the tea as they like to have some extra. Thus, the story ends with a positive note.

a. CHARACTERISATION:

The story begins with Binya's words, *Neelu! Neelu!* Neelu was one of the two cows that Binya's family possess, the other one is Gori. Ruskin Bond introduces the character as *She scrambled barefoot over the rocks, ran over the short summer grass, up and over the brow of the hill, all the time calling Neelu, Neelu!* Though it is mentioned that Binya's age is ten, but she is not sure enough, again nature comes to rescue, according to her mother Binya is ten years old because "*...she'd been born during a winter when the snow had come up to the windows, and that was just over ten years ago...*" There are many instances from where we can relate how nature plays an important role in Bond's writing. The characters in Bond's writing are simplistic in nature and their way of life is also too simple as he describes Binya's economic status as "*they had three tiny terraced fields on the side of the mountain, and they grew potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, mustard and maize: not enough to sell in the town, but enough to live on.*" This is a clear indication to move from materialistic lifestyle to towards nature. Their way of living is somehow semi-primitive, which is at its best. The writer then described her physical appearance by saying: "*Binya was quite sturdy, fair of skin, with pink cheeks and dark eyes and her black hair tied in a pigtail. She wore pretty glass bangles on her wrists, and a necklace of glass beads. From the necklace hung a leopard's claw.*" The Umbrella itself appeared as a big blue flower to her. When the picknickers seen her, they instantly started to judge her by her appearance: "*Isn't she pretty? Remarkd the other. But how torn and dirty her clothes are!*" And whenever the young lady saw the necklace, she wanted to have it, no matter how and with how much money. The people from the plain land are portrayed as materialistic, because the moment when they got the necklace, they forgot everything and was busy with it. But this gave Binya a chance to went silently as she came. Binya, irrespective of her age is quite mature and throughout the story we have many such instances where we have experienced how mature she is. It was she who was become so protective for the umbrella and not even dare to leave a glance from it, but at the end of the story we also witnessed that how easily she handed over the umbrella to Ram Bhorosa by saying: "*But an umbrella isn't everything.*" She shows her maturity through this line, as she knows, humans are always run after material, possession but that is not everything, beyond this materialist possession many things are there to have or enjoy. From the beginning to the end Binya becomes perfect and true to her emotion about the umbrella, it was not just a matter to have or possess it, it is the beauty of the umbrella that attracts her. Ruskin Bond himself highlighted the bonding between Binya and the blue umbrella by saying:

Binya seldom closed the blue umbrella. Even when she had it in the house, she left it lying open in a corner of the room. Sometimes Bijju snapped it shut, complaining that it got in the way. She would open it again a little later. It wasn't beautiful when it was closed. p 17.

Bond also describes and elaborates the different shades of her character as—simplistic, humanitarian, kind hearted and more humanistic than any other characters of the story. It is evident from the following lines when he said:

She was always ready with her smile, and would willingly have lent it to anyone who was feeling unhappy. p 20.

Binya felt no fear when climbing trees. She was proud of the fact that she could climb them as well as Bijju. p 31.

She had nettle stings all over her legs, but she was hardly aware of the smarting. She was as immune to nettles as Bijju was to bees. pp 32-33.

The next important character that catches the attention of the readers is the shopkeeper Ram Bhorosa. Without his character the narrative would be flat and boring, it was him who brings the twist and turn throughout the plot. In the story he was introduced as Ram Bhorosa (Ram the trust worthy). The narrator, Ruskin Bond never bore to snatch his false mask as a good human being. He was living alone, though not much information we get from the narrative but it could be easily assumed that he might live alone in his shop. He always trapped people and always ready with his baited hooks. Whenever some poor villager in need of cash, he was the only one to help them but through this he took over all the possession the poor man has. This is also visible in the description, when one day Bijju was returning from school and he was hungry as he took his meal in the morning. When he was passing Ram Bhorosa's shop he wanted to have some toffees but Bijju was well aware about Ram Bhorosa's character, as it is depicted through the lines:

Bijju shook his head. Some of his friends had taken sweets on credit, and at the end of the month they had found they'd eaten more sweets than they could possibly pay for! As a result, they'd had to hand over to Ram Bhorosa some of their most treasured possessions—such as a curved knife for cutting grass, or a small hand axe, or a jar for pickles, or a pair of earrings—and these had become the shopkeeper's possessions and were kept by him or sold in his shop. pp 36-37.

