

E T K i	
ETKI: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>	ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 3.1 ★ June 2023	e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 3.1 ★ Haziran 2023

Jim Corbett, the Hunter-conservationist: Hunter or Conservationist?

Kaustav Chanda | Asst. Master | New Integrated Govt. School
chandakaustav@gmail.com

Abstract

Jim Corbett's hunting narratives have always enthralled lovers of the wild. His works portray a bygone era of pristine natural beauty and abundance of fauna in a country where today many of the species have gone extinct or are on the verge of extinction. The works of Jim Corbett, while recording the serenity of Indian jungles and the majesty of its fauna, have also presented through his brilliant narratorial prowess the classic struggle between man and nature. The author of this paper intends to see past Jim Corbett's hunting narratives and analyse his claims to be a hunter-conservationist. The author of this paper seeks to probe into the psychology of the White Sadhu to see what motivated him to become a hunter: Was it poverty? The abundance of game in the area? A tradition of big-game hunting in the family? A desire to emulate the social class that extolled the virtue of hunting? A desire to belong? Or his perception of nature as subservient to human needs? The author intends to analyse the words and acts that may appear humanitarian in essence, but carry within them seeds of injustice. The various works of Jim Corbett are unapologetic, and since they are so carefully crafted, an average reader may very well get enamoured with Jim Corbett, without paying heed to the environmental injustice. The author of this paper has aimed at finding the chinks in the armour of Jim Corbett's environmentalism and uncovering the mind of a hunter.

Keywords:

hunting,
environmentalism,
nature,
man-eater,
conservation,
empire.

Article History:

Received: 11.05.2023

Accepted: 11.06.2023

Citation Guide:

Chanda, Kaustav. "Jim Corbett, the Hunter-conservationist: Hunter or Conservationist?." *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023, pp. 21-36.

ETKİ: <i>Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies</i>	ETKİ: <i>Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi</i>
e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Volume 3.1 ★ June 2023	e-ISSN: 2822-3950 Sayı 3.1 ★ Haziran 2023

Avcı-Çevreci Jim Corbett: Avcı mı, Çevreci mi?

Kaustav Chanda | YL | New Integrated Govt. School
chandakaustav@gmail.com

Özet

Jim Corbett'in avcılık anlatıları vahşi doğa severleri her zaman büyülemiştir. Eserleri, bugün birçok türün neslinin tükendiği ya da tükenmek üzere olduğu bir ülkede, bozulmamış doğal güzelliklerin ve hayvan türünün bol olduğu geçmiş bir dönemi tasvir ediyor. Jim Corbett'in çalışmaları, Hint ormanlarının dinginliğini ve faunasının görkemini kağıda dökerken, aynı zamanda insan ve doğa arasındaki klasik mücadeleyi de parlak anlatım becerisiyle ortaya koymaktadır. Makale yazarı, Jim Corbett'in avcılık anlatılarının ötesini görmeyi ve onun avcı-doğacı olduğu iddialarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale yazarı ayrıca White Sadhu'nun psikolojisini ele alarak onu bir avcı olmaya neyin motive ettiğini anlamaya çalışmaktadır: Yoksulluk mu? Bölgedeki av hayvanlarının bolluğu mu? Ailesinin büyük hayvanları avlama geleneği mi? Avlanmanın erdemini yücelten sosyal sınıfa öykünme arzusu mu? Bir yere ait olma arzusu mu? Ya da doğayı insan ihtiyaçlarına boyun eğen bir varlık olarak algılaması mı? Özünde insani görünen ancak içlerinde adaletsizlik tohumları taşıyan söz ve eylemleri analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktayız. Jim Corbett'in pek çok çalışması müdanasız niteliktedir ve çok dikkatli bir şekilde hazırlandıkları için ortalama bir okuyucu, çevresel adaletsizliğe aldırış etmeden Jim Corbett'e hayran kalabilir. Bu makalenin yazarı, Jim Corbett'in çevrecilik zırhındaki çatlakları bulmayı ve bir avcının zihnini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

avcılık,
çevrecilik,
doğa,
insan eti yiyen,
doğayı koruma,
imparatorluk.

Makale Bilgileri:

Geliş : 11.05.2023

Kabul : 11.06.2023

Kaynak Gösterme Rehberi:

Chanda, Kaustav. "Jim Corbett, the Hunter-conservationist: Hunter or Conservationist?." *ETKİ: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2023, pp. 21-36.

