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**A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF RUSKIN BOND'S *THE BLUE UMBRELLA***

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**Abstract:** Ruskin Bond, renowned for his captivating narratives, intricately weaves tales that not only celebrate the simplicity of life but also delve into complex human emotions. *The Blue Umbrella* offers a glimpse into the life of Binya, a young girl who values her prized possession, the blue umbrella that gives her immense pleasure. Enchanted by its allure, Binya trades her pendant made of leopard claw to possess the coveted umbrella, which soon becomes the talk of the village. The novella beautifully captures the essence of human emotions, including envy, greed, and forgiveness, set against the backdrop of rural India's simplicity and charm. Through the story of the blue umbrella, Ruskin Bond weaves a narrative that highlights the importance of kindness, understanding, and the transient nature of material possessions.

The paper aims to study the characters and themes in the novella through the lens of psychoanalytic concepts such as the unconscious, repression and desire by examining the inner workings of the characters' minds and the symbolic significance of objects and events.

**Keywords:** Human emotions, material possessions, transient nature, Umbrella, psychoanalysis

**Introduction:** Ruskin Bond's novella *The Blue Umbrella* offers a rich tapestry of human emotions, desires, and societal dynamics, providing fertile ground for a psychoanalytic exploration. Through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, particularly drawing upon the insights of Sigmund Freud, we can uncover the unconscious motivations, conflicts, and symbolic representations present in the narrative. The pleasure principle, as Freud suggests, does not influence behaviour in isolation. According to his Theory of Personality, the pleasure principle acts as a "force that compels people to seek pleasure and avoid pain (Cherry, 2023). Binya, in *The Blue Umbrella*, finds pleasure in displaying her prized possession, the blue umbrella to the world irrespective of whether the onlookers are humans or non-humans.

**Discussion:** Binya, the Garhwal mountain girl serves as the protagonist in *The Blue Umbrella*. She is adventurous and fearless, and her two favorite places in the world are the local community and the wide outdoors. Her brother, Bijju, and her cows, Neelu and Gori are her best friends whose company she enjoys the most away on the hills. Binya comes across a family of picnickers who possess a blue umbrella. She is fascinated by the umbrella, “like a flower, a great blue flower that had sprung up on the dry brown hillside (Bond 2023 8)”. She has such a strong desire to own it that she is prepared to trade her good luck charm, a pendant made of leopard claw. Her happiness knew no bounds and “she turned the blue umbrella this way and that, looked through the bright blue silk at the pulsating sun, and then, still keeping it open, turned and disappeared into the forest glade” (16). The blue umbrella became her inseparable companion and also the talk of the town.

“Ram Bharosa, the operator of a tea stall on Tehri road, too, had an unquenchable desire for the same umbrella, which, at times, is comparable to the need of a kid.” (Stubley, 1992) He tries to bargain Binya to let go off her umbrella but he just can't seem to get his hands at it. His heart aches every time he sees Binya dancing about spritely with her prized piece of happiness.

Ram Bharosa concocts a plan to steal the umbrella and satiate his need with the assistance of Rajaram, a servant working in his tea stall. However, Rajaram is not a professional thief and is spotted by Binya running away with the umbrella from the forest glade. She sees Rajaram running away with the umbrella and tries hard to chase him. Bijju comes across Rajaram running with the umbrella and gives him a big fight. The thief flings the umbrella into the nearby stream which Bijju retrieves. This incident spreads across the hamlet like wild fire. Ram Bharosa loses respect of everyone in the village. He becomes miserable when no one visits his shop any more. He suffers daily from the effects of his deteriorating health. “Even the local children pick on him, and he appears to have run out of both money and hope.”(Gural, 2010)

“Binya’s umbrella had turned a pale milky blue, and was patched in several places, but it was still the prettiest umbrella in the village, and she still carried it with her wherever she went.” (68) Somehow, Binya felt responsible for Ram Bharosa’s misery and “closed the umbrella whenever she came near the shop” (72) and crept quietly past. One day, she went to Ram Bharosa on the pretext of buying a toffee and quietly left the closed umbrella on the counter. The shop owner saw this umbrella after a while, opened it and stood under it realizing, “but I’m never in the sun or in the rain, of what use is an umbrella to me?”

He ran after Binya to return it but she did not take the umbrella saying, “but an umbrella isn’t everything” (75). Binya receives a bear claw pendant on a silver chain from Ram Bharosa as a token of his gratitude.

**Psychoanalytic Perspective:** Binya's acquisition of a blue umbrella from a city tourist becomes the focal point of the narrative, symbolising her desires, aspirations, and the

unconscious yearnings of her psyche. Binya's attachment to the blue umbrella can be seen as a manifestation of her unconscious desires and fantasies. According to Freudian theory, the objects can serve as symbols of unconscious desires and conflicts, and the blue umbrella in Binya's possession can be interpreted as a symbol of her desire and emerging sense of identity. The umbrella represents a source of pleasure and power for Binya, allowing her to assert her autonomy and individuality in a patriarchal society.

Contrary to Binya's innocence and vulnerability is Ram Bharosa, the enigmatic shopkeeper whose coveting of the blue umbrella sets off a chain of events that disrupt the tranquility of the village. Ram Bharosa's desire for the blue umbrella can be interpreted as a manifestation of his unconscious desires, fantasies, and conflicts. Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego offers insights into Ram Bharosa's psychological makeup and motivations.

Freudian theory posits that the *Id* represents the unconscious reservoir of instinctual drives and desires, seeking immediate gratification and pleasure. Ram Bharosa's coveting of the blue umbrella can be seen as a manifestation of his id-driven desires for power, pride and status. The blue umbrella becomes a symbol of his unconscious fantasies and repressed desires, projected onto an external object of desire. Moreover, Freud's concept of the ego, which mediates between the id, superego, and external reality, provides insights into Ram Bharosa's conscious motivations and actions. Ram Bharosa's attempts to acquire the blue umbrella reflect his ego-driven efforts to satisfy his unconscious desires while navigating the social and moral constraints of his environment. Additionally, Freud's theory of the superego, representing the internalised moral and societal norms, sheds light on Ram Bharosa's internal conflicts and sense of guilt. Ram Bharosa's pursuit of the blue umbrella may be driven by unconscious feelings of inadequacy, envy, and resentment, stemming from his own perceived shortcomings and societal pressures.

**Conclusion:** Even the most corrupt people can be transformed into good by love, innocence, and maturity of children. The Blue Umbrella is a story about Binya's growth, her sensitivity towards Ram Bharosa that makes her feel responsible in some way for his misery. Binya walks into the shop holding the umbrella with the intention of leaving it with Ram Bharosa, but she exits without the umbrella instead. This unexpected act of generosity not only makes Binya feel good about herself, but it also teaches the reader a profound lesson about the satisfaction of seeing another person's happiness as a result of one's own fundamental, humble act of compassion. Binya's acquisition of the blue umbrella symbolises her quest for identity, autonomy, and recognition, while Ram Bharosa's coveting of the umbrella reflects his unconscious desires, fantasies, and conflicts. *The Blue Umbrella* thus emerges as a profound exploration of the unconscious mind and the complexities of human desire, power, and identity.

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