



# A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF UNIVERSAL RELEVANCE IN 'THE BLUE UMBRELLA' BY RUSKIN BOND AND 'THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL' BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



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**Abstract:** Universal relevance signifies the capacity of an idea or story to tap into shared human experiences, emotions, and values that transcend the boundaries of time and place. This comparative study explores the universal relevance of two emotionally resonant narratives, "The Blue Umbrella" is a novella by Ruskin Bond and "The Little Match Girl" is a short story by Hans Christian Andersen. Despite their distinct cultural and temporal origins, these stories encompass common thematic elements that deeply connect with readers on a universal level. Through a comparative analysis, we delve into the human condition, shared emotions, and enduring themes such as empathy, desire, moral growth, and the resilience of the human spirit. Both narratives serve as poignant reminders of the significance of caring for those in need, promoting empathy and fostering social awareness that transcends cultural boundaries. This essay underscores how these stories address fundamental aspects of the human experience, rendering them universally relevant and emotionally compelling to readers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Index Terms - Ruskin Bond, Indian author, Universal relevance, Psychoanalytic exploration, Desire and pleasure principle.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ruskin Bond is a highly acclaimed Indian author renowned for his extensive literary contributions spanning various genres, including fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature. Ruskin Bond is celebrated for his diverse body of work, but he has earned particular recognition for his contributions to the genre of "nostalgic and coming-of-age fiction." A significant portion of his literary works, especially those unfolding against the backdrop of the stunning Himalayan region of India, draws inspiration from his own life and childhood memories. These stories often reflect his personal experiences and keen observations.

Among his many notable works, "*The Blue Umbrella*" stands out as a beloved classic of Indian children's literature. Binya, the central character in this novella, lingers in the minds of readers due to her relatable desires, emotions, and interactions with her surroundings, evoking a deep connection. Bond's portrayal of Binya's innocence, moral growth, and simplicity authentically captures the essence of everyday life, infusing a sense

of realism into the narrative. Another noteworthy writer for this research is **Hans Christian Andersen**, a Danish author celebrated for his enchanting fairy tales.

## II. UNIVERSAL RELEVANCE

Andersen's narratives are primarily distinguished by their whimsical and imaginative quality, frequently incorporating elements of fantasy, magical beings, and moral insights. His tales are emotionally resonant, delving into themes of affection, separation, solitude, and yearning, while also exploring the intricate facets of human feelings and connections. *"The Little Match Girl"* delves into themes of innocence, desire, and the contrasting values placed on material possessions. Both stories feature child protagonists, with Binya in *"The Blue Umbrella"* and the little match girl in Andersen's tale emerging as innocent, vulnerable figures who undergo life-altering moments. While their stories differ in content and setting, they share common thematic elements. Bond portrays Binya as a compassionate and innocent child, easily captivated by the beauty of the blue umbrella she comes to possess. In contrast, Andersen's little match girl is depicted as fragile, vulnerable, and trapped in dire circumstances, marked by suffering and hardship. Binya's moral development and the Little Match Girl's tragic fate prompt contemplation on the importance of caring for and assisting those in need. These characters and their narratives touch upon universal themes, such as the human condition, the impact of poverty, and the complexities of desire and loss. These themes resonate with readers regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

This paper aims to explore the universal relevance shared by both stories, *"The Little Match Girl"* by Hans Christian Andersen and *"The Blue Umbrella"* by Ruskin Bond. The research will center around this comparison, and in the paper's conclusion, a critical analysis of the universal relevance presented by both authors will be discussed. This analysis not only holds value for aspiring writers seeking to explore similar themes but also underscores the significance of children's literature in addressing fundamental aspects of the human experience.

## III. EVALUATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In both instances, these narratives are skilfully crafted to resonate with the sensibilities of young readers. *"The Little Match Girl"* embodies the moralistic and sentimental attributes commonly found in children's literature during the 19th century. In contrast, *"The Blue Umbrella"* epitomizes the evolving and multifaceted landscape of children's literature in the latter part of the 20th century. It places an emphasis on relatable characters and universal themes. Children's literature should evoke emotions and create a lasting impact. Both stories are emotionally resonant, with *"The Little Match Girl"* drawing out empathy for the suffering of the protagonist, and *"The Blue Umbrella"* encouraging readers to feel compassion for Binya and her moral growth. These emotional connections are vital in the evaluation of children's literature.

## IV. PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION

Psychoanalytic theory, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, delves into the uncharted depths of the human psyche, uncovering hidden desires and the intricate workings of the human mind. This approach can be used to examine *"The Blue Umbrella"* and *"The Little Match Girl,"* shedding light on the characters' psychological journeys, underlying motivations, and the broader relevance of these aspects to a global audience.