Introduction

The name Jim Corbett is revered by the wildlife biologists and enthusiasts who study Indian wildlife. Known as the *White Sadhu*¹ by his beloved Kumaonis, his is a legacy of the benevolent patriarch of Choti Haldwani who stood, with gun in his hands between the dreaded man-eaters and the poor natives, helpless in the face of the onslaught of nature. For their deliverance they looked towards the White Sadhu, their own Carpet Sahib who ventured deep into the tiger land, on foot and often unaccompanied, to slay the beast. At least this is how his adventures have been represented in his six books by him, as well as in scores of critics who have studied hunting narratives. The hunting of man-eaters was essential to protect the people of Kumaon and their livestock which formed a large part of their economy. However, it is also essential to investigate the veracity of Jim Corbett's claim to be a conservationist and champion of wildlife first and then a hunter by reading his books from an environmental perspective or dimension. A study of Jim Corbett as a hunter-conservationist from an environmental perspective may open many debates on the correlation between the racial identity of Jim Corbett and his attitude towards the natural world. It is not that the natives never indulged in hunting. They did, so in the strictest sense, Jim Corbett alone should not be bearing the burden of anthropocentrism. However, the author wants to point at the differences in circumstances, background, upbringing and education that existed between the Corbetts and the natives. The idea of the trophy was a European import. Killing for relics from an exotic space would define their masculinity in a land that was beyond their comprehension. It was, to some extent, ritualistic. The natives, on the other hand, would engage in environmentally destructive practices like poaching for sustenance. What was survival for them, was sport for the sahibs. The author intends to find out if Jim Corbett was carrying out imperialist ideologies in his treatment of wildlife, that is, if he was furthering the project of imperialism, viewing the jungles of India as an extension of the colonial domain. The author intends to explore the myth of "*White Sadhu*" to see if the naturalist was indeed keen on conservation, or on using nature as a mere backdrop against which a blue-blooded imperialist engaged in blood-sport like his predecessors.

Jim Corbett: Hunter or Conservationist?

When we look at Jim Corbett's childhood, it appears to be far from easy, with fourteen siblings who were raised on the meagre salary of Postmaster Christopher William. His mother, Mary Jane was a shrewd homemaker who efficiently looked after the household arrangements with the help of her daughter, Eugene Mary Doyle while also keeping an eye on the education of her children. Indeed, at the Corbett's one would find books on a variety of subjects: literature, medicine, grammar and so on. Jim grew up to be an ardent admirer of James Fennimore Cooper

¹ "Sadhu" in Hindi means sage, or hermit.

and his Leatherstocking Tales. Nutty Bumpoo was Jim's hero and his romantic view of nature can be attributed to his early and continuous exposure to Cooper's novels. Starting his journey as a hunter with a catapult, he progressed to using bows and arrows, graduating as a boy scout with a muzzle loader first and then a rifle that he got from the Sergeant Major at Oak Openings in 1885. The tradition of hunting was already there in the Corbett household since the poor economic condition at the Gurney House required that the larder was stacked with game animals. Jim was initiated into hunting by Tom, his elder brother who was an avid hunter and greatly admired by Jim. However, his real education in jungle lore came from Kunwar Singh, a poacher who took Jim under his wing and made him acquainted with the birds and beasts of the jungle, and with its geographical features. He taught Jim how to survive in the forest, something that greatly benefitted the young hunter who later in his career hunted many man-eaters using that knowledge. About his time under the tutelage of Kunwar Singh, he writes:

Times without number when returning from a shoot I called in at Kunwar Singh's village, which was three miles nearer the forest than my house was, to tell him I had shot a chital or sambhar stag, or may be a big pig, and to ask him to retrieve the bag. He never once failed to do so, no matter how great a wilderness of tree or scrub or grass jungle I had carefully hidden the animal I had shot, to protect it from vultures. We had a name for every outstanding tree, and for every water hole, game track, and nullah. (Corbett, *My India* 23)

Jim Corbett the hunter was a product of his environment. American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner explained how the environment of a child, that is, their social environment affects their development, through his Ecological Systems theory. A child's exposure to several Microsystems, ranging from school to family and peer group affects the way in which they react to his social environment. The dominant social and cultural values too have a direct influence on the way they act or behaves. Being one of the youngest children of his family, he was often bullied by his siblings and their friends. In *Jungle Lore*, he mentions how he was tasked with guarding the clothes of the girls of the family as they bathed in Ramsay's canal, and duly warn them of the approaching men:

This handicap, of being the youngest of the males, saddled me with tasks that I disliked intensely, for, we were living in the Victorian age and when, for instance, the girls went bathing in the canal that formed one boundary of our estate...it was deemed necessary for them to be accompanied by a male whose age would offer no offence to Mother Grundy (Corbett, *Jungle Lore* 6).

