

A Comparative Study of Literary Adaptation of *the Blue Umbrella*; Film reviewing and its fidelity to the text

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The Himalayan wanderer of British descent, Ruskin Bond, is one of the major names amongst the list of Indian writers in English. Winning prestigious awards since his early 20s, starting with the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957 to the very recent Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017, Bond has bagged all the esteemed awards and recognitions of his stream including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 to Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014.

However, unlike his flamboyant career, his writings remain simple and very close to life in the countryside as it actually is; and though he has touched many genres including novellas, essays, poems and short stories, his literature for children remains at the pinnacle of his works. His name is more or less synonymous to children's literature in a country where not many writers have done much to understand and pen down life revolving around children's psyche.

His stories portray a very deep and minute understanding of the children's motivations and causes of their dismays as well, and so does his personality. Even in his eighties he remains as joyful as a child and seems to have the same playfulness for all the serious issues of life as a child does. Many of his stories, especially his stories of a boy named Rusty have an autobiographical touch, and moreover he loves writing about children as he finds them - uncorrupted and curious.

Bond writes about adolescent's concerns....through the story of Rusty, the protagonist, who is an Anglo-Indian like Ruskin, orphaned and is brought up by his guardian, in the hilly town of Dehra Dun..... Rusty is shy, withdrawn and suffering child like Ruskin.....the protagonist is no other than Ruskin himself (Gour 196).

One such story exemplifying all of the above said is Bond's *The Blue Umbrella*. Set in the hills of Garhwal, it is not only the story of a child's fascination about an umbrella but also one in which, through that humble instrument, Ruskin explores the deeper and more vibrant strings of human nature. It is a story about that which remains of a child in adults and about the maturity in children.

Ruskin covers the story in seven chapters the first one of which centers only on Binya, the Garhwal mountain girl and the protagonist of his story. The chapter gives us a glimpse of everything that Binya is, both physically and at her heart. She is a carefree child belonging whole heartedly to her village, where she knows everyone and roams dauntless in the lap of nature. She has one brother Bijju and her companions as Neelu and Gori – the grey and fair cows. Binya loves being on her own, with her cows wandering deep on the mountain trails, much distant from the jostle of the town and its market.

In this very chapter the innermost child in Binya surfaces when she is fascinated by an umbrella that the people who had come for a picnic on the hill side had. She is so attracted to the umbrella that she is ready to exchange her lucky charm – the tiger claw pendant for it and doesn't mind even for the slightest bit to settle the bargain. Unlike an adult who might have thought twice before exchanging his good luck pendant for a fancy item, Binya does it without any worries for the whatever luck to come.

The next three chapters of the story focus on the old man named Ram Bharosa - the owner of a tea stall at Tehri road, and his avarice for the umbrella, which at times is even beyond that of a child. He tries every way to get the umbrella but all in vain. Both Binya and Bijju are portrayed as having enough maturity for not falling for his tricks. And thus Ram Bharosa with the help of Rajaram, the servant at his shop, plots to steal the umbrella and quench his desire.

However, as Ram Bharosa is not a seasoned thief, and just as childish as he is, Ram Bharosa is also afraid and guilty at the same time of plotting the theft. He says to Rajaram, "You mean to steal it, don't you, you wretch? What a delightful child you are! I'm glad you are not my son or my enemy" (Bond 55).

However, Rajaram makes a fail attempt to steal the umbrella and is caught by Bijju and Binya ultimately revealing the truth about Ram Bharosa's evil intentions. This in turn leads to the downfall of his character, not only in the eyes of Binya and Bijju but also for the whole village. People no more buy stuff from

his shop and he feels the torments of his frailty every day. Even the children of the village taunt him and he seems lost all hope and money as well.

The last two chapters of the story but reveal a very deep rooted conscientious element of human nature. It's about how the principle of an eye for an eye fails, bringing happiness and contentment to none. It's about how innocent children are, and how their love, innocence and maturity can invoke goodness amongst the most corrupt. Though Binya knows that Ram Bharosa did wrong her, still passing through Tehri road she tries not to look at the misery of the old man, which she feels to have been caused by her love of the umbrella. She closes down her umbrella every time she passes the shop and opens it only after she is far from it, but the ruined shop and "yard long" (Bond 71) face of Ram Bharosa makes her feel bad about herself.

Ultimately, to end Ram Bharosa's predicament, Binya steps in his shop with the umbrella and leaves the shop knowingly forgetting the umbrella for Ram Bharosa to keep it. This act of generosity is something the readers never expect from a child of Binya's age. It is this unexpected act which leads Binya to feel good about herself and in turn teaches a very deep lesson to the reader – the lesson of the joy of giving, the joy of sharing, the victory over one's desires, the joy looking at someone become happy due to a simple, humble act of charity. When Ram Bharosa runs to return the umbrella Binya tells him, "You keep it. I don't need it anymore.....an umbrella isn't everything" (Bond 75).

