

Many Personas of Jim Corbett

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Abstract

Jim Corbett was a man of many talents, revered for his diverse contributions to wildlife and conservation. He first gained fame as a remarkably skilled hunter, known for tracking and eliminating dreaded man-eating tigers and leopards in British India, a feat that saved numerous lives. However, Corbett's legacy extends far beyond his hunting achievements; he was also a pioneering conservationist who raised his voice for safeguarding the very wildlife he once hunted. As a naturalist and gifted writer, Corbett shared his experiences and insights through a series of classic books that continue to inspire environmental stewardship. His deep connection to the people and culture of India's Kumaon region further solidified his reputation as a figure of lasting respect and admiration.

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Jim Corbett's paradoxical identity as a hunter-conservationist is further enriched by his multiple personas. His trilogy on man-eaters comprising *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1944), *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* (1948) and *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1954) presents a blood-curdling account of his extra-ordinary hunting exploits in the Himalayan foothills of Kumaon-Garhwal. In addition to being an expert hunter, Corbett was courageous to the extent of risking his life on numerous occasions in order to safeguard his beloved hill folk against the depredations of fearsome man-eaters. Although Jim Corbett organised some big game hunting expeditions for the colonial dignitaries including two viceroys of India—Lord Linlithgow and Lord Wavell—eventually he did realise the wastefulness and injustice involved in such practices. Consequently, he turned a pioneering conservationist with a marked preference to shoot wildlife with the camera rather than the gun.

In his biography *Jim Corbett of Kumaon* D. C. Kala highlights Jim Corbett's multi-faceted persona by enumerating various manifestations of his name:

Baptized Edward James and buried as such, Corbett was 'Carpet Sahib' the do-gooder of the maneater legend and the patriarch of Kaladhungi. He was Jim to his patrons, friends and fans. He ran his bank account at Naini Tal as Captain and later Major Edward James Corbett, VD. This was the volunteer officer's decoration. As a city father and house agent of Naini Tal, he signed his papers as James Edward. He never could stick to one name. These together provide a vignette of the man. (59)

The multiple identity of Corbett, however, was not confined to this kind of word-play only; its essence lay in the varying roles that Corbett actively played at different places at different times. D. C. Kala himself highlights this aspect as, according to him, Corbett was "a tiger among men, lover of the underdog, a hero in war and pestilence, a model zamindar and employer, an ascetic, naturalist, and, above all, a hunter of maneating tigers and leopards for thirty two active years" (1). And one may add, he is also a best-selling author of international repute, conservationist and wildlife photographer.

In his book *Tiger Haven* Billy Arjan Singh, the man who single-handedly carved out the Dudhwa National Park, hails Corbett an “an inveterate slayer” (106) of man-eating tigers. Reeta Dutta Gupta designates Corbett as “the star hunter of the Raj” (30) in her book *Jim Corbett: The Hunter-Conservationist*. Jerry A. Jaleel points out in his book *Under the Shadow of Man-Eaters* that while recording its “profound sorrow at the death of Mr. Corbett”, the Naini Tal Municipal Board called him “Kumaon’s greatest sportsman and friend” (159). Geoffrey C. Ward describes Corbett as “the intrepid British dispatcher of man-eaters” (3) in *Tigers and Tigerwallahs*.

As a foremost naturalist of his era, Corbett is called “one of nature’s true gentlemen” by Brigadier General Beyts, as recorded by Jerry A. Jaleel in *Under the Shadow of Man-Eaters* (156). In the same book, Jaleel himself calls Corbett “The most famous authority on the Indian tiger” (40). In *Tiger Haven*, Billy Arjan Singh captures Corbett’s dual identity as hunter-conservationist in the phrase, “the doyen of hunters but also India’s first conservationist” (75).

Jerry A. Jaleel has also recorded the impression of A.J.S. Butler of Middlesex, who was one of the soldiers who took instruction from Colonel Corbett in jungle warfare during the Second World War, “Corbett appeared to be a cross between a magician and a master detective” (85). Interestingly, the Indian populace of Kumaon-Garhwal venerated Corbett as an ascetic endowed with spiritual powers. Corbett himself mentions in *My India* that the natives often referred to him as “the white Sadhu” (15).