D.C. Kala has rightly pointed out that it might have been a traumatic experience for Jim

[...] but this biographer shudders to think what the sights and sounds in the canal did to the child's psyche--the clinging nighties, dark groins and the banal talk revolving round the two boys, Neil and Dansay, both frequent guests of the two families and 'madly in love with the girls' (Kala 22).

The symbolic castration happening via his exclusion from the games of the canal, and his bullying by Dansay when he set young Jim for a failure might too have contributed to his becoming a hunter. Hunting has always been considered a masculine sport. The boy's journey to manhood thus would be complete after the attainment of mastery over hunting. Gun, as a phallic symbol would have to be acquired by Jim to qualify as a man, a consciousness strengthened by the opinion of Kunwar Singh, who examining Jim's weapon lauded him as a man: "You are no longer a boy, but a man; and with this good gun you can go anywhere you like in our jungles and never be afraid..." (Corbett, *My India* 19). Later, when he was an adult, while yet to bag his first man-eater, he became friends with Eddie Knowles whose association with the army, through his brother, ignited the spark that was dormant in Jim: a desire to join the army of the Empire and go to wars. The conventional association of manhood with the army might have contributed to his obsession with enlistment and to his perception of the jungle as a battleground, a substitute for the actual battlefield, where he would engage in a war with nature that manifested itself in man-eating tigers and panthers.

Jim Corbett's journey from being a boy scout to a hunter of repute that marked his journey to adulthood, to being a man was influenced by his identity as a domiciled European. Even though he wrote *My India* to fondly recollect the memories of his beloved Kumaonis, it is imperative that he was deeply aware of his racial position. He with his expertise in Garhwali and Hindi languages of the natives on one hand and his desire to mix with the men and women of his own racial stock, kept oscillating between two distinctive identities of slave and master. He was a pariah for the blue-blooded British civil servants who, even though many of them had cordial relations with him, would never consider him as their equal. To them, he served a purpose, a purpose that was akin to that served by the natives to Jim when they served as his trackers and beaters in a hunt. The fearsome exotic space with its dangers and thrills required an expert guide, and the colonial officers found that in Jim. He remained an outcast to the British elites. Martin Booth, in his biography of Jim Corbett, entitled *Carpet Sabib: A Life of Jim Corbett* writes:

Jim was domiciled and from this social position stemmed much prejudice in the first half of his life. Young women out from England looked down upon the likes of the Corbetts not only because of pure snobbery but also practicality. To marry a domiciled man was to commit oneself to the same state of permanent expatriation and a few young women

viewed a lifetime in India without many misgivings. It was one thing to do just a tour of duty there but quite another to be resident. (Booth 92)

An awareness of this social position of an Anglo-Indian--a position divorced from the mainstream British culture--and a desire to be called 'one of their own' was also a driving factor in his hunts. Imperialist masculinity had to be imbibed to belong. The British masters were hunters. They viewed it as a sport. Jim Corbett had exposure to the works of hunters like William Rice, A.A. Kinloch and Captain Thomas Williamson. Major Henry Shakespear, in *Wild Sports of India* extols hunting as a virtue that must be inculcated in an early age so that the children could become responsible citizens and public servants:

Ye anxious parents, who perchance read or hear the title of my book, with a full determination and dread resolve that your boys shall not pursue or obtain it, bear with me a little while, while I explain to you, that my making them shikarees, or hunters of the large game of India's magnificent forests, you are keeping them out of a thousand temptations and injurious pursuits, which they can scarcely avoid falling into, if from no other cause them ennui or thoughtlessness. Induce them, if possible, to become fond of field sports. This will keep them fit for their duty as soldiers, both in body and inclination. (Shakespear 2)

Jim Corbett's exposure to such literature --the library at the Gurney House had many well-known as well as lesser-known books on *shikar*² -- at a tender age might have shaped his anthropocentric attitude that related to his Eurocentric beliefs. The child Jim Corbett might have believed that hunting not only filled the larder of the house with meat, but also made individual growth possible. The accounts by the European hunters before him would have instilled in him a perception that to qualify as British, he must emulate them, and engage in the sport himself to gain recognition as his subjectivity would be construed from his interaction with the *grande autre*, that is, the English society.

