

**Struggle between Humans and Wild Creatures in
Ruskin Bond's Selected Short Stories**

V. Valarmathi, M.A., M.Ed., M.Phil.



Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond. (2012). FamousAuthors.org. Retrieved 04:07, October 1, 2016 from <http://www.famousauthors.org/ruskin-bond>

Abstract

Humans belong to the earth in much the same way as animals and plants belong. The relationship between animals and humans show that they are interrelated. The present day world is a world of advancements, hi-tech technology and incredible scientific growth and development. People live a mechanical life which has turned them blind toward nature and natural surroundings. In the present scenario, some writers have made themselves necessary to the human heart. Ruskin Bond is one such writer whose dominant theme is ecology and

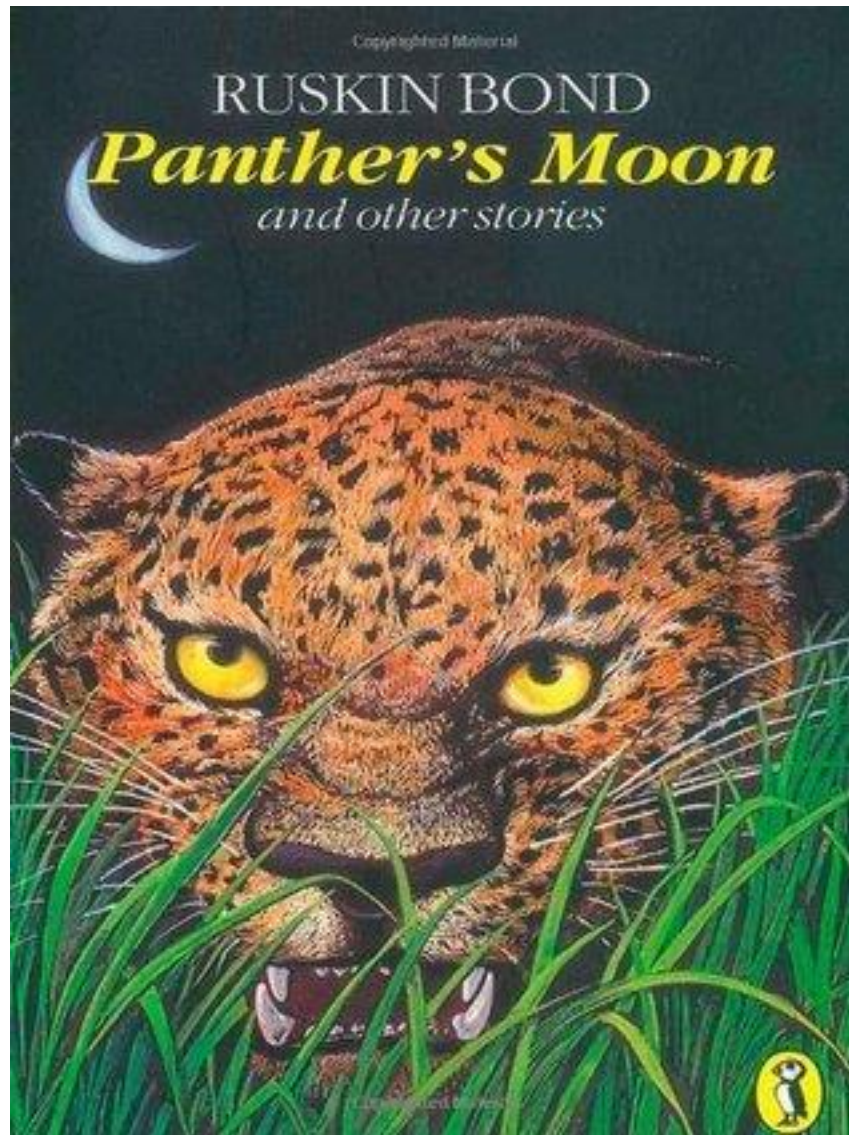
environment. He always emphasizes on the friendly relationship between humans and non-humans as both are interdependent. Bond skillfully handles the issues on man's harmony with his environment including animals. In his stories, he describes this passion for pets and animals and related adventures. He equates animals with human beings and gives a graphic description of wildlife in his stories. Ruskin not only brings man into a close relationship with animals but also shows how sometimes people are being affected by wild creatures.