"The wind grew stronger, picking up dead leaves and sending them spinning and swirling through the air"- *The Blue umbrella* - Ruskin Bond. "It was so terribly cold. Snow was falling, and it was almost dark. Evening came on"- *The Little Match Girl* - Hans Christian Andersen. These lines similarly describe harsh weather conditions in the respective stories. In both the stories the child protagonists were portrayed as innocent, young individuals facing challenging situations. In both the narratives, a profound convergence of desire and vivid imagination within the characters has been witnessed. Binya's determination to retrieve her beloved blue umbrella epitomizes an intense yearning that propels her forward. Her pursuit becomes a canvas upon which her imagination freely paints, conjuring visions of the sheer delight she anticipates when the umbrella is once again within her grasp.

Similarly, the little match girl embarks on a journey of both imagination and longing as she strikes each match. Within the brief, flickering glow of these matches, her dreams transcend her immediate dire circumstances. Each match illuminates a world filled with the warmth of comfort and the joy of a festive Christmas celebration, providing her with a momentary escape from the harsh reality of the cold and despair that engulfs her. These shared elements of desire and vibrant imagination underscore the indomitable strength of the human spirit to rise above adversity through the transformative power of hope and creative thought. In doing so, both narratives establish a deep emotional resonance and universal relevance, making them relatable to readers of diverse backgrounds. In both the cases the characters' desires run deep and serve as a driving force for their actions. Applying psychoanalytic theory could explore how these desires may be rooted in the characters' unconscious minds. Also, there are other relevant aspects of Freud's psychoanalysis that can be applied to the stories "The Blue Umbrella" and "The Little Match Girl." They are: Desire and pleasure principle, and repression. Furthermore, delving into the characters of "The Blue Umbrella" and "The Little Match Girl," we can apply Freud's concept of the Pleasure Principle is evident in both stories. Binya's intense yearning for the blue umbrella in "The Blue Umbrella" and the little match girl's fantasies of warmth and celebration in "The Little Match Girl" exemplify their pursuit of immediate pleasure and gratification, even in the face of adversity. These desires profoundly influence their actions, motivations, and their coping mechanisms in difficult situations. Moreover, another noteworthy aspect of Freud's psychoanalysis is 'Repression,' which deals with the subconscious act of suppressing distressing or unacceptable thoughts, memories, or desires. In both narratives, repression serves as a psychological mechanism utilized by the characters. In "The Blue Umbrella," Binya represses her feelings of anger and betrayal when she discovers the truth about the stolen umbrella. Her eventual act of compassion in returning the umbrella to Ram Bharosa signifies a breakthrough in dealing with this repressed emotion. Similarly, the little match girl's harsh reality and suffering are repressed as she escapes into vivid fantasies of warmth and happiness induced by her matches. These repressed emotions form a poignant undercurrent in the stories, shedding light on the complex workings of the human psyche when facing adversity.

## V. CONCLUSION

Binya's intense longing for the blue umbrella might symbolize deeper emotional needs or wishes. In *"The Little Match Girl,"* the little girl's yearning for warmth and a festive celebration could represent unconscious desires for comfort and happiness. The psychoanalytic theory brings forth the notion of defense mechanisms, which individuals utilize to confront and navigate difficult emotions or circumstances. Within these passages, one can examine whether the characters deploy any such defense mechanisms. For instance, Binya's unwavering commitment to reclaim her umbrella and the little match girl's vivid visions as she ignites matches might be regarded as coping strategies, providing them with a temporary respite from their immediate adversities. Both the protagonists navigate critical moments laden with moral and emotional significance. Binya, after successfully recovering her beloved blue umbrella, is met with a moral quandary when confronted by the repentant thief, Ram Bharosa. Her selfless decision to acknowledge his emotional attachment to the umbrella and return it showcases a profound moral evolution. This act resonates universally, underscoring the importance of empathy and the transformative capacity of compassion, transcending cultural boundaries.

Conversely, in the grim circumstances of *"The Little Match Girl,"* the protagonist succumbs to the unforgiving weather and dire conditions. Yet, her final moments are illuminated by the striking of a match. Within that fleeting, flickering light, she envisions a world brimming with warmth, comfort, and a jubilant Christmas celebration. Her passing serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerability endured by the less fortunate and the suffering experienced by those in poverty. This narrative underscores the universal theme of the human spirit's tenacity, as the little match girl clings to imagination and hope in the face of extreme adversity. It invokes a call for empathy and social awareness, rendering it pertinent to readers worldwide.

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