All the people who either knew Jim Corbett or wrote about him agree on one point that he was a shy and reticent man in public life. In his introduction to *Tree Troops*, Lord Malcolm Hailey calls him “this quiet and unassuming man” (374). Martin Booth describes Corbett as “a shy, gentle and immensely courageous man” and “a rare, true man” (14), in his “Introduction” to *Carpet Sahib*. Prosenjit Das Gupta calls him “this intensely private man” in his “Preface” (ix) to *Tracking Jim*. In his biography *Under the Shadow of Man-Eaters*, Jerry A. Jaleel quotes Mrs. Kay Wilson, an army captain’s wife, “He was a very shy, reticent man, and would not talk much about his exploits... he rather brushed off the conversation I had with him about the man-eaters” (157).

It is quite intriguing to note the interesting variations in the physical appearance of Corbett, as reported by people who had met him on various occasions. Prosenjit Das Gupta points out in *Tracking Jim* that according to Govind Ram Kala, a former civil servant, Corbett was “a man of average height, with a swarthy complexion” (13). This description is quite at variance with the one provided by Marjorie Clough, a nurse with the Red Cross who had met Corbett in India during World War II. In *Jim Corbett of Kumaon* D. C. Kala quotes Marjorie Clough who described Corbett as “an erect, ruddy mustachioed six-footer with twinkling Irish eyes that laugh and are sad all at once” (81). Prosenjit Das Gupta also mentions Geoffery Cumberlege’s impression of Corbett as, “tall and spare with dark brown hair and light blue eyes” (14) whereas according to Martin Booth, “...the hunter was just over six feet tall and had mousy brown hair and brown eyes” (14). His sister Maggie’s observation also adds an interesting dimension to his personality as D. C. Kala quotes her: “Grace of Movement, one of his most notable characteristics, was perhaps partly due to his having lived so much amongst wild animals, whose movements are always so graceful” (81).

Corbett’s personality was made unique by some of his peculiar mannerisms. In this regard, Jerry A. Jaleel points out in *Under the Shadow of Man-Eaters*:

He shot his animals with both eyes open. He strongly believed in shooting a snake before setting out to hunt a man-eater. He drank water [occasionally] from a remote well in the bush ‘to kill the germs’ in his system. He refused to commence a journey on Fridays, and enjoyed being referred to as a ‘white sadhu’.

He slept in a small tent outside his cottage in Kaladhungi so that he could listen to the various bird and animal sounds. He learnt all the hill dialects and could speak them fluently. He loved the poor and the less fortunate.... (120)

Prosenjit Das Gupta points out that according to people he met at Kaladhungi and who had known Corbett when they were children, he often resorted to the Hindi slang “paji” (rascal) if he wished to reprimand somebody. He then expresses his disapproval of the term “paji” by pointing that its Urdu equivalent “badtameez” might have been a more acceptable choice as employing the former term “would have been quite beneath an Englishman of standing” (181). Prosenjit Das Gupta here misses the point that Corbett used the term “paji” with an unmistakable undercurrent of endearment and probably with a hint of smile beneath his heavy moustache. “Badtameez”, on the other hand would have been an outrightly angry and demeaning expression for a native, particularly from the mouth of a white sahib.

Yet, Corbett could be quite high-handed and stern when necessity arose in his dealings with people. For instance, he threatened to burn down the whole village of Chandani Chowk if his old poacher friend and headman of the village, Kunwar Singh who was suffering from the ill-effects of opium addiction, was not looked after properly. On another occasion, he made poor Chhota Punwa carry a big piece of rock on his head for quite a long distance just to teach him that one does not place a rifle carelessly on the sandy bed of a stream.

Corbett’s gandparents Joseph and Harriet Corbett set foot in India on 7 February 1815 as immigrants from Ireland. Joseph served in the army as a sergeant. Corbett’s father, Christopher William held the rank of assistant apothecary; the term was equivalent to assistant surgeon and was also loosely applied to chemists as well as those practicing western medicine. His younger brother Thomas Bartholomew (b.1828) was tied to a tree and burnt alive by insurgents during the siege of Delhi in 1857. Christopher quit the army in 1858 to join the postal service. In 1862 he was transferred to the postmanship of Naini Tal which was then, according to Martin Booth, “a flourishing hive of colonial endeavour” (23).

