

Binya's Hookup with Nature in Ruskin Bond's

The Blue Umbrella

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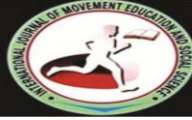
ABSTRACT

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 threats 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.

Keywords: *Nature, Ecology, Modern technology, Water resources, Conservation*

The Blue Umbrella is a short novella by great writer Ruskin Bond. It captures life in a hill village of Himalayas known as Garhwal. Binya, a little ten year old girl is described by Bond as a child of nature at the very onset of the novel. He introduces her as, "Binya belonged to the mountains" (3). Dark forests and lonely hilltops hold no terrors for her. She walks barefooted over the rocks, over the short summer grass, up and over the brow of the hilltops and the fallen pine-needles into the forest glade on the spur of the hills. Her father has died and she lives with her mother, a brother Bijju and two cows Neelu (the blue-grey cow) and Gori (the white fair cow). Her cows Neelu and Gori preferred having Binya with them while grazing because she would let them wander into far distant valley. They have enough to live on as they possess three tiny fields on the side of the mountain where they grow potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, mustard and maize. She becomes owner of a small, dainty and colorful blue umbrella as she happens to exchange her leopard claw necklace with a wealthy lady from city who comes for a picnic on hills. The beautiful colour of the umbrella as if casts a spell over her. She gets enamoured by its beauty. She carries it with her where ever she goes.

There are many people in the village who get a stir of jealousy with her because of umbrella. This includes a school master's wife and Ram Bharosa, a shop keeper. She is ever ready to protect her umbrella because Ram Bharosa many a times conspires to snatch it from her. She even rescues her umbrella from the strong winds. Bond presents Binya's association with nature in a unique way. Little girl Binya is always in a tune and conversation with the nature around. Once Binya sits down in the shade of a pine tree and leaves her umbrella open by its side. She gets a nap and the winds plan a game with her. A wind comes secretly and drags the umbrella with it. Bond describes the game between Winds and Binya in the following lines:



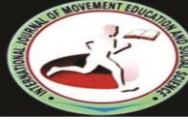
It came quietly, swishing gently through the trees, humming softly. Then it was joined by other random gusts, bustling over the tops of the mountains. The trees shook their heads and came to life. The wind fanned Binya's cheeky. The umbrella stirred in the grass (25).

The winds join hands and lift the umbrella about six feet from Binya. Binya wakes up and with out any fear sets off in pursuit. Bond describes nature in a wicked, playful mood. It would leave and catch umbrella when Binya came near. Bond writes, "... It would pick up the umbrella again and send it bouncing, floating, dancing away from her" (26). Binya and Wind seem to be chasing one another. The wind takes the umbrella the very edge of a steep cliff and hangs it there on a cherry tree branches. Bond describes her so much at home on hilltops that she with out any hesitation peers up the cliff-face and sticks her bare leg over the edge of the cliff and begins climbing. She boldly holds on to the thorny bilberry bushes. Author describes Binyas hookup with the nature as:

As agile as a mountain goat, she did not take more than five minutes to reach the crooked cherry tree. . . . Binya felt no fear when climbing trees. She was proud of the fact that she could climb them as well as Bijju. Gripping the rough cherry bark with her toes, and using her knees as leverage, she crawled along the trunk of the projecting tree until she was almost within reach of the umbrella. (31)

During the process, she gets nettle stings all over her legs, but she is so much in resonance with nature that she is immune to nettles and other such hardships. In the same manner, her brother, Bijju is portrayed by Bond immune to bee stings. Binya and Bijju have got natural immunization for life time against nettle and bee stings while living in the lap of nature. It is once, her brother, Bijju knocks a hive out of an oak tree and is badly stung about face and legs all over. These stings act as vaccine for him now because now if a bee stings him, he feels nothing at all. Same is the case with leeches. Every day after roaming in the hills, Binya comes home with a couple of leeches fastened to the flesh of her bare legs. They fell off by themselves as they have their thimbleful of impure blood from Binya without intimating her. In the novella, Bond deliberately mentions that whenever Ram Bharosa has a headache, he applies a leech to his throbbing temple. It is still believed that to be bled by leeches is a remedy for various ailments. Leeches are being used in medicine from ancient times to draw impure blood from patients. In modern times, these are used in microsurgeries. It is believed that leeches reduce swelling in the tissues and promote healing. They are used to help restore circulation after microsurgeries to re-attach body parts. Like a true devotee of nature, Bond has a fervent love and faith in the healing powers of nature. Through his characters, he is ever set to explore nature's myriad vistas. He presents life of people living in the lap of nature in a beautiful manner. These people have their own adaptations and survival tactics to withstand the surrounding difficulties. He has a gladdening and cheery relationship with nature, its trees, hills, water resources and even animals and small insects. His love for nature is in resonance with great nature writer Edward Abbey's love for nature. U.Sumathy in *Ecocriticism in Practice* sums up the Edward's confederation with nature as:

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. (25)

The modern technology has disconnected people from nature. To many people now, nature is virtually nonexistent to their perceptions. In contrast to the children like Binya and Bijju from Bonds novella, who depend completely on nature for their minor and major needs, the average modern children living in major cities finds nature a great mystery. Most of these children obtain without delay the nurturing commodities and are as such deprived of experiencing a connection between the commodity that fills their need and its natural source. Harold Fromm in "From Transcendence to Obsolescence" exactly remarks such a situation, "I recall a student who once remarked that she had no desire to venture out into the country to "enjoy Nature" when she could see all the trees she wanted on colour TV" (qtd in Glotfelty 33). In the novella, Bond depicts an incident when Bijju denies to buy sweets from Ram Bharosa's shop when he is hungry. He knows that he can not afford to pay for the sweets. He prefers to eat Kingora berries from the berry plants on road side to satisfy his hunger without paying any thing. Bond like other nature writers constantly probes, traumatizes, thrills and soothes the minds of the readers.

Conclusion

In *The Blue Umbrella*, Bond inculcates in readers a sense of living in harmony with nature and cultivates in them the virtues of ecological modesty and humility. The ecological modesty asserts that human beings are only one species among many, with no special rights. True humility lies in living up in harmony with nature for sake of glory and beauty of the earth.

Works Cited

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