

RUSKIN BOND'S PANTHER'S MOON: A STORY OF A STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is a writer who writes regional stories set against the background of Himalayan hills. Many of his stories depict the struggle for survival for the people who live in the villages located in Himalayan valley. Some of Ruskin Bond's stories are full of adventures. Bond depicts the hard life of Himalayan children. As there is no school in villages, children have to walk about five miles every day to and fro. The weather in hills is also uncertain. There is always possibility of rain and land slide. The animal like panther may attack anytime. Sometimes animals also become man-eater. Thus, the people who live in the villages located in the Himalayan valleys are always under constant fear. In Panther's Moon Bond describes hard life of villagers. The current research paper studies how Bond describes struggle for survival of inhabitants of Himalayan hills in his episodic story Panther's Moon.



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This is an episodic story divided in nine parts. The story is set in a small village Manjari situated in Himalayan valleys. Bisnu, a twelve year old school boy, is the protagonist of the story. The story also describes the hard life of people who live in Himalayan valleys. The first part of the story begins with Bisnu's daily activities right from his early rising of bed at five o'clock in the morning. He and his dog Sheroo begins walking down to the stream. Having taken bath in the stream Bisnu returns home where he finds his mother up, making tea and chapattis. Her older sister Puja is still sleeping. She helps her mother in the households during the day. She does not go to school with Bisnu. Though Bisnu is twelve years old, he is the head of the family as his father is dead.

Thus, Bisnu starts his five miles up the mountains journey to school with the blessings of Lord Ganesh. Bond then comments on the farming activities. They have to depend upon the monsoon therefore expect timely monsoon.

Bond depicts the hard life of Himalayan children. As there is no school in Manjari village, Bisnu has to walk five miles every day to and fro. The nearest school is at Kemptee, a small township on bus route. Manjari is located a drop over two thousand feet from Kemptee. From hills to plains, through oak forest, from trees, crossing a small brook Bisnu stops to drink water. Here Sarru joins him with milk cans to sell milk. Sarru informs Bisnu that there

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is a panther previous night in his village. Bisnu knows panthers do not normally attack humans. Occasionally, it attacks a careless dog or a stray goat. According to Bond the reason behind the attack of panthers on stray animals or humans is hunters. He explains:

‘These hunters are the people who cause all the trouble. They think it is easy to shoot a panther. It would be better if they missed altogether, but they usually wound it.’

‘And then the panther’s too slow to catch the barking deer, and starts on our own animals.’

‘We are lucky it didn’t become a man-eater. Do you remember the man-eater six years ago? I was very small then? My father told me all about it. Ten people were killed in our valley alone.’(126)

At the end of the part they meet Mela Ram, the Postman.

In the Second part, three characters are described. Firstly, the postman Mela Ram is introduced. Dr Taylor is fifty but full of vitality. She has been in India for twenty years. She knows Bisnu and admires him. Bisnu’s teacher is Mr. Nautiyal’s character is also described at length. Mr. Nautiyal is in bad temper. A herd of goats entered his garden that had damaged his favorite rose plants. At the end of the day Bisnu starts his return journey with his dog Sheroo. As he reaches near the brook, he remembers the bangles he has promised to buy for Puja. He decides to return for the bangles and addresses to Sheroo but finds it missing. Soon Bisnu comes to know that Sheroo has been seized by a panther. With tear in his eyes Bisnu returns home. The part ends with this untoward incident.

The third part begins with Bisnu’s grief. He has lost his companion unexpectedly. In the hills when you are alone, pets can be your best companions. Though Bishnu is quite young boy, he is not sentimental. He knows the uncertainty of the life in hills but the surprising about this attack of panther is it has shown the daring to attack the dog even before the dark. In spite of all this, he becomes ready to undertake his long journey without his companion. He thinks if he stays at home on every appearance of panther, he might stop going to school altogether. He leaves even earlier than his usual time. Dr. Taylor also shows sympathy when she comes to know about Sheroo’s death. Mr. Nautiya is also symthatic towards Bisnu on learning about the incident and asks him to go home early if he desires but Bisnu shows the spirit and does not go home early. At the end of the chapter Bisnu fights with a boy and forgets everything. Thus, the chapter shows the hard life and spirit of the people of the

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Himalayan hills. Despite constant fear of animals, the people in the hills like Bisnu perform their duty.

