



## **PORTRAYAL OF BRAVE FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN THE NIGHT OF THE LEOPARD**

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### **Abstract**

*This research paper aims at undergoing the various features of adolescent stage of life like bravery, sentimentality, moral sense, sense of ego, rebelliousness, sense of responsibility, developing consciousness towards growing body parts etc. The paper throws light on certain specific qualities like sense of responsibility, bravery developing among the growing up female adolescents. The Night of the Leopard is a short story by Shashikala Skeimo depicting the thrilling experience and courage of two young sisters. Both the sisters save not only their life but also trap the leopard and save their parents' life. The story is narrated by first person singular, the elder sister. Generally, females are considered weak and helpless. But bravery is not the fiftom of any class, religion or gender. This story challenges such prejudice and proves that female adolescents can fight against the most vicious cat, the leopard that accidently come to their house. The narrator and her younger sister tactfully face the leopard and save not only their but also their parents' life who are out and would come back home soon. Both the sisters trap the wild beast into the store room of their house. This is an inspiring short fiction of female adolescents' courage to face the wild animal within their house in the absence of their parents.*



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### **Introduction:**

#### **'Adolescence': Definition/ Concept**

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first, the  
infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
Then the whining schoolboy, with his  
satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like  
snail

Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a  
soldier,  
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the  
pard,  
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in  
quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the  
justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too  
wide  
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly  
voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans  
everything. 1

Here, William Shakespeare considers the whole worlds as a stage and men and women are merely players who perform different roles they get. After infant's the second is the school boy's phase that is one of the most significant stages that shapes one's personality and molds one's self. That is the stage of 'adolescence'. It is a link between childhood and adulthood. This is such a period of life as witnesses a drastic change in one's physical, emotional, mental

and social development. An adolescent who has just left his childhood behind and has not grown adultery fully, struggles to settle him/herself. One becomes more conscious about his/her personality, appearance or look, dressing manners, physical changes that develop at very fast speed.

### **1.6.1 Definition of Adolescence:**

The task of defining adolescence remains a confusing one due to the fact that adolescents themselves are influenced by various factors that determine when childhood ends and adulthood begins. In general conception, the term 'adolescence' has been derived from Latin meaning 'to grow up' and it is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood. It is quite impossible to have a general agreed definition of such term. One of the definitions is given in Medical Dictionary:

**Adolescence** [ad"o-les'ens]

the period between the onset of puberty and the cessation of physical growth; roughly from 11 to 19 years of age. Adj. adoles'cent.

Adolescents vacillate between being children and being adults. They are adjusting to the physiologic changes their bodies are undergoing and are working to establish a sexual identification and to use these changes for their personal benefit and for the benefit of society. They are searching for personal identity and wanting freedom and independence of thought and action, but they continue to have a strong dependence on their parents and suffer feelings of loss in separating from them. In reaction to this they identify with their peers and tend to yield to peer pressure and conform to peer group values, behavior, and tastes in such things as clothing, food, and entertainment. 2

Some children show extra-ordinary bravery and courage. Such heroic personalities can be observed in literature as well as history. It is said that Chhatrapati Shivaji had won his first fort when he was only sixteen. Renowned Gujarati poet Zaverchand Meghani has written a poem *Caharan Kanya (A Girl of Caharan Community)*. The poet presents the character of a fearless girl of fourteen who faces a lion bravely in Gir forest and drives it away. To motivate such children, in India every year, special awards are given by the President of India to the children who show unusual courage, and save lives of other people at the risk of their own life. *The Night of the Leopardis* such a short fiction by Shashikala Skemoe as introduces two brave adolescent sisters.

### **Portrayal of brave female adolescents:**

The story begins in tense atmosphere. Both sisters are alone at home as their parents have gone into town for the funeral of a close friend. They live very close to the edge of jungle. In the very beginning there is a question by the young sister: ‘What was that?’ both sisters are in living-room. The narrator is cleaning the floor and her sister Mandakini is studying for her Pre-Degree Exams. They hear some sound in the kitchen. Again they hear a scratching followed by a coughing grunt. It is clear that there is some wild animal in the kitchen. The narrator pales and her sister clutches her arm.