Jim Corbett's perception of the 'Indian' nature can be assessed in the light of his allegiance to the Crown that almost borders on servitude. He was obsessed with participating in wars on behalf of the Crown. He volunteered to fight in the Boer War (1899), the Afghan War (1919) and World War I without much success. However, he received a wartime commission as a Captain and led a troop of over five thousand at Flanders in 1917. He again volunteered for the World War II, but this time he trained the troops in jungle warfare. Martin Booth writes about his ardent wish to be of service to the Crown in the World War I:

This was a very strange feeling for Jim. India was his home. He was domiciled. And yet, like

² 'shikar' in Hindi means hunting, and a 'shikaree' is a hunter

most of his breed, he was fiercely patriotic and 'British' and related to Great Britain even though he had ever seen it in faded photographs or steel engravings in editions of the Illustrated London News. He was intensely curious to see the Tower of London and the Heroes of Parliament from which stemmed the flow of history and the power of the Empire. (Booth 96)

Hence, it hardly was a matter of surprise when he went out of his way to arrange for hunting expeditions for European dignitaries such as Lord Linlithgow in 1945. D.C. Kala in his biography of Jim Corbett notes how wary the old hunter was about the success of the shoot. It was, after all, his chance to be of service. D.C. Kala provides an eyewitness account of a participant of the hunt, Panwan Gusain who recounted how 'Carpet Sahib' explicitly instructed them to behave well and let the Viceroy be first to gun down the tiger, or Corbett's reputation would suffer in England (Kala 65). Therefore, one can very well see that a tiger's body or its corpse became a site on which allegiances were sealed. It is significant to note that Corbett's hunting days were almost over by that time. He hunted occasionally, primarily for the larder, but his age was catching up to him, and it was a phase when Jim Corbett was more inclined towards conservation and wildlife photography. In the author's note to *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, Jim Corbett writes:

There is, however, one point in which I am convinced that all sportsmen--no matter whether their viewpoint has been a platform on a tree, the back of an elephant, or their own feet--will agree with me, and that is that a tiger is a large-hearted gentleman with boundless courage and that when he is exterminated--as exterminated he will be unless public opinion rallies to his support--India will be the poorer, having lost the finest of her fauna. (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* xi)

Considering this statement, the arrangements of royal hunts in the forests around Kaladhungi, and later in Africa seem like acts of assuaging the conscience in favour of the desire for acknowledgement as a true emissary of the Empire. His statement to Lord Wavell also appears paradoxical when seen in the context of his actions: "Two years ago, Lord Wavell asked me the same question about tigers that you have done, and I told him that in my opinion there were 3000 tigers would survive, I said that except in sanctuaries and one or two Indian states tigers would be wiped out in ten years" (qtd. in Kala 101). Jim Corbett's plea for conservation in the later stages of his life appears to be borne out of his realisation of the fact that he was getting too old to chase game, and that his relevance in the scheme of things was in jeopardy. In his doctoral thesis entitled '*Call of the Wild*': Representation of Nature in Game Narratives Set in India, the author noted, "It might well have been his old age and failing health that made him desist from undertaking the hazard of stalking and late night vigils since he never advocated for wildlife preservation with such veracity in

his prime as he did in his later years” (82-83).

India became independent on 15 August, 1947, and the Corbetts left India for Africa on 11 December, 1947. The Corbetts were not sure if they would be welcomed in the new regime. According to Maggie, Jim Corbett's sister,

After independence came in India and our British friends were leaving, we began to realize that it would be very difficult for us to remain, especially as when the time came for one of us to be taken, the contemplation of the other having to leave on alone in Gurney House, our home for nearly all the years of our lives and so full of memories, could not be faced” (qtd. in Kala, 130).