This humble act of kindness leads Ram Bharosa to gift Binya a bear claw pendant in a silver chain. She gets her lucky charm back for an unintentional gesture of her exchange of umbrella and here all the characters turn round invoking an un-worded importance of people and relations in life. The whole set of circumstances arouse every emotion in the story be it love, temptation, greed, possession, viciousness, pride, fear, fulfillment, regret, loneliness, happiness, care and selfless motives. It thus appeals to the innermost child in an adult reader and to the budding adult in a child. "*The Blue Umbrella* can be read as transposition, commentary and analogy" (Wagner 222) all at once and therein lays the strength of the text that it is.

This beautiful yet simple novella of Ruskin Bond is adapted by the master coalescer Vishal Bhardwaj who has won international accolades for his adaptations. A master of the art of adaptation, Bhardwaj not only picks up a story to show what the story says but is also able to put it in the required political, cultural and emotional background to it. According to audience reviews, "The storyline of the film is simple yet deep, metaphorically" (Abhi2400). Film adaptation of *The Blue Umbrella* won The National Film Award for Best Children's Film in the year 2005. Khalid Mohamed in his review of the movie said,

Vishal Bharadwaj's second confection for children after *Makdee*, has its passages of charm, visual aplomb and performances that are as lively as an amusement park.....Undoubtedly, it has a warm sensibility that keeps you engaged – in the tradition of Iranian cinema which takes on micro-issues (like a child losing a pair of shoes), elevating them into mega-social comments (Hindustan Times).

Unlike the novel in which the opening lines introduce Binya, it's central character, the movie opens with Ram Bharosa renamed as Nandkishore Khatri. The scene follows the introduction of Binya and the children of the village singing joyful songs and roaming in the village. The picturization of this song focuses on the lifestyle of children in the countryside of India and the little things that they take joy in, like "tesu" the puppet in the song. The lines read "Mera tesu yehi adaa, ooh ya ya, khaane ko mange dahi bada, ooh ya ya, such gaya mera tesu re ek taang pe khada khada" (*The Blue Umbrella*). It not only brings to life the imagery that Ruskin tries to evoke in the novella with his words, but also introduces the characters and their life in the village, dancing and rejoicing in all that the children are doing.

These events are altogether absent in the novella by Bond. Bond wrote it as a children's story on one line plot. The story focuses on Binya and her umbrella and that's it. But in the movie, Vishal Bhardwaj builds the character sketch of Nandu with the help of these smaller events associated with him explaining his very nature and thus building a platform for the viewer to understand or sense what was to follow next.

The introduction of Binya's brother Bijju is also very different from the one in the novel. Unlike the novel where Binya's brother Bijju is just around two years older to her, in the movie he is a grown up man, much like a father figure protecting Binya at all times, in addition to which he is also shown as a wrestler which adds to the climax of wrestling in the movie.

In the movie, it is after building the character of Nandu that Binya has her first encounter with *The Blue Umbrella* whereas in the novella it is when Binya roams and rejoicing with her umbrella that Nandu is introduced in the story. In both the cases it is when Binya is roaming with her cows Nilu and Gori that she sees the umbrella. But the in the novella it is in a straight and direct encounter with the picnickers that Binya sees that beautiful umbrella and in the movie it is introduced as the strange object flying down towards Binya which creates enough suspense and thrill in the audience. The music effect that runs for around 50 seconds in that scene is enchanting enough to add on to the surprise that we see on Binya's face to end only with the view of the beautiful Japanese blue umbrella with patches of white on it, offering the entire sky in Binya's limit.

The music that comes into play when Binya tries to touch the umbrella for herself and realize the reality of it is the same that plays at the beginning of the movie when the titles glance through the image of a

little girl playing around with a blue umbrella. There is some kind of gloominess in the music, a kind which makes one think of the incompatibility of the combination of humble children of countryside with such expensive things as that Japanese umbrella – what we see is the awe of Binya on touching the umbrella and what we listen to is the melancholic tune – thus we are delighted at the sight of seeing Binya enjoying the umbrella but at the same time we know somewhere that it is not something that belongs to her, not a thing that she can afford to have. This emotion evoked wonderful use of music in the movie is completely absent in the novella. The use of music in this movie is something that is an original addition in its meaning and interpretation from Bhardwaj to make the story more meaningful and conveying.