The present paper attempts to analyze the conflicts faced by the humans and wild animals for their survival.

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, Humans and wild animals, Wild Life, Theme of struggle to survive in the selected short stories.

Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond is born on 19 May 1934. He is an Indian author of British descent. The Indian Council for Child education recognized his pioneering role in the growth of children's literature in India and awarded him the Sahitya Akademi award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He has also awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhusan in 2014. He now lives with his adopted family in Landour near Mussoorie.



Panther's Moon and Other Stories

Ruskin Bond's *Panther's Moon and Other Stories* comprises ten stories. It describes the relationship between humans and wild creatures and their struggle for their existence. The protagonists of these stories have tender feelings for animals and wildlife. The stories also effectively show the aggressive attitude of animals that fight for food and with their opponents for their existence. Living in the hills, or near the vast forests or the sea makes one easier to engage with the natural world. Ruskin Bond is very close to nature as he spends most of his life in the hills. The man who is a 'minority' in the world of animals has been persecuting animals more than expressing love and showing care towards them being a supreme creature among them all. These days one can learn about conflicts between men and animals entering into the human

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zone as there are shortages of space for them. The great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata have provided infinite space for animals. Even in Panchatantra a classic of India of 5th century BC by Vishnusharma is full of animal characters.

The Wildlife

Bond's observation of the wildlife is evident in many of his descriptions about them. Even in animal society, there are fights and harmonious relationships. The life of the wild animals makes one astonished as their world is different. Animal's world is a world of innocence. They do not harm humans unless and until their anger is induced. Animals hunt other animals for their livelihood. But man kills them for other reasons. Not all the people have this attitude towards animals. Like the human characters in Ruskin Bond, some people love animals.

The Tiger in the Tunnel

The first story titled The Tiger in the Tunnel illustrates about a central character who is a watchman and his experience with a tiger hiding in a tunnel. The theme of the sense of duty is aptly brought out in the story through Baldeo, the watchman at a wayside signal shop. He is a responsible man who fulfills his duties towards his family as well as his shop. The theme of the sense of responsibility is aptly brought out in the story through Baldeo, the watchman at a wayside signal stop. He is a responsible man, who fulfills his duties towards his family as well as his job. For the welfare of his family, Baldeo takes up the job of watchman unmindful of having to stay away from home and family, near a dense and wild forest. As far as his job is concerned, Baldeo never shirks his duty. Even in the dead of night, extreme cold and prowling wild animals, Baldeo leaves the warmth of his bed to proceed towards the station for his nightly errand. It is in the course of doing his duty that he encounters the ferocious man-eater tiger. He fights valiantly but loses his life. Thus, he diligently performs his duty so that others may be safe. The axe becomes a symbol of commitment to duty and a symbol of man's constant war against forces of nature. Baldeo shows great courage and determination in his fight with the man-eater tiger. As soon as Baldeo realizes that the tiger is heading towards him, he prepares to attack, with his axe in hand. Though the chances are slim for Baldeo, he decides firmly not to give in. He fights bravely, giving the tiger a deathly blow on its shoulder, wounding it severely. He dies a brave man, fighting till his last breath.

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The tiger roaring with pain now sprang upon Baldeo, bringing him down and then tearing at his broken body. It was all over in a few minutes. (7)

His axe gives him courage, and it is only when he loses it, does he fall prey to the tiger. Tembu, his son, realized that his father was death, grieved for his death, and returned to the tunnel to light the signal lamp.

The Monkeys

Another story **The Monkeys** portrays a monkey who never forgives the woman who grows Dahlias. The narrator of the story stays in a cottage where Miss.Fairchild once lives with her dogs. Colonel Fanshawe tells the narrator that Fairchild is killed by the monkeys who spoil her garden full of dahlias. He says:

... Well, Miss Fairchild fairly loathed those monkeys. She was very keen on her dahlias-grew some prize specimens- but the monkeys would come at night, dig up the plants, and eat the dahlia bulbs. (14)

Miss Fairchild sets her dog to chase the animals away. But it ends in vain. She becomes furious and shoots one of the monkeys dead. As soon as the narrator hears this, he takes pity on the animal considering them as humans. He is shocked to hear that the animals also kill the lady. It shows that even animals have the power to take revenge against people.