Corbett’s mother Mary Jane had married her first husband Charles Doyle at Ferozepur in 1851, at the age of 14. When the Indian Mutiny erupted in 1857, Mary Jane and her children were sent for safety into the Agra fort and suffered terrible privations resulting from the mutineers’ siege. Martin Booth records, “on 8 December in the course of fighting and having killed two mutineers by sword from horseback, he [Charles Doyle] was pulled from his saddle and hacked to death” (19-20). Mary Jane Doyle was widowed at 21, with three children and a meagre pension given to her by the army. She met and married the widower Christopher William Corbett in Mussoorie after a very brief courtship. The couple settled down in Naini Tal and as pointed out by D.C. Kala, they “had the unenviable lot of raising fifteen children on a pittance of a postmaster’s salary. These were the three Doyle children, three from his [Christopher’s] marriage and nine from the second” (15). Their life formed itself into the mould of the domiciled English civilian. Martin Booth writes, “India was their country now, affording them whatever they wanted and it embraced them into its social order which they, as a part of it, helped to shape....In all but blood, they were Indians—the new Indians, the white Indians” (25).

Edward James Corbett, lovingly known as Jim Corbett to the world, was born on 25 July 1875 in Naini Tal, the eighth child of Christopher and Mary Jane Corbett. The family spent the summers at Gurney House that stood at a height of over 6,400 feet, a thousand feet above the sacred Naini lake. Towards the end of the year they moved to their winter house Arundel, a colonial style bungalow built with stone at Kaladhungi, some fifteen miles below the hills.

Corbett grew up in the lap of nature as the lake was close by and the wooded hills around were a haven

of wildlife. In the backyard of their Arundel house in Kaladhungi was a patch of dense forest which is often referred to by Corbett as the “Farm Yard” that played an important role in his development during the formative years of childhood. Quite literally, his playground was not far from the tiger’s. He made himself fully sensitive and receptive to the sights, smells and sounds of the jungle and became one with his environment. Luckily for Jim, he was not packed off to England, as some of his elder siblings had been, and this “added to his indoctrination with the ways of the natural world”, according to Martin Booth (38).

At the Farm Yard, the boy Jim first experienced the jungle for himself. It was here that he gradually overcame his fear of wild animals and embarked on his lifelong acquisition of jungle lore. Outlining Corbett’s learning experiences during this early phase, Martin Booth writes:

His desire to know the jungles and yet his justified fear caused Jim to be not only careful but also ingenious. He quickly learnt—though he preferred to use the word ‘absorbed’—how to stalk by using cover, how to utilise the wind direction to mask his scent, how to walk silently....In a watercourse that ran through the Farm Yard, he studied and understood the spoor left by those animals who used the shallow, often dry gully as a highway. With Magog [a big dog] as guide and scout, he discovered all the places to be avoided, saw how a tiger’s pugmarks going into the cover, but not out of it, suggested the presence of the beast. Different tracks told different stories and it was gradually, by trial and error and acute observation, that the young boy picked up the means to read them. (47)

At about the age of seven, Jim classified the animals according to their functions in the scheme of nature. This classification, rated as “a childish but soundly philosophic” division of animal life by Martin Booth (47), made Jim the world’s youngest naturalist. After tracking, Jim set out to studying and imitating the calls of birds and beasts. Soon, he had his senses so attuned that he could hear the slightest noise and know what it meant. In this context, D. C. Kala writes, “The application of this knowledge of how the jungle telegraph works...helped Jim become a master sleuth of the wilds, a great sportsman and pioneering wildlife photographer” (23).

Jim’s elder brother Tom presented him with his first catapult as an incentive to recover from a life-threatening attack of pneumonia. The young sportsman was also given his first lesson in hunting ethics as he was told that birds must not be killed during the breeding season. Tom also provided Jim with a skinning knife and arsenical soap and taught him how to skin a bird. Armed with the catapult, Jim set out to collect specimens to illustrate his cousin Stephen Dease’s book on the birds of Kumaon and soon became an early ornithologist himself. He also hunted birds for the pot.

The eight year old Jim was assigned the task of escorting all seven white girls of Kaladhungi to the Boar canal where they went to bathe on weekdays. Corbett writes in *Jungle Lore* that he resented this “enforced labour” (210) as it deprived him of the opportunity to participate in the “fascinating sports” (210) which included swimming, fishing and catapult shooting which the older boys enjoyed.