This is just one example. Ram Bhorosa was keen to have the umbrella that Binya possessed. He even offered her money, and also gone through the negotiation. He commented about her umbrella that there is no use to have such an umbrella as it belongs to the Memsahibs. His greediness is quite evident through his work when he stopped Binya and asked:

‘But what do you need it for? The sun isn’t hot enough, and it isn’t meant for the rain. It’s just a pretty thing for rich ladies to play with!’

‘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.’

p 21.

He also planned to steal the umbrella from Binya with the help of his assistant Rajaram. In offer he would give him three rupees. However, they have failed to execute the plan at the end. And from then, Ram Bhorosa’s image has shattered. His greediness was shown to every villager. At this point we have seen some drastic character transformation from an evil, money monger to a kind-hearted sympathetic man. When everyone rejects him, Binya came to shelter him with her tenderness, with her most beautiful appealing smile. It was her sympathetic attitude that helped to bring the transformation. Thus, we can conclude by saying that Ram Bhorosa is a completely changed man with the influence of Binya and later on he found himself the healthier and the happiest one.

Not only Ram Bhorosa or Rajaram, the villagers also become envious about the blue umbrella. The temple priest already made an attempt to buy the replica but was failed to complete his wish. Whenever Binya is out with her umbrella open above her head everybody come up with a comment as Ruskin Bond describes:

Most of the people in the village were a little envious of Binya’s blue umbrella. No one else had ever possessed one like it. The schoolmaster’s wife thought it was quite wrong for a poor cultivator’s daughter to have such a fine umbrella while she, a second-class BA, had to make do with an ordinary black one. Her husband offered to have their old umbrella dyed blue; she gave him a scornful look, and loved him a little less than before. The pujari, who looked after the temple, announced that he would buy a multi-coloured umbrella the next time he was in the town. A few days later he returned looking annoyed and grumbling that they weren’t available except in Delhi. Most people consoled themselves by saying that Binya’s pretty umbrella wouldn’t keep out the rain, if it rained heavily; that it would shrivel in the sun, if the sun was fierce; that it would collapse in a wind, if the wind was strong; that it would attract lightning; if lightning fell near it; and that it would prove unlucky, if there was any ill luck going about. Secretly, everyone admired it. pp 39-41.

But the children as they are always symbolized as pure and innocent creature on earth in Bond’s writing, have different view about the blue umbrella, they are so happy to have such an umbrella, they become merry by its slightest glance, as Bond narrates:

Unlike the adults, the children didn’t have to pretend. They were full of praise for the umbrella. It was so light, so pretty, so bright a blue! And it was just the right size for Binya. They knew that if they said nice things about the umbrella, Binya would smile and give it to them to hold for a little while—just a very little while! p 41.

Ruskin Bond’s *The Blue Umbrella* has become a masterpiece by its universal appeal, its simple but colourful narrative style, easy words and with the proper space given to each character. They are all knitted well thus, one loose end will shatter the entire plot. We can’t imagine *The Blue Umbrella* without Binya, as well as without Ram Bhorosa, Bijju, Rajaram it is also not even possible to imagine.

6. CONCLUSION:

Ruskin Bond and his characterization is very much grounded with the involvement of commoners. Being a writer, he sometime tagged as a writer of Children Literature, which is true to some extent. But he is not only a writer for children, he has many works which equally give enjoyment to both adults and children, irrespective of their age, status, culture, place. That’s why it is rightly to call him a writer for all generations. He never deviates from the core essence of being a writer to entertain his readers, with his wide reach of stories.

In this paper I am trying to examine how Ruskin Bond become a writer of the Millennial. This is just because of his acceptance among all sort of readers. So, one could easily find a reader of Bond from 10 years of age to 70 years of age. The core theme which attracts the reader is definitely the Indianness, the simple and easy narrative style and his way of storytelling. Many of his stories are actually the real encounters with the real people in real world, that’s why readers often easily involve themselves into the narratives and it becomes the story of their own. Many research works have been done on Ruskin Bond’s writings, many will come in future but he will remain a constant source for researchers to analyze and reanalyze his works in their own way.

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