Jim Corbett himself said to a villager, “Your independence has come, who cares for us now” (qtd. in Kala, 129). Jim Corbett's position as the city-father, his influence on the Kumaonis and his many friends among the influential Indians would not have put the Corbetts into any jeopardy under the new regime. In all his writings, especially in *My India*, he has emphasized repeatedly his 'Indianness' and his love for the country and its people, his own people. The fact that he felt unsure and unsafe in the new socio-political environment compels the author to think that he only felt confident about his existence in India as a member of the ruling class, no matter how low in the hierarchy his own position was, among his peers. His quick departure raises questions about his sincerity and honesty in writing those books where he has expressed his love for the people of India and his camaraderie with them. As a man who even knew the Viceroy and several rajahs of the land, he was in a perfect position to effect changes regarding the way people looked towards the animal world. He could have been influential in the formulation of wildlife laws and policies of the newly formed State that never hesitated in acknowledging his contribution to conservation, as can be very well seen in the renaming of Hailey National Park as Corbett National Park in 1957. After he left hunting for good, he was very much active as an Editor of *Indian Wildlife* with Hasan Abid Jafri, writing articles on conservation; lecturing about nature, forests and the animal world in schools and colleges of Naini Tal; and photographing animals in their natural surroundings. He left for the new hunting avenues in Kenya which was still a British colony. It was as if the quiet life of a naturalist never suited him, but he had to resort to it not just because he was getting old, but the world was getting new. The image of the hunter with a gun that calls to mind the imago of a patriarch was perceived by him to be under threat. Subhasis Biswas in “Indian Forest: Looking through the European Literary Expressions” writes:

Photography never became Corbett's genuine hobby. We have enough evidence that he was mainly a hunter, and not a photographer even after 1930. One of his hunting trips was

well documented by an army officer Lionel Fortesque. Corbett accompanied by his faithful servant Moti Singh and Fortesque, accompanied by his Indian servant James, made a shooting trip to Pangi and Chenab valley. They hunted a number of animals. Although Corbett had his camera with him he rarely used to photograph the animals. Lord Strachwana gifted a camera to Corbett. But it was actually in return of Corbett's help in the organized hunting of two tigers in the Kumaon forest area. (Biswas 98-99)

While examining the hunting memoirs of Jim Corbett, collected in three books: *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, *Temple Tigers and More Man-eaters of Kumaon*, and *The Maneating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, the author has come across many incidents that actually discredit Jim Corbett as a naturalist. Not only these books but also his autobiographical accounts in *My India* and *Jungle Lore* are replete with instances that situate Corbett with the colonial hunters before him who hunted for trophy. Jim Corbett was indeed the 'White Sadhu', the saviour of the masses in many ways. He put an end to the scourge of man-eating at Kumaon on many occasions, much to the detriment of his health and danger to his life. However, the Bachelor of Powalgarh and the Pipal Pani Tiger bring out the sportsman in him into the light. Jim must have killed a lot of tigers in his lifetime, but not all of them were man-eaters. They were beautiful specimens and were hunted as trophies. The hunts arranged for the royalty did not result in killing man-eaters but normal tigers. In *The Bachelor of Powalgarh* he admits to being impressed by the huge size of the tiger and seduced by the prospect of bagging the trophy. However, he hid behind the veil of humanitarian effort to save a poor herdsman from worrying about his buffaloes that might soon be devoured by the great tiger. It is important to note that Jim Corbett killed the tiger at a time when, as per his claims, he had become saturated with hunting and was more inclined to photograph tigers: "I have earned the reputation of being keener on photographing animals than on killing them, and before I left my friend he begged me to put aside photography for this once, and kill the tiger, which he said was big enough to eat a buffalo a day; and ruin him in twenty-five days" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 80). After killing the Pipal Pani tiger he writes:

Pleasure at having secured a magnificent trophy--he measured 10'3" over curves and his winter coat was in perfect condition--was not unmixed with regret, for never again would the jungle folk and I listen with bated breath to his deep throated call resounding through the foothills, and never again would his familiar pugmarks show on the game paths that he and I had trodden for fifteen years. (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 135)

The writer's anthropocentric view is evident in coming to the aid of people who had injured the tiger, thus turning him into a cattle-killer, and instead of rebuking them for their actions and raising awareness among them about the need to preserve the wildlife and kill only, when

necessary, he skinned the animal with great enthusiasm.