Jim’s first gun-shot by a muzzle loader, at the age of eight was not a pleasant experience. The ‘opportunity’ was provided by one of their neighbours, Dansay, a thickset Irishman. The muzzle loader went off with a mighty kick, throwing little Jim off his feet. In all probability, Dansay had overcharged the gun to seek revenge against Jim who had conspired with the girls in the canal earlier to play a prank on him.

Jim’s first bear-shoot with Tom turned out to be his first day of terror, as he was left alone in the forest with a shotgun and two ball-cartridges. Tom, his mentor, had been watching the boy from a tree, as he wanted Jim to overcome his fear of being alone in the jungle. At school Jim became the youngest recruit

of the cadet corps, at the age of ten. Any carelessness in maintaining the uniform resulted in severe military punishment. This military discipline and harsh conditioning stood Corbett in good stead during his stints as a British army officer during the two world wars as well as during his death-defying exploits against the man-eaters of Kumaon.

It was here, as a cadet of the Naini Tal battalion named Voluntary Rifles that Jim had a life-changing experience. While participating in a shooting contest, Jim got flustered and missed the first shot. The visiting officer then adjusted the back sight of the boy's carbine to the correct range and advised him to take a slower shot. Jim hit the target in his next four shots. Corbett recalled the shooting-range episode with deep gratitude in *Jungle Lore* as he wrote, "When I have been tempted, as many times I have been, to hurry over a shot or over a decision, the memory of that quiet voice telling me to take my time has restrained me and I have never ceased to be grateful to the great soldier who gave that advice" (287). This visiting officer later became Field-Marshal Earl Roberts. Impressed by Jim's mettle, a Sergeant-Major lent him a .450 Martini rifle with as much ammunition as he wanted. The powerful and deadly accurate military rifle gave the ten year old Jim great confidence as a hunter. The .450 Martini was a far cry from the derelict old muzzle loader gifted earlier by his cousin Stephen Dease. It is a measure of Jim's cool-headedness as a hunter that he never fired at a bird without first ensuring a solid background behind it so as not to hit accidentally any of the hill women who gathered firewood and kindling in the forest. Armed with this rifle, Jim ventured to enter the Farm Yard which was inhabited by tigers and leopards and bagged his first leopard at the age of ten.

As a child, Corbett learnt to read, write, add up and subtract from his mother Mary Jane and half-sister, Engene Mary. Jim picked up the local dialect in his early childhood, and in his later years as he continued to mix freely with the natives, he gained proficiency in all the local dialects of the hills. Mary Jane was well-read and an accomplished pianist. Their home had a big collection of nineteenth century fiction and poetry, religious texts, medical books, books on hunting and sport, and the classics including Chaucer and Shakespeare. James Fenimore Cooper was one of Jim's favourite authors. Jerry A. Jaleel points out that at night, Jim "would read *The Last of the Mohicans* or *The Pathfinders* or other adventure books aloud to other boys gathered around his bed" (24). Corbett himself writes in *Jungle Lore* that "after reading Fenimore Cooper's thrilling books...I made a bow ... and ... set out to emulate a Red Indian" (250).

Jim left his first school, Oak Openings, to enter the Diocesan Boys' School, presently known as Sherwood College, to pass into secondary education. His ambition was to become an engineer, but the family could not afford the fee. Jim's father had died when Jim was only four, and his brother Tom had married and was obliged to support his own family. Jim realised that he was the man of the family by the time he was seventeen. He decided to take up a job with the railways. The Bengal and North-Western Railway (BNWR) contracted Jim as a temporary fuel inspector posted to Bihar on a salary of one hundred rupees per month. Martin Booth observes, "To enter the employment of the railway was to join an organization that promised job security, stability and, for a domiciled European, a position of some authority in an important institution" (69). His task was to organise the felling of timber that was cut into billets as locomotive fuel. It was a tough life for the next two years. "It was a miserable existence ... after all, he was little more than a cut above the Indian labourers over whom he held sway" (70), writes Martin Booth. Yet, in spite of the heavy odds, the eighteen year old lad gave a good account of himself as Martin Booth reports further:

