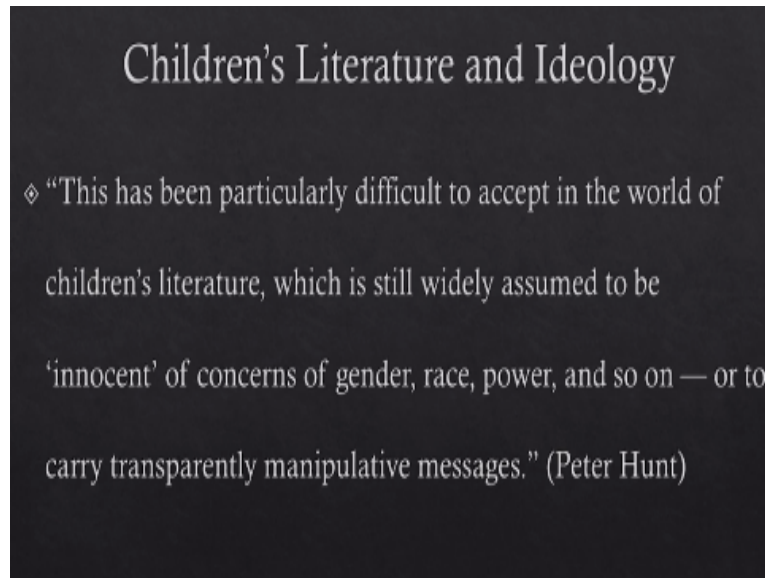


**Short Fiction in Indian Literature**  
**Prof. Divya. A**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Civil Engineering**  
**Indian Institute of Technology – Madras**

**Lecture-10A**  
**Hidden Fractures in Ruskin Bond's The Blue Umbrella-II**

Hello and welcome back to Ruskin Bond's the Blue Umbrella. The angle of interpretation that I am going for this particular story is Hidden Fractures.

**(Refer Slide Time: 00:30)**



And I would like to begin this session by introducing a concept by Peter Hunt on Children Literature and Ideology and this is the quote I would like us to look at closely. He says this has been particularly difficult to accept in the world of children's literature which is still widely assumed to be innocent of concerns of gender, race, power and so on or to carry transparently manipulative messages.

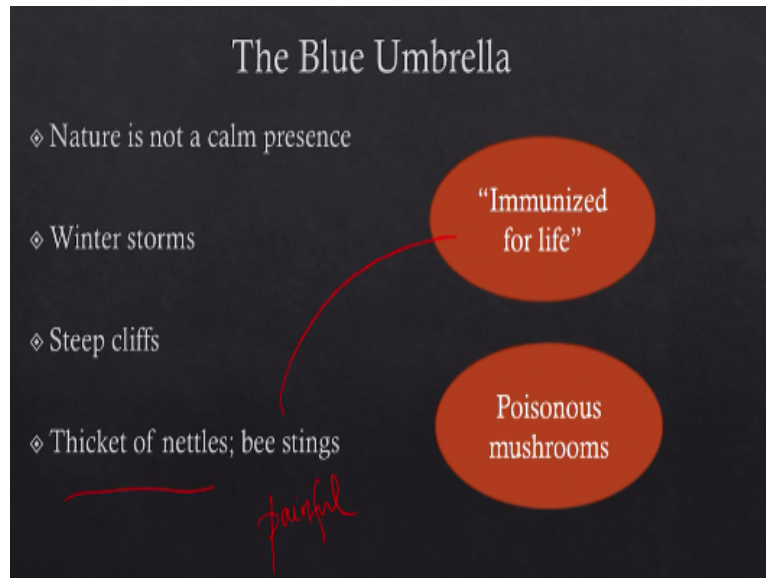
So in this particular idea of Peter Hunt here there are 2 things that we need to look at. One is he says that the general assumption is that children's literature is innocent and that is the term that he uses innocent of aspects or issues of gender, race, power or we look at children's literature as carrying easily understandable manipulative messages, things are really in black and white.