Another case in point is the Temple Tiger of Dabidhura which remains one of his few failures as a hunter. The tiger in question was not a man-eater. But his elusive nature, almost mythical abilities to escape scores of trophy hunters and the priest's conviction that the tiger had a charmed life, and no human could slay him triggered Jim Corbett's desire to bag the trophy at any cost. The obsession with hunting this particular tiger can be attributed to the imperial arrogance that would brook no challenge from an animal that was associated with the cunning of the native, or with the trope of the rebellious native on one hand; and on the other the anthropocentric arrogance that considers the birds and beasts to be beneath man in the Great Chain of Being or Scala Naturae. The fact that he cares more about the trophy than anything else can be emphasized by the fact that at the time when he was obsessively looking for the Temple Tiger, the Panar leopard was wreaking havoc. He took a break from the hunt of the leopard to go after the tiger of Dabidhura for the sport of it. The humanitarian Jim Corbett did not find it necessary to save the poor natives from the leopard's terror. Not only that, but he also undertook many fishing and hunting trips amid important hunting expeditions with his European buddies. In a letter addressed to Maggie on 3 November, 1925 he wrote: "I have seen lots of pheasants but the going is bad and it is very difficult to get men; however, if I have my own ten men, and if I can get another five, we should make something of a bag" (Corbett, *My Kumaon: Uncollected Writings* 36). That time he was also on the most difficult hunt of his life, of the Rudraprayag leopard.

Jim Corbett's environmentalism cannot be understood in all its aspects unless we consider his days with the railways (1894-1939). He joined Bengal and North-Western Railway in 1894. Martin Booth writes that as Fuel Inspector for Bengal & North-Western Railway, Jim Corbett was responsible for the felling of five hundred thousand cubic feet of timber and clearing over five hundred acres of land (Booth 72). The act of felling timber resulted in a lot of casualties for the animals living in the forests where he worked. Even though Martin Booth says that Jim Corbett was saddened by the lot of the animals that were orphaned or driven out of their homes, he believed that the act of felling was necessary for the sake of modernism that was to be ushered in by the railways. Moreover, the railways were an imperial project that began in 1853 and was an indispensable medium through which the entire country was connected and managed by the imperial government. Given his allegiance to the Crown, Jim Corbett did not hesitate to remain at that job for nearly two decades. It is true that he tended to the animals that were injured by the felling. It is also true that while at his job with the railways, he hunted a lot of game. In fact, all his man-eaters were hunted while he was an employee for the railways. The menial and masculine job of toiling heavily every day for the railways might have motivated him to pursue another masculine

endeavour, that is hunting. At Mokameh Ghat where he was stationed, he hunted mainly for meat as meat was hard to come by and the labourers would be pleased to have meat in their diet.

Sharing meat or sharing game in those days was considered necessary to form social bonds or express social solidarity. In the areas where Jim Corbett hunted man-eaters, he had to rely on the information provided by the local villagers about the movements and haunts of the animal. He had to rely on their cooperation as trackers and beaters as well. For this reason, he had to shoot an occasional ghooral, deer, or peafowl so that they could have meat in their diet as they were too poor to purchase meat from the market. In *The Champawat Man-eater*, Jim Corbett writes:

The village was situated on the top of a long ridge running east and west, and just below the road on which I had spent the night the hill fell steeply away to the north in a series of glassy slopes; on these slopes I was told ghooral were plentiful, and several men volunteered to show me over the ground. I was careful not to show my pleasure at this offer and, selecting three men, I set out, telling the Headman that if I found the ghooral as plentiful as he said they were, I would shoot two for the village in addition to shooting one for my men. (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 7)

In this regard, Jim Corbett was a provider in the role of a patriarch. He was like a game warden for the forests of Kaladhungi. D.C. Kala writes that Jim Corbett “enforced shooting laws and even preached sports ethics to a party of hunters whom he caught leaving a wounded tiger in the vicinity. People treated him with awe, for Carpet Sahib even knew the Viceroy” (Kala 64)! In his role as a provider for the people of Kumaon, he would often share game animals with them. Ram Datt Sati, a resident of Kaladhungi recalls how once Corbett gave him his own bag of game as the former had no luck with hunting that day, saying “One should not go home empty handed” (qtd. in Kala, 65). D.C. Kala mentions how once he sent a man to a forest officer with a message after the officer had shot a leopard: “You have killed my leopard” (Kala 64). To this the officer replied, “I did not see a dog collar and did not know it was yours” (Kala 64). Jim Corbett believed himself to be the protector of the forests and believed that his instructions or orders should be followed by those who ventured into the forest for hunting game.