Grandpa Fights An Ostrich

Grandpa Fights An Ostrich narrates the story of the grandfather who had his memorable encounter with the Ostrich when he was working in the Indian railway. One day grandfather accompanied by his dog made a journey on foot. Suddenly he was attacked by an Ostrich. It kicked him and tried to tear him into pieces.

Altering course a little, I rushed for the nearest clump of bushes where, gasping for breath, I waited for my pursuer. The great bird was almost immediately upon me, and a strange encounter commenced.(21)

The grandfather struggled for his survival and finally his dog saved him. This story shows the ferocious attitude of an Ostrich and love which is shown by the dog to its master.

Panther's Moon

In the story, **Panther's Moon**, the presence of a man-eater in the forest becomes a battle for the survival for a young boy Bisnu. The panther emerges a personal adversary because Bisnu is unable to attend the school and is confronted with the possibility of failing in the final examinations. He determines to continue his schooling and ultimately succeed in forcing the animal to change the territory. The character of Bisnu displays his tremendous courage and presence of mind. The description of animal's encounter with humans is very exciting and thrilling. Bond portrays the man-eater as a villain who kills innocent people brutally:

No one likes that old villain. He must have been a man-eater himself in some previous existence!(35)

Eyes of the Cat

Eyes of the Cat deals with the story of a young school girl named Kiran who transforms into a tawny leopard to avenge the wrongs done to her by her teacher. From the beginning of the narrative, it becomes evident that it is Kiran's poverty which makes her the target of her teacher's relentless bullying, taunting her because of her inability to attend the tuition. Kiran's transformation into the leopard as well as her character contrast with Madam is both highly symbolic and fraught with irony. Even as a young girl – as certainly as she is as a leopard – Kiran is completely and utterly at home in the wilderness of the mountains; even though her friends seem somewhat nervous, she exhibits no fear or apprehension of wandering alone along the forest's desolate paths. Madam, on the other hand, appears to be relatively well-off than Kiran. She runs a private academy for girls, and even the club with which she has her affiliation is named the "Kitten Club. Kitten' stands for harmlessness, innocence, and gentleness whereas Kiran is the 'Leopard,' the far more menacing and dangerous member of the same cat family. Also, Madam herself, in all her harshness and scornfulness towards the girls of her academy, can hardly be termed a kitten. The description of the leopard waiting at Madam's doorstep is also ironic for it is described as sitting silently:

"waiting with all the patience of an obedient schoolgirl" (75)

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After all the insults and hurt inflicted on her, the only occasion Kiran chooses to display obedience and patience towards her teacher is when she is finally able to exact her vengeance:

When Madam saw the leopard on her steps, she dropped her handbag and opened her mouth to scream; but her voice would not materialize. Nor would her tongue ever be used again, either to savour chicken biryani or to pour scorn upon her pupils, for the leopard had sprung at her throat, broken her neck, and dragged her into the bushes." (75)

The Leopard

In another story "**The Leopard**," a village boy wanders all by himself in the forest without any defense. He unconsciously becomes friendly with a beast. He enjoys the presence of the beast crouching at the bank of the river, and in return, the animal also likes his presence. Both are confident about each other, but the boy is scared of the men who may come any day with the gun to shoot it:

I thought no more of the men. My attitude towards them was similar to that of the denizens of the forest. These were people unpredictable, and to be avoided if possible". (84)

This mutual distrust of the outsider is shared by the beast and the boy, who is critical about the deception of human beings. Ruskin Bond's honest opinion is that wild animals are not an object of entertainment or amusement. They deserve the equal right to lead a free and happy life like human beings. The concluding line in the story, "The Leopard," is a quotation from D.H. Lawrence:

"There was room in the world for a mountain lion and me." (87)

summarize the theme of the story. The villagers live in harmony with nature and believe in peaceful co-existence with the jungle, its trees, and animals. They do not interfere with each other's life. But only when the man crosses this boundary and tries to kill the Leopard, the

trouble starts. The wounded Leopard starts attacking the animals and the people in the village, for its survival.