So either they are formulaic very reductive, very apparent that is transparent or we see them as not containing issues or complications of gender discrimination, racial issues and power

structures and things of that category. So according to Peter Hunt we need to really see Children's Literature from Ideological perspectives and that is one of the intentions behind my titling of this particular lecture which is to arrive at or to kind of lay bear.

The hidden fractures the (( )) (02:30) that are part of the world in which Binya and Bijju and their cows and how life is in Garhwal in the Himalayan ranges.

**(Refer Slide Time: 02:48)**



So let me look at this concept of nature itself. In Ruskin Bond fiction there is again a general consensus that nature is a calm presence, nature is beautiful and nature plays a really charming role in the landscape of Ruskin Bond fiction, but at least let us look at nature pretty very closely in the Blue Umbrella and I would argue that nature is not a calm presence in the world of Binya.

There are winter storms and in fact Binya was born during one such massive winter storm 10 years ago or there about and how mother remembers the fact that the snow piled up at least until up to the windows of their house. So it was a big natural calamity in some respects and if you look closely we have steep cliffs as well. In fact, on the very first conflicts is about Binya scaling down a steep hill phase in order to reach a kind of cherry tree or which grows on the side of a cliff and that is a precarious descent that she undertakes.

A slip would mean that she would fall from such a great height that surviving itself becomes a big question. So that kind of understanding of natural life in this particular fiction is essential I would think because it is sort of is a symbolic indication that life is not easy in the

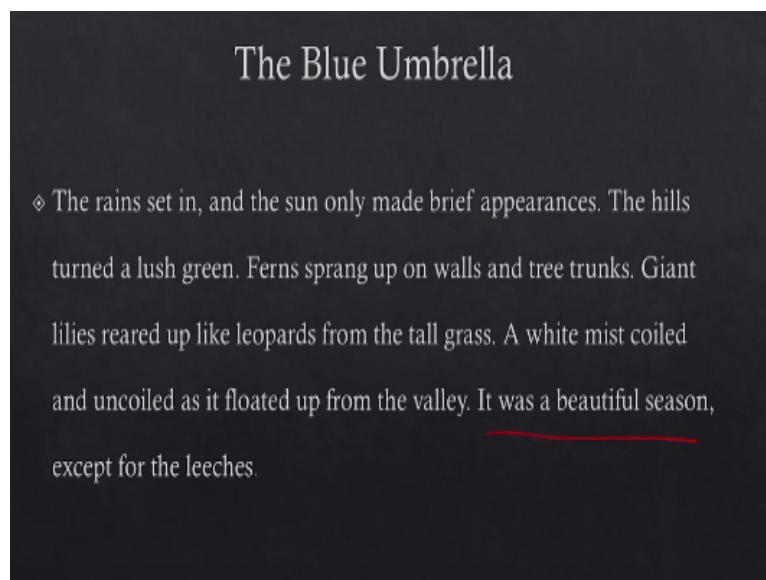
mountain ranges, life is very difficult and dangerous and in fact if you look at the lesser troubles in this particular fiction.

We have the thicket of nettles from which Binya rescues her Blue Umbrella and we have a reference to bees stinging Bijju even though he is immunized for life that was a really painful experience according to the narrator. So there are also other references to poisonous mushrooms, dangerous natural vegetables and then we have again a reference to leopard that is scrolling the hill side towards the end of the story.

And Binya is now in a hurry to get home in order to avoid an encounter and again we need to remember the encounter with a really poisonous snake and she escapes with the help of her Blue Umbrella. So nature the landscape, the beautiful landscape the hills is not a better (()) (06:04) to speak for Binya and her family and the rest of the villages. Okay let me see how this idea that nature is a dangerous subtext to the people.

That it (()) (06:20) to in this particular story the Blue Umbrella and this is a very good extract to do a close analysis in that regard.

**(Refer Slide Time: 06:34)**



The rains set in and the sun only made brief appearances. The hills turned a lush green. Ferns sprang up on the walls and tree trunks. Giant lilies reared up like leopards from the tall grass. A white mist coiled and uncoiled as it floated up from the valley. It was a beautiful season except for the leeches. It is very interesting that even that last statement in that extract which beautifully figuratively describes the elements of nature, the beautiful elements of nature

even mentions the fact that it was a beautiful season.