But Soon after Binya's exchange of her lucky charm with *The Blue Umbrella* of the Japanese tourists she is seen roaming in the village with that which could by no chance would have been her – *The Blue Umbrella*. The umbrella becomes an object of attraction for every man big or small in the village except for Binya's mother who is not very sure of how Binya got *The Blue Umbrella*. The music again plays magic through its tunes, adding to the surprise of the villagers including Rajaram and Nandu. Binya roams with her umbrella, sometimes like a queen, sometimes like a warrior. She even scares the snake that tries to enter the compound of their house with her umbrella and stuns every one by her bravery and the villagers start comparing the umbrella with queen of Jhansi.

The use of colors and light is also one of a distinct kind in the movie. The umbrella is blue and white, the names of the cows are neelu – the blue one and gori – the white one, the village is most of the time covered with snow that is white and the sky that is blue. Every spirited or happy moment is in the sun. The sun symbolizing positive energy and everything inside the village homes is mostly dark lit only through the lanterns. The use of the colour blue in the movie, which is the color of the sky signifies freedom and flight. Whereas when Khatri gets the umbrella dyed, he gets it coloured red, which is the colour of fire and signifies danger. The use of light to exemplify jealousy, negative human intentions, and along with it, the uncorrupted laughter and happiness that one experiences in childhood, is masterful. The conspirers – Khatri and Leelavati are always hidden inside their homes with no room for sunlight at all, conjuring all their evil plots and plans to somehow or the other get the umbrella for their own. And on the opposite side of it, the happiness experienced by Binya and other children is always shot under the sunshine.

For Binya, the umbrella is no less than a treasure she discovered, which no one else, at least in her small village, is capable of getting; she rarely closes it and roams throughout the day with it and with her gang of children following her. The song consists of lines saying, “ambar ka tukda toda, lakdi ka hattha joda, haath mein apna aasmaan hai re” (*The Blue Umbrella*) – and in reality as well, the umbrella is not less than a piece of the sky for her. It symbolizes her joy, her freedom and her spirit, that of which the sky could only be the limit.

Similarly for Khatri, the umbrella is an object of desire, which he states is for the peace of his soul. Rajaram offers Nandu to raise his salary for Rs. 27/month for getting that umbrella by stealing it. Immediately after this Binya's umbrella is stolen when she is busy calling Neelu and Gori back from the fields. The twist in the simple plot of the novella comes when this happens, because in the novella, Rajaram is caught red handed stealing her umbrella and she never undergoes the plight of losing – the sky over her head – her precious blue umbrella. The sound that the audience experience when Binya first sees the umbrella is repeated when she loses the sight of it. The difference is that this time it is Binya's view point that the camera is rolled rather than the umbrella's point of view as in the initial scene. The camera with the music moves away from forlorn Binya, who is seen in with her head on her knees, consoling herself in the absence of her beloved umbrella. The torment that she goes through is visible when she walks alone in the rain drenched from top to toe. The same melancholic music which is played when she touches the umbrella for the first time is heard when she is walking without it, as if for the affirmation of the feeling of incompatibility of the umbrella and Binya, that one has earlier about them. It is as if one feels that once and for all she is faced with the harsh reality of what life has to offer her. Both Leelavati and Nandkishore are seen looking at Binya, looking with a shrewd secret smile as if they know and are satisfied with the fate that she has met.

However, there is one more element in the scene that comes to light, which is the concern that people have with each other and even for children in the countryside life. The policeman of the village even agrees to search Nandu's home on just a hint of doubt from Binya. But all of this goes in vain as they find nothing in Nandu's house. Pankaj Kapur's mastery at his art of acting just takes full-form when he is seen outside his shop with an expression of helplessness. He yells and cries in front of the whole village for the accusation of theft and takes an oath to buy an umbrella of his own. It is at this point in the movie that the audience, if they have read the novella before, suspect whether in the movie Nandu is the actual culprit or is it Leelavati. Vishal Bhardwaj succeeds here in creating the desired effect on the viewer's mind through the creation of his sub-plots in the movie.

Further, to repent for the false accusation of theft that has been put on Nandu the villagers decide to invite him as the Chief Guest in the Dangal competition to be organized accepting which, and though after a lot of discussion, Nandu kind of obliges the villagers and for them it seems as if he has forgiven all of them. And

one day when Nandu is unable to fold his umbrella, Binya helps him to do so. It is when Binya touches the umbrella that that same melancholic tune can be heard in the background reminding her of the touch of her own umbrella.

This incident is what once again makes Binya think of Nandu being the thief and she enquires the whereabouts of the place from where the courier of Khatri's umbrella had come. It is when Nandu is addressing people coming to Dangal as a Chief Guest that water washes away the dye of his umbrella and at the same time Binya and the policeman arrive at the dangal with the dyer Chaudhary.