The fourth part of the story describes the panther's attack on a small boy Sanjay who is just nine year old son of the villager named Kalam Singh. Since the panther's attack on Sheroo, the people of the village have become alert. Until now the panther has not attacked any human but Sanjay becomes the first victim. Bond describes how panther stealthily approaches Kalamsinh's house and takes away Sanjay. The other family members and villagers drive out the panther. But Sanjay is seriously wounded and lays unconscious. Villagers think that Sanjay will not live through night but Sanjay returns to consciousness. Kalam Singh without wasting time decides to take him to Dr. Taylor's hospital. Taking Sanjay on his back Kalam Singh walks for two mile and reaches the hospital at Kemptee where Dr. Taylor treats Sanjay. After primary medieval treatment Kalam Singh returns home. In this part also Bond describes hard life of villagers of Himalayan hills.

In the fifth part we learn that the panther has disappeared for few days after the attack on sanjay but Bisnu has stopped going to school because there is no one to accompany him. This worries him much because his final examination is approaching. Sanjay has nightmares for several nights but with the resilience of youth quickly recovers. The panther has not been seen over a week so the people of the village think that it might have moved on over the mountain or further down the valley. But they confidently don't believe and start move around fearlessly. Bisnu thinks of starting of going to school again but her sister Puja warns him not to be too sure. Bisnu's mother suggests him to go with Sanjay and his father. Mr. Nautiyal is pleased to see Bisnu at school but advises to attend extra classes. Bisnu replies he must reach home before dark as he has to be careful of panther. While they are returning, Melaram, the postman informs them that the panther has moved away in another district. Bishnu reaches home. Again he forgets the bangles for Puja.

The part sixth begins with rain and thunderstorm that give hope to the villagers in time arrival of the monsoon. Bisnu on his way home from school is caught in the rain. The rain has freshened the whole surroundings. Meanwhile, Bisnu finds a kid of a goat that has been strayed from the rest of the herd. Bisnu decides to keep it until the owner claims it. The goat is a good replacement of Sheroo for Bisnu. The story reaches to its climax when Bisnu hears the sawing grunt of a panther just from a hundred to two hundred yards right to him. Bisnu is aware of the life of the hills and animals around. If it is an ordinary panther, it will go away on finding that the kid is with him. But it is the man-eater; it will not hesitate to

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attack the boy. The only way to save his life and the kid from panther's attack is to climb a tree. Without losing time Bisnu, decides to climb a spruce tree, as it is the only tree nearby. Bisnu is a good climber of tree. He is twelve feet above the ground, at the height where the panther cannot leap. Bisnu shouts for help. Bisnu's mother and sister worry much down in the village as Bisnu does not return even after dark. Kalam Singh along with other armed villagers set out in search of Bisnu. Puja shows courage to join the search party and go with them. The search party reaches near Bisnu. The panther, hearing the noise of approaching humans disappears in the forests. They rescue Bisnu and the kid.

The seventh part describes the several attacks of the frustrated panther on humans. The postman Melaram becomes the first victim of the panther. After Melaram's disappearance, an old woman has been dragged out of her house. One more attack has been made in Sarru's village on a woman. The villagers are so frightened by the panthers that they represent the matter before the magistrate. Bisnu is upset because he is unable to go to school. Bond describes miserable condition of Himalayan school children as;

Bisnu was fretting because he could not go to school. Most boys would be only too happy to miss school but when you are living in a remote village in the mountains and having an education is the only way of seeing the world, you look forward to going to school, even if it is five miles from home. Bisnu's exams were two weeks off and he didn't want to remain in the same class while the other s were promoted. Besides, he knew he could pass even though he had missed a number of lessons. But he had to sit for the exams. He couldn't miss them. (140)