But for the leeches which drains the blood out from the human being. So that element that nature is a disturbing presence in the life of villages is mentioned directly in the description about the landscape.

**(Refer Slide Time: 07:41)**



Let us look at the phrasal verbs and the metaphorical significance of that spring up and something that springs up which means it is done in a southern manner and usually animals are supposed to spring up to catch the prey the predator kind of hide in the tall grass and they spring on to their victims, the vulnerable victims or victims who are completely unaware of the facts that these predators are hidden in the tall grass.

They reared up like leopard and that simile is also interesting. So rearing up we are reminded of another such action especially during the encounter with the snake when the poisonous snake the cobra rears up to attack Binya. So there is a lot of animal imagery embedded in this particular extract and that tells you the insidious aspect of nature is something that the villages are constantly aware of.

And probably because Ruskin Bond's who also lives in the mountain ranges is aware of such aspect of such perspectives of such realities which are embedded in the day-to-day life of the hill people. So by the way what is a metaphor? A metaphor is an implicit comparison between 2 things, hidden comparison between 2 things. So if we go back to that extract we have giant lilies rearing up like leopard.

So the way the lilies come out from the tall grass suddenly is compared to the rearing up of leopard from the tall grass.

**(Refer Slide Time: 09:45)**



Another set of words which are very interesting in this particular context of figurative language is coiling and uncoiling. We usually associate coiling and uncoiling with again snakes, pythons and even dangerous venomous snakes too. So again there is a over reference to threatening creatures from the wild and if you look at as I said if you look at the close of the fiction we have again reference to hungry leopards, we have sightings of bears too, bears which comes down from the hills and hoping to get some food from the villages.

And there is one such bear which climbs on to the roof of the shopkeeper tea shop and it leaves behind a claw when it gets back. So all these entire narrative is coded overtly and discretely with reference to the wide aspect of nature, the dangerous aspect of nature which again is an indication or appointing to the idea that the villagers have a uphill task on a daily basis in terms of leading their lives. So the threats in nature are both symbolic as well as literal.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:30)**



So we have looked at the figurative languages, the application or the usage of similes and metaphors and I have suggested that these similes and metaphors hint at the symbolic significance. And I would like to bring to your attention this particular statement which I mentioned highlighted little while ago that is it was a beautiful season except for the leeches the comparison is very, very striking.

You make a reference to the beautiful aspect of nature even though that description is overlaid with animal imagery. The animal imagery does evoke a particular charm about the hilly regions of the Himalayas and then you make a reference to the leeches the (( )) (12:20) leeches that suddenly kind of tricks that beautiful balloon so to speak and there is a kind of revulsion as soon as you read the word leech there is discuss, there is revulsion in association with this particular context.

And we do know that Binya is beaten by leeches and it is a painful itchy feeling and there is again an understanding that Ram Bharosa the villain of this piece does apply leeches to throbbing temples whenever he has a severe headache. So leeches are associated with discomfort with pain with backwardness with non progressive understanding about modern medicine.

So these are the associations that we can draw between the nature, the wealthiness and the way of life of people who live in close communion with nature.

**(Refer Slide Time: 13:35)**

## The Third Conflict

- ◆ “Ram Bharosa desired it”
- ◆ No longer “bright blue; still very attractive
- ◆ “He was the richest man in the area—so why shouldn’t he have a blue umbrella?”

Now let us look at the third conflict in this particular narrator. In the previous sessions we looked at 2 conflicts and the 2 conflicts are both from the nature itself provides the conflicts first through the playful (( )) (13:53) that takes away the umbrella from Binya and throws it down a cliff and then Binya is hard to retrieve it and that is the first conflict and second conflict is associated with the encounter with the cobra which tries to attack Binya and then Binya uses her weapon which is a blue umbrella and escapes with her life.

So these are the 2 conflicts now let us look at the third conflict which is connected or associated with human beings and their attitude towards the umbrella. Now who is at the heart of the third conflict. The answer is pretty easy if you have read the story. It is a shopkeeper Ram Bharosa he desired it and it is a deep passion that he has for the blue Umbrella.