Jim Corbett's crusade against the man-eaters of Kumaon may very well be a 'White man's burden' to bear. As a representative of the Empire because of his racial status, he believed it to be his solemn duty to protect the people who, being his tenants, can very well be assumed to be his subjects. The people of the hills constituted the 'Other' against which the 'Self' of the coloniser would always be pitted, and in this interaction, his subject position was formed. The people of Kumaon always looked towards the sahib for protection against the forces of nature in the form of

man-eaters and cattle-killers. One may very well imagine what effect that gaze of the Other would have on a domiciled white man whose entire life was dedicated to serving the Empire and being one of 'them'. Thus, he rose to the occasion that would not only allow him to obtain the allegiance of the local people but would also strengthen the position of the Empire in the region, for it was one of them who was protecting the natives, not the native rulers and *zamindars*. The news of the great white hunter at the rescue of hapless natives would spread like wildfire in the world as it did with the leopard of Rudraprayag that remained a hot topic in the Western media for eight years (1918-26) and was even discussed in the House of Commons. The case of the Panar man-eater also got highlighted in many newspapers all around the world. Jim Corbett was doing the work of the Empire in many ways. He was building the reputation of the Empire and that too at a time when the whole country, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, was getting united in the struggle for independence. Jim Corbett's Naini Tal was almost untouched by the larger socio-political happenings of the nation. The people would happily celebrate George V and Lord Linlithgow, since Jim Corbett's exploits had assured the natives of the good intentions of the Empire and had earned their gratitude. To cite an instance among many, in *The Mohan Man-eater*, Jim Corbett's act of mounting guard while a local woman filled her pitcher in the man-eater's territory earned him a friend who conveyed his benevolence to the villagers whose gratitude he earned in no time. Similarly, in *The Chowgarh Tigers*, a woman who had lost her grandson to the tigress, offered her milch buffaloes to be used as baits, even though those few buffaloes comprised all her material possessions.

Jim Corbett was serving the Empire in another way. The arrival of a man-eater would disrupt the economy of that place and the treasury of the government would also take the blow as the inflow of taxes would stop. That was why the requests for hunting would primarily come from regional administrative authorities or even higher up the official chain of command. Jim Corbett had the onus of restoring order. For instance, he would mount guard while the crops were hurriedly cut by the villagers. He would toil night and day so that the Rudraprayag leopard could no longer terrorise the pilgrims, and hence not disrupt the tourism of the place.

Jim Corbett was a gifted writer, and he portrayed himself as the saviour of the people of Kumaon by writing moving accounts of the sufferings of the people who were affected by the scourge of man-eating. He did so to show the natural world, represented in the tiger as an unforgiving, cruel and unfair destiny, and to represent himself as a Godlike entity that would exact revenge on behalf of the villagers. For example, in *The Chowgarh Tigers* he writes: "The major wound consisted of two claw-cuts, one starting between the eyes and extending right over the head and down the nape of the neck, leaving the scalp hanging in two halves, and the other starting near the

first, running across the forehead up to the right ear” (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 47).

In *The Panar Man-eater* – hunted between 1905 and 1910 – he writes about the pitiable condition of the young woman who was mauled by the panther: “In the heat of the small room, which had only one door and no windows and in which a swarm of flies were buzzing, all the wounds in the girl's throat and on her breast had turned septic...” (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 224). This narrative strategy of graphic representation of pain that evokes revulsion in the reader, is useful in portraying the animal world as an evil force, justifies the killing of the animal, and establishes the credibility of the hunter as a representative of the ruling class.

Conclusion: Is the Myth Real?

It is, however, undeniable that Jim Corbett worked towards conservation more fervently than his contemporaries. His lectures, essays, and many of his writings make passionate pleas for conservation. His writings on the fauna of the country, the descriptive pieces are the veritable sources of information on wildlife. He would often be found preaching to the villagers at Kaladhungi and Choti Haldwani about the importance of conservation and living harmoniously with the denizens of the forest. However, it is the ambivalence in Jim Corbett that is important to consider reaching the heart of his writings. On one hand, he was the champion of Indian wildlife, and on the other, he was a European hunter looking for recognition as the rightful ruler of the land and a true emissary of the Empire that upheld its masculinity through hunting. Jim Corbett was an enigma that has remained unsolved. His love for nature cannot be denied, but that love doesn't appear to be borne out of the realisation of democracy in the creation of the almighty, but a natural acceptance of man's superiority over nature that establishes man as the lord and nature as his faithful subject.