People of hills are always optimistic. In spite of all troubles they have deep faith in nature and God. Bisnu is worried about his exams but his sister and mother both comfort him. Through them Bond express optimistic attitude of people of hills. 'Cheer up, Bhaiya' said Puja, 'The Panther may go away once the rains break.' Her mother also adds further that they will soon get rid of the beast soon and he will pass his exams. To cheer up her children the mother tells a humorous story. Bisnu falls asleep before the story finishes. At night when Bisnu awakes he realizes a panther is scratching at the door of his house. It is trying to get its paw in under the door. Bisnu gets his spear through the window, he brings the sharp end down with considerable force on the panther's rump. The panther leaps away with a roar of

pain and disappears into the darkness. Thus, the panther tries to enter Bisnu's house but doesn't succeed. The part ends with Bisnu's clever trick that drives out the panther.

The part eight shows that the panther has become a kind of mystery for the villagers. They cannot predict when it appears or it attacks. Sometimes it behaves like a coward and sometimes shows extra ordinary daring. He does not need thick forest to hide in. The panther appears again while Puja and Bisnu are busy with their work in the field above their house. Bisnu is fascinated by the panther's mighty look.

It looked enormous from the angle at which he saw it and for a moment he thought it was a tiger. But Bisnu knew instinctively that it was the man-eater. (Bond 142)

The spell is broken when Bisnu realizes that the Panther is stalking his sister Puja. Bisnu shouts in panic and warns Puja about the panther. With great presence of mind, she jumps down into a ditch dug for irrigation. The panther misses and falls into the ditch a little far away from Puja. Bisnu shows extra ordinary courage though he is small boy. He comes with an axe shouting 'Kill,kill! Two other men also rush to help Bisnu armed with axes. The battle continues between the panther and the three men. The panther attacks on one of the three and tries to get at his throat. Kalam Singh arrives just then with a long spear. He plunges the end of the spear into the panther's neck. The panther is deadly wounded and runs away in bushes. Finally the panther dies. The death of the panther is confirmed by Kalam Singh. Kalam Singh rejoices the death by arranging a feast at his house for the villagers. The villagers of Manjari takes a sigh of relief. They can move fearlessly now. The part ends in celebration of the villagers.

The final part of the story passes on valuable messages to the readers. Bisnu is on his way home after finishing his paper. The story of Bisnu's heroic role in killing of panther has spread like a forest fire. Sarru meets him on the way and asks him to wait for him. Through their discussion Bond passes on the serious message of the story. Bond believes that animals kill stray animals or become a man-eater only if hunters wound them with bullets. Consequently, animals lose their natural rapidity and target stray goat, dog or even humans. Some animals become man-eaters only because of these hunters. Otherwise humans have never been natural prey for animals. Bond also mentions that people of hills suffer a lot because of man-eaters.

‘Well, I hope we don’t have any more man-eaters for some time,’ he said. I have lost a lot of money by not being able to take milk up to Kemptee.’

‘We should be safe as long as a shikari doesn’t wound another panther. There was an old bullet wound in the man-eater’s thigh. That’s why it couldn’t hunt in the forest. The deer were too fast for it.’(Bond 145)

The season of monsoon arrives on time. Bisnu reaches home but doesn’t forget bangles for Puja today. She is very happy to get her favourite bangles. Thus, the story ends happily.

Thus, the story describes in detail Bisnu’s adventurous journey. In the story Bisnu becomes instrumental for inhabitants of Himalayan valley who have to struggle a lot for their survival.

In *Panther’s Moon*, the presence of a man-eater in the forest becomes a battle for survival for twelve-year-old Bisnu. The panther emerges as his personal adversary because he is unable to attend the school and is confronted with the possibility of failing in the final exam. (Aggarwal 88)

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