And sometimes if you look at the way he looks at umbrella we are also reminded of the way Binya relates to the Blue Umbrella her passion for it. So to the 2 people the young girl and the older man have similar attitude towards this beautiful thing, but as time passes as the season passed the Blue Umbrella is no longer bright blue. It has lost its shine it is no longer very, very striking in terms of its color, but it was still very attractive in the village.

It was a very, very desirable commodity and Ram Bharosa thinks that he was the richest man in the area. So why should not he have a blue Umbrella. So look at the logic behind the desire. And if you recall my previous sessions I kind of pointed out a 2 other figures in the world of Binya who desire it really very overtly and one is the school master wife who thinks

that she has studied up to the B. A Bachelor degree.

And therefore since she is highly educated “she needs to have the blue umbrella”. If she thinks that it is her prerogative to have the umbrella and then we have the village pujari who thinks that he is a superior person, he is a very spiritual and therefore he should have an umbrella which reflects his authority in the village and he tries to get an umbrella which is superior to Binya and he goes for a multi color umbrella which she thinks is available in the nearest town, but he is disappointed.

And again that narrative of that superior people should own superior things and the blue umbrella is a superior thing is continued in the mind of this particular man Ram Bharosa too. So the narrator or Ruskin Bond continues that narrative that the rich the superior should possess this. So he asks this question he was the richest man of the area so why cannot he have the blue umbrella.

And that particular rhetorical question has several interesting layers of interpretations and we can see that the rich and the beautiful as (( )) (17:41) concepts the rich are supposed to own beautiful things seem to be the logic and the reverse would be the poor are supposed to own ugly concepts, ugly things. So that logic is very, very significant and that seems to be the logic running through this particular set of people in Ruskin Bond's fiction.

So if you remember the lady the school master's lady for her education is the faddish and for the pujari his spiritual authority is the faddish and for Ram Bharosa his wealth is his talisman, his badge of honor so to speak and he thinks that just because he is rich she should have nice things and reminded of summer vacation and in that particular story we have Amu noticing the beautiful ring the very intricate ring that Nani Ama wears.

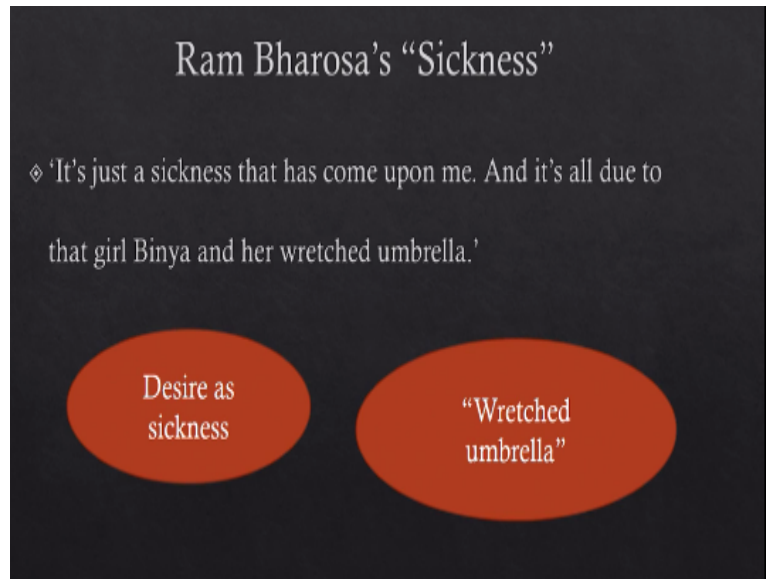
And Amu says that she is very fortunate to have that particular ring perhaps the jarring idea in her mind is the fact that unfortunate people, less wealthy people are not supposed to own or possess beautiful intricate aesthetic objects. So the same philosophy seems to run here too and then he says that he wants Ram Bharosa in Ruskin Bond blue umbrella he says that he wants to own this beauty.