Binya gets her umbrella and her respect back. She seems to be back in her frolic with her friends only for better. The camera rolls from different scenes of the sunlit fields with Binya and the children playing lively in it to a snow covered and empty place at the Tehri road, which once used to be the favourite stop of the tourist buses, Nandkishore Khatri's tea stall.

The shift of the environment from light, sunny and playful to dark, cold, and lonely is in itself a symbol of Nandu's plight. Everything is still blue and white but all in its negative shade. The camera runs through ruined eatables, the jars - which once used to attract the children with their contents - now empty and lying lidless on the barren shelves, the clock which isn't anymore working and is just hanging for the sake of it. All of this adds to the sense of misery that the audience perceives which Nandu is going through.

Binya keeps witnessing the predicament which Nandu has to go through at all times, and in a sense deems herself responsible for his plight. At times she keeps looking at the umbrella and thinking to herself whether that non-living object is worth so much so as to cause that kind of suffering to a living man. The music is of the kind which invokes the feeling of two warriors visiting the battle grounds to look at the aftermath of the war caused by them, no matter who has won and who has lost, at that moment in time, both lose.

The umbrella now gives her lesser joy and induces more guilt in her. And she finds it much better to not have it rather than burdening herself with that guilt. She plans to return it to Nandu.

The same flute which plays at the encounter of Binya and Nandu at the shop plays again, it is his moment of catharsis, his purgation and atonement of his evil deeds. He beats the umbrella with a stick as if beating the evil out of him, he even tries to burn it down but then realizes that it is not his. He runs after Binya to return it to her.

This is intriguing, because in the novel she says, she doesn't need it anymore and that Nandu can keep it. But in the movie her refusal to acknowledge it as her own is something that makes the audience think about how easy it is for children to let go off the things that cause trouble to their peace of mind.

Ram Bharosa is also a changed man after receiving the precious gift from Binya who started to enjoy the company of the need by lending the umbrella to ".....anyone who wants to borrow it....." and *The Blue Umbrella* that belonged to Binya in the beginning ".....has become everyone's umbrella. It is faded and patchy, but it is still the best umbrella in the village" (Dahiya 93).

The movie ends with Nandu's shop sunlit, full of tourists and other people, and the name changed from "Khatri Tea Stall" to "Chhatri Tea Stall" painted in Blue.

As is said, "Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value judgments" (Rand), Vishal Bhardwaj has recreated a well-established story and sustained the very nerve of it. He has perfectly taken from the novella the single plot story apt for kids reading and embedded it into a more complex and intertwined plot structure realizing the possibilities presented in the novella. Where in the novella there is only an attempt to steal the umbrella, Vishal Bhardwaj creates the reality which takes shape when the umbrella actually gets stolen. The novella is the purgation of Binya but the movie is more about the purgation of Nandkishore Khatri.

Some critics have however challenged it to be a children's film as the accent used by actors, which is more of Garhwali, is not easily to be understood by children, and the complexity of plot again makes it difficult for children to link through.

In many ways, *Blue Umbrella* seems too small, too personal and too simple a story for the big screen..... Having said that I'm also not sure *Blue Umbrella* is what you'd typically call a children's film. The Himachali dialect and accent will be difficult for the little ones to follow, and I doubt kids are in the habit of reading subtitles. It is nevertheless a heartwarming story for adults, something to take you back to your childhood, a very simple, very basic moral tale (Rockstah Media).

However, Vishal himself describes this one as a "children's film for adults" (Times of India). And in a true sense it is. He has re-plotted the novella and made a remarkable shift, not only in changing the language from English to Hindi but also adding the regional dialectical elements of Garhwal. The change in plot not only corresponds to the change of protagonist that he has made but also adds to the overall effect of showing the story than telling it.

The true reason to watch *Blue Umbrella* is the character of Nandu as portrayed by Pankaj Kapur who had just given his best for it. Every gaze, every action of his, every dialogue he speaks is to transform the Ram Bharosa from the novel and transport the viewer into an altogether different realm of human emotions. The

musical element embedded by the director himself, and the transformation of the imagery described in the novella by the wand of his cinematography Sachin Krishna makes Blue Umbrella a film worth the time. "The Blue Umbrella as a story might not hold.....mystery and drama but manages to touch your heart by its simplicity. Even the supposed villain of the story disarms you with his gullibility" (Srivastava and Teiwari 100).

And like Robert Stam mentioned in his book *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* "Bhardwaj's presentation of the text, has almost achieved the impossible – a mating of fidelity discourse and preservation of the medium of the expression" (58)!

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