The myth of White Sadhu has remained with the residents of Choti Haldwani and Kaladhungi. Many writings on Jim Corbett appear to be a little hesitant in dismantling the myth. May be this has got to do with the fact that Jim Corbett's life is one that can be taken as a lesson for the people who read his works and get inspired to become environmentalists. The reason why his trophy hunting anecdotes are not much referred to in critical essays and other discourses on Jim Corbett may be seen as an attempt to keep his legacy alive as a white ascetic who remained pure all through his life, as pure and pristine as the jungles where he felt at home.

Since Nainital at the time of Corbett was divorced from the political upheaval in the mainland, the people in that area never really got into considering the Corbetts as outsiders. He was a Sahib, fluent in the native languages and sympathetic to their needs. He, in general perception, had a halo around him. He was chaste, unmarried and without any 'visible' material

greed. He would happily drink from their cup, smoke with them, and miraculously heal them using 'strange' potions and drugs. For them, he was one of them, yet above them in many respects. The myth originated from the word-of-mouth accounts of Corbett's benevolence, something that strengthened Jim Corbett's own claims as a conservationist. The people of Jim's India hardly knew or understood the mind of Jim Corbett, or his struggles to belong in the hierarchy. After all, in India, people rely the most on godmen to solve their problems, and Jim Corbett was there, the whiteness of his skin magnifying the purity perceived by the Kumaonis.

Works cited

- Biswas, Subhasis. "Indian Forest: Looking through the European Literary Expressions." *A Collage of Environmental History*. Edited by Mahua Sarkar. Kolkata: Alphabet Books, 2017. pp. 79-109. Print.
- Booth, Martin. *Carpet Sahib: A Life of Jim Corbett*. Oxford UP, 1990.
- Bronfenbrenner, Urie. *The Ecology of Human Development*. Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Chanda, Kaustav. "Call of the Wild": *Representation of Nature in Game Narratives Set in India*. 2022. Vidyasagar University, PhD dissertation. Shodhganga, <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/383729>.
- Corbett, Jim. *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. Rupa Publications, 2016.
- . "Author's Note". *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. vii-xi. Print.
- . "The Champawat Man-eater." *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 3-24. Print.

- . “The Chowgarh Tigers.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 34-75. Print.
- . “The Bachelor of Powalgarh.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 76-86. Print.
- . “The Mohan Man-eater.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 87-110. Print.
- . “The Pipal Pani Tiger.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016, pp. 128-135. Print.
- . “The Thak Man-eater.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 136-172. Print.
- . “The Temple Tiger.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 177- 203. Print.
- . “The Panar Man-eater.” *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 221-236. Print.
- . “The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag.” 1948. *The Jim Corbett Omnibus*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016. pp. 305-435. Print.
- . *My Kumaon: Uncollected Writings*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- . *Temple Tigers and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. Oxford UP, 2002.
- . *Jungle Lore*. Oxford India Paperbacks, 1990.
- . *My India*. Oxford UP, 1988.
- . *Tree Tops*. Oxford UP, 1991.
- Kala, Durga Charan. *Jim Corbett of Kumaon*. Penguin Books India, 2009.
- Kinloch, Alexander Angus Airlie. *Large Game Shooting in Thibet, The Himalayas, and Northern India*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co.; London: W. Thacker and Co., 1885.
- Internet Archive. Web. 16 May 2018. <https://archive.org/details/largegameshootin00kinl>.
- Rice, William. *Tiger-Shooting in India; Being an Account of Hunting Experiences on Foot in Rajpootana, During the Hot Seasons, from 1850 to 1854*. London: Smith, Elder &

Co.; Bombay: Smith, Taylor and Co., 1857. Internet Archive. Web. 1 May. 2023.

<https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.23914>.

Shakespear, Major Henry. *The Wild Sports of India: with Detailed Instructions for the Sportsman; to Which are Added Remarks on the Breeding and Rearing of Horses, and the Formation of Light Irregular Cavalry*. 2nd ed. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862. Internet Archive. Web. 11 April. 2023.

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.221515>.

Williamson, Captain Thomas. *Oriental Field Sports; Being a Complete, Detailed, and Accurate Description of the Wild Sports of the East*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. London, 1819. Google Books. Web. 15 June 2019. <https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.26544/mode/2up>.