And he feels that he is capable financially capable of owning this beauty. So he has this



prolonged desire or passion for this particular material object, the manmade object of the Blue Umbrella and the big question is why does he want to own this beauty.

**(Refer Slide Time: 20:01)**



So Ram Bharosa has this particular perspective and he feels that he has fallen sick. It is a kind of psychological sickness and that sickness has come about because of the umbrella and this is the set of statements that exemplifies his analysis. It is a very precise and sharp analysis and he says that it's a sickness that has come upon me and it is all due to that girl Binya and her wretched umbrella.

So he clearly understands the source of the problem in his mind and he calls the umbrella wretched umbrella. It is an interesting word choice. It is not the umbrella that is wretched, it is he himself who has become wretched because of the presence of the umbrella which is there in the village and he is capable of purchasing that umbrella and he cannot because Binya is not willing to sell it.

So that is one thing the other interesting element here is that the ideal of desire as sickness is presented by Ram Bharosa himself. It is a very neat psychological analysis under good concept of person desire as sickness, it is an ailment, it is a mental feeling and he has it. It is almost as if it is catching disease he has caught it and he cannot let it go. So the umbrella, the beautiful patch of blue that is what the narrator says the patch of blue, the beautiful patch of blue that Binya has all the time is bringing sickness to Ram Bharosa.

Now again makes this wonder about the opinion of the village folk that I described in my

previous session which is that the umbrella will catch any bad luck if there are bad luck issues going around. So it is the umbrella catching the bad luck, is it attracting bad luck, is Ram Bharosa victim of that bad luck that the umbrella has brought to the village. So we can also think about it in a more symbolic manner to have a very attractive commodity has brought chaos into this village folk.

And how these people desire it and want to own it and that is impossible. We need to look at a very important character. He is a minor character in this story and introduced pretty late by the author.

**(Refer Slide Time: 23:15)**



And he is Raja Ram and he is a kid. He is a child, a school going boy who goes to school with Bijju he is employed by Ram Bharosa in his tea shop and it is to Rajaram that Ram Bharosa is able to open up. So all these statements here have been related to in the presence or un-narrated in the presence of Rajaram. So he is somehow like the presence which brings out this discourse of the hidden desire in the shopkeeper.

So what is his function in the tea shop? He does the washing up and the running of the errands for Ram Bharosa and as I said he importantly gets the old shopkeeper to reveal his secret and his desires for the blue umbrella. So he is a like a mirror symbolically and Rajaram is able to reveal his inner longings.

**(Refer Slide Time: 24:35)**

## Rajaram and Ram Bharosa

- ◆ 'Why, what has she done to you?'
- ◆ 'Refused to sell me her umbrella! There's pride for you. And I offered her ten rupees.'
- ◆ Perhaps, if you gave her twelve...'
- ◆ 'But it isn't new any longer. It isn't worth eight rupees now. All the same, I'd like to have it.'

And this is the discourse of this conversation between Rajaram and Ram Bharosa. And once Binya walks by the tea shop with her umbrella and Ram Bharosa (( )) (24:47) big sigh and that sigh is resulting in this set of dialogues between the two. What has she done to you and Ram Bharosa says refused to sell me her umbrella. There is pride for you and I offered her ten rupees.

Perhaps if you gave her twelve, but it is not new any longer. It is not worth eight rupees now. All the same I would like to have it. Look at the way he judges Ram Bharosa judges Binya there is pride for you and he says I was willing to offer her ten rupees which is a lot of money in those days and Rajaram is very simplistic. He says that if we give her more and we understand that Ram Bharosa is a skinflint.

And he is not willing to offer more money for something that no longer new and he says that right now it is not worth eight rupees and anyway despite all this I would like to have it. Now as I mentioned the assessment of Binya's character by Ram Bharosa is significant when the girl refuses to sell she is labeled as very proud and this incidence reminds us of an earlier incident at the beginning of the story.

When the picnickers, the people from the plain when they picnic on the hill side and when Binya tries to get the blue umbrella and for her claw pendant one of the village women is struck by the fact that she asks for that blue umbrella and she says how dare she ask for my umbrella that insolence, that pride that she has in asking for something that she likes is comparable.