Grandpa Tickles a Tiger

Grandpa Tickles a Tiger is a touching story of an animal lover, Ruskin Bond's grandfather, who bought a tiger-cub home. At first, Timothy, as the grandmother of the author named it, was friendly and loved amusements. But when he was about six months old, he became less friendly, and when grandfather thought that Timothy had become dangerous, he took him to the nearby Lucknow zoo:

...when Timothy was about six months old a change came over him; he grew steadily less friendly. (92)

When grandfather visited the Zoo, he stroked the tiger's forehead and tickled his ear. It was only later that he came to know that Timothy had died two months ago of pneumonia. But the tiger was still licking grandfather's arm, as he could see the love in his eyes.

The Eyes of the Eagle

The Eyes of the Eagle portrays the story of Little Jai with his dog Motu, guards his grandfather's flock in the Tung meadows, high up on the Himalayan range. But on the prowl is a mighty golden eagle, with its powerful beak and talons, ready to prey on the lambs. Motu is injured by the wild bird when he saves the lamb from the bird. Grandfather cleans and applies a paste made of herbs. Finally, Jai chased the bird away with the help of his villagers. Ruskin Bond describes the bird:

The golden eagle stood almost as tall as Jai. Its wings were still outspread. It's fierce eyes seemed to be looking through and through the boy.(107)

Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright

Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright is an interesting story about the future of wildlife in India. It describes a sturdy old tiger that lives on its own near a village in the foothills of the Himalayas, and the villagers and the tiger respect each other's territory. When everything is dry due to the late arrival of monsoon rains and due to the breaking out of the fire in the forest the tiger remains hungry for quite some time and then it makes the buffaloes of villagers its food. Since the

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villagers are concerned about their survival they kill the tiger by cleverly trapping him. If the tiger is slightly wounded, it falls in the Ganges and floats to the opposite bank where he seeks refuge in a befitting manner. The villagers feel sorry for the tiger in his absence because he is a dignified creature which symbolizes harmony of creation and offers protection to the green forest from those who cut off trees and therefore **Tiger Tiger Burning Bright** is an emblem of grace that preserves wildlife:

The tiger is the very soul of India, and when the last tiger has gone, so would the soul of the country. (117)

A Crow for all Seasons

The story **A Crow for all Seasons** is a compelling account of a crow, which befools human beings. The Crow also accepts the truth that people are necessary for their existence and thus the fact regarding the interdependence of nature is emphasized here. "**A Crow for All Seasons**," is also a satire on the indifference of humans regarding birds and beasts and this truth is revealed through a crow named Speedy who lives in a bungalow inhabited by the Colonel, his wife, their son, and junior sahib. Speedy thinks that Junior Sahib is inferior to crows because he does not earn his living but takes food three times a day and is a burden on his relatives. The Colonel and his wife give Speedy waste food and allow him to eat from the trash bin. Junior Sahib is cruel and objects his presence. He always tries to make him fly away. When junior sahib shoots Speedy's cousin, Speedy becomes furious, and he with the entire Crow community pecks and claws him whenever he comes out of the house. Junior Sahib has an anxious collapse, and the colonel takes him to the hills for recovery. When Speedy appears on the verandah of the rest house, junior Sahib starts behaving strangely and imagines himself to be a Crow. The story ends happily when the family returns home, and Junior Sahib starts feeding the crows every day. "**A Crow for All Seasons**" is a satire on the inhuman attitude of the human beings regarding animals. Human beings are intimately associated with animals and the world of nature.

Focus on Relationship between Animals and Humans

All these stories clearly state the various kinds of relationships between the humans and animals. In Ruskin Bond's stories where animals are the antagonists of humans, either animals struggle to survive, or people upset the ecological balance by an intrusion into the world of

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animals. His stories lay emphasis on saving wild animals in this world. Ruskin Bond's perception about wildlife is that raptorial animals are part of the duality of nature; therefore, one must protect them and let them live on earth. In the hills, life is risky because one has to face the constant threat of wild animals. Ruskin Bond's honest opinion is that wild animals are not an object of entertainment or amusement. They deserve the equal right to lead a free and happy life like human beings.

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