The narrator’s family lives very close to the edge of jungle, so it is quite possible. In fact, they are sole inhabitants of the Kadampuzha Housing Colony. There are forty –eight other houses but only the narrator’s family has shifted here so close to the wild. Therefore, no help is possible from the neighborhood. Both sisters have to help themselves. They plan to hide. Unfortunately, there are not many places to choose as none of the bedrooms has been fitted with doors yet. Actually there is still a great deal of work remaining to be done on the house. At last, they decide to hide in the store room. It has a stout door. They get up as noiselessly as they can but they cannot stop the little bones in their ankles from clicking. As a result, the animal roars and it sounds deafening in the stillness of the night. Moment by moment fear increases. When the sisters reach the store room, they have second big shock of the night. The door can only be bolted from outside. Using a high stool they scramble up onto the ledge. It is not wide but is high enough to be safe.

The grunts come closer and a great yellow and black head comes round the door followed by the rest of the body. It is not lion or tiger but a leopard supposedly the most vicious of the great cats. Both sisters nearly fall off the ledge in fright at the sheer size of it. The narrator describes the next moments in this way:

My mouth went dry as the great beast lifted its head and looked at small mortals perched on the ledge. It gave roar and sniffed the air. Our store-room was not a very large place and the animal took up nearly all of it. Just as I was thinking that it had no hostile intentions towards us, it roared and leapt up at us. Had that ledge been just a foot lower, the leopard would have had us for dinner

that night. My sister screamed and so did I.  
I'm not ashamed of admitting it. You can  
have no idea of what that roar sounded like  
in that store-room. 3

Both sisters are terribly afraid and think to stay on the ledge since it is the safest place till the help arrives. Then they both look at each other as the same thought strike them simultaneously. It is about their parents, what if the leopard is still around and their unsuspecting parents return. They may return any moment. The narrator's sister begins to cry, great sobs shake her thin body. The narrator wants to cry too but does not. She tries to think and schemes something. Here is a great difference between ordinary and extra-ordinary people. Generally, ordinary people stop to think and surrender before the situation and accept the possible danger. While, brave people like the narrator do not easily give in and plan to come out of the tight corner. The narrator looks at the ventilator; it is not very large but they are both quite thin. They can squeeze through.

The narrator proposes a trick before her younger sister that she is going to crawl through the ventilator, get inside the house through the kitchen door and trap the leopard in the room. It sounds easy according to the narrator but her sister refuses her to go. She fears for any act. She suggests that they can yell. The narrator explains her that nobody will hear them for the nearest house with people in it is over a mile away. They have to help themselves. Ultimately, the younger sister agrees to follow the narrator. The narrator crawls through the ventilator quite easily. It is quite a way down to the ground but she jumps. She can listen to her sister yelling inside and the leopard roaring in reply.

The narrator reaches to the back door without mistake. She acts like an army soldier. Quick as a flash she slams the door and shoots the bolt just a heavy body crashes into it. The door is very strong. She runs outside again, fetches a ladder and leans it against the wall under the ventilator. Then she yells at her sister to come out, and without waiting to see how her sister acts, she rushes back into the house again to see the leopard trapped.

**Conclusion:**

The story reflects two important qualities of mankind: astonishing courage in critical situation and selfless attitude. Both the sisters impress a reader with unbelievable daring at such dangerous point. An adult may even give in and accept the circumstances before a wild animal like leopard. But, the narrator doesn't feel defeated. She schemes to trap the beast cleverly and succeeds in it. She like a capable leader handles the unexpected adversity. She

without losing hope for a single moment instructs her younger sister to get into a secured position. Her sister responds actively and follows the narrator's every order. As a result, both sisters reach at a safer place. This operation shows incredible daring to beat the most vicious and a very clever animal, the leopard, an uninvited guest.

Secondly, both the sisters show a key quality of mankind, selflessness. They both are secure at the ledge. But they think about their parents. The adult may refuse to take such risk as both sisters do; these adolescent sisters plan to trap the leopard at the risk of their own life. This quality to think about their parents and may be for others makes their bravery more admirable. They may not be blamed for being inactive and staying on the safe place; the narrator encourages her sister to do something for the safety of their parents. They don't know how much the beast will remain in the house. It is possible that their parents may return home and may be attacked by the beast. Therefore they are worried about the parents and at last, trap the leopard. They succeed as their motive is kind. Even though for parents, rare people may take such risk.

A few words more, *The Leopard in the Night* is a short story highlighting significant aspects of adolescents. The writer is female; the only two characters of the story are female too. The story is a valuable document of female bravery at adolescent stage.

### References

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