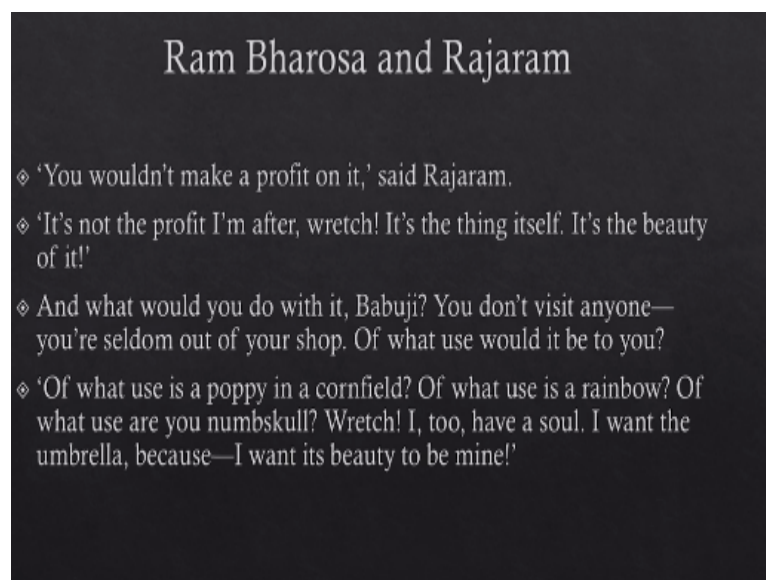
That reaction of that young women from the plain is comparable to the reaction of Ram Bharosa for them she is at the bottom of the hierarchy and the fact that she can refuse to oblige or give the staff that they want and the people who are at the top of the social ladder want. The refusal itself is very, very annoying and irritating to the people who are at the top of the society.

So it is a non obliging aspects of Binya hurts the ego of the rich shopkeeper. So that kind of refusal that Binya does is happens throughout if you read the story closely. She refuses to take any other stuff or she refuses to take money from the picnickers to exchange for her claw pendant and initially even when Ram Bharosa bargains with Binya for the blue umbrella she refuses.

And even with the little children she gives them to hold the umbrella only for a little time and then she takes it back. So Binya is a very, very persistent and stubborn and she has great passion for the umbrella just as the other people who desire it greatly like Ram Bharosa, so that something we need to keep in mind. So Binya character is also very interesting in that regard and a close analysis will tell you that all the failings many of the other villagers have in the society are kind of embedded in Binya character too.

So let us go back to the conversation between Ram Bharosa and Rajaram.

**(Refer Slide Time: 29:14)**



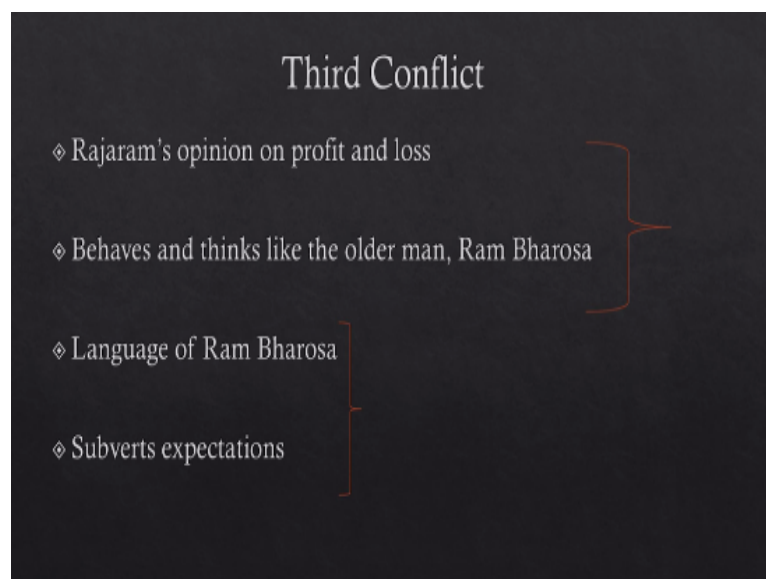
Raja Ram says that you would not make a profit on it if you want to sell it that is the hidden

subtext there. You would not make a profit on it said Rajaram it is not the profit I am after  
wretch. It is the thing itself, it is the beauty of it and what would you do with it babuji you do  
not visit anyone, your seldom out of your shop of what use would it be to you of what use is a  
poppy in a cornfield, of what use is a rainbow, of what use are your numbskull.

Wretch I too have a soul; I want the umbrella because I wants it beauty to be mine. It is one  
of the most significant passages in this particular story and Ram Bharosa is a character who is  
a profound character we cannot understand Bharosa as a simplistic man who wants an  
umbrella because it is beautiful and he is capable of purchasing it. He kind of creates a  
narrative in his mind about why exactly he wants the umbrella from Binya and he says that in  
this particular extract.

He says that I am not going to make a profit, I am not going to sell this particular object, it is  
not money I am after. It is the thing itself, it is a beauty of it and I want that beauty to be  
mine.

**(Refer Slide Time: 30:54)**

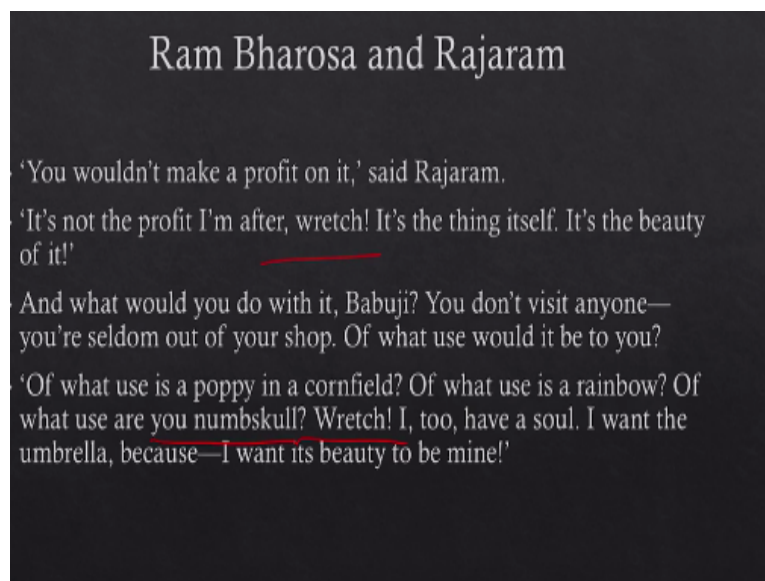


And there are several things here, but I would like to look at Rajaram opinion on profit and  
loss because that tells you that he has a good read on Ram Bharosa character. In fact we can  
even go so far as to say that he behaves and thinks like the older man himself because  
towards the end of the story or a little later after this exchange we have a bargaining discourse  
between Ram Bharosa and Rajaram where Rajaram is very, very insistent and persistent in  
striking a good bargain according to him.

And Ram Bharosa gives in ultimately. So there are parallels between Ram Bharosa and Rajaram too he seems to be like a mirror image of this older man Ram Bharosa and he kind of bargains with him and ultimately he wins the bargain and gets the 3 rupees he wants from Ram Bharosa or the assurance from Ram Bharosa that he would give 3 rupees if he is able to steal the umbrella from Binya.

So that is one thing the fact that Rajaram is able to understanding the workings of Ram Bharosa mind is evident in that particular exchange. The other thing that we need to keep note of here is the language of Ram Bharosa.

**(Refer Slide Time: 32:36)**



If we go back to that particular extract, we realize that he refers to Rajaram as wretch not once but several times wretch and then he says what use are your numbskull means stupid person. So that language is an indication of the quality of mind of Ram Bharosa and we suddenly realize that being evil is one thing in a particular children fiction, but to be abusive towards children is another and our expectation that the adults are supposed to be guardians of young minds are supposed to set the model for young folk are subverted here in this particular exchange of ideas.

So I will come to the third conflict in my next session. Thank you for watching I will continue in the next session.