He had a considerable rapport with his labourers. Not only was he unusually knowledgeable for a European about the forests in which they were working, but he was also quick to learn the dialects of their language, he understood their culture and religion, he appreciated the caste system and its importance and he was scrupulously fair. It was his role to be not only glorified foreman but also arbitrator and chief justice, guide and mentor, strict and patronising leader, councillor, doctor and teacher. (70)

His first assignment being over, Jim was shifted to Samastipur with miscellaneous duties as a guard, assistant storekeeper and assistant station master. Thereafter he became a trans-shipment inspector at Mokameh Ghat. Clearance of goods from one gauge to another was a daunting task—to start with, 500,000 tons of goods had to be cleared. Corbett, not yet twenty one, organised his labour force to clear coal. Additionally, he had to supervise a staff of over 200 clerks, pointsmen, shunters and watchmen. The initial months were a nightmarish experience, with four hours' sleep on a half-empty stomach as the railway headquarters failed to send any money owing to an administrative error. Jim had already used his one hundred and fifty rupees' savings to pay the men whilst he knew that his men had pawned their every belonging to survive.

Here was indeed the worst crisis of his career as a railwayman. Stung by the inhuman condition of his men, Jim took on the authorities in a head-on manner as he sent a telegraph which read, "Work at Mokameh Ghat ceases at midday today unless I am assured that [a sum of] twelve thousand rupees has been dispatched by morning train" (152-53). The money arrived promptly within forty eight hours. This episode reveals Jim as an extraordinarily courageous young man. The image of an underling domiciled youngster defiantly confronting the might of colonial authority is unforgettable. The crisis being over, there were no further troubles in all the twenty-one years he handled the contract. When he left Mokameh Ghat, he was handling a million tons of goods a year.

Jim's extraordinary success in handling the human resources at Mokameh Ghat as well as his rare humanitarianism are highlighted by Geoffery C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward in *Tigers and Tigerwallahs*, "he did gain an extraordinary reputation for industry and fairness among the Indian labourers who worked for him, eating nothing but lentils and unleavened bread when times were lean, just as they did, and distributing eighty per cent of his own annual profits among the men at Christmas" (55). Mokameh Ghat initiated Jim into manhood—it taught him organisation, leadership and deep love of the Indian people.

In association with Tom Kelly, the station master of Simaria Ghat, Corbett instituted a local hockey and football tournament. The lean and swift-moving Jim played as a forward while the bulky Tom Kelly guarded the goal. It was indeed a rare sight to see Europeans playing with Indians. The high regard for the contractor was quite evident at the playground. Every time he tripped, the game was brought to a standstill to allow him to dust his clothes. When Jim went away to join the Second World War, the people of Mokameh Ghat offered prayers for his safe return in temples, mosques and private shrines. Such love and respect of the natives enjoyed by Corbett stands in a stark contrast to the wretched experiences of George Orwell as recorded by him in the essay "Shooting An Elephant," anthologised by Oxford University Press in *Contemporary English: An Anthology for Undergraduates-I* (1991). Orwell was born in India and later served in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma between 1922 and 1927. Orwell writes, "I was hated by large number of people...I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was bitter" (123). It is very interesting to read what happened to him at the football-field, "When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field

and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once” (123).

It goes to Corbett’s credit that he was able to carry on his work at Mokameh Ghat for over twenty years under exceptionally arduous conditions. In his introduction to *Tree Tops*, Lord Malcolm Hailey points out that Jim was able to accomplish this task mainly due to “his friendly personal contacts with the large force of Indian labour which he employed as a contractor” (375). The year 1910 was important to Corbett as his workmen at Mokameh Ghat set a record by clearing 5500 tons of goods in a single day without any mechanical aid, and he also shot down the Muktesar and Panar man-eaters in this year. Corbett left the railway at the age of thirty nine. He left with great satisfaction a job well done.

In addition to being a hardy railwayman, Corbett was also a leading naturalist of his era. An observation made by Eric Risley, a former District Commissioner of the British Colonial Service in Tanzania and recorded in Jerry A. Jaleel’s book *Under the Shadow of Man- Eaters*, crisply captures Corbett’s naturalistic acumen:

Seldom in life does one find a really true naturalist, deeply knowledgeable of all natural trivia which make up our natural world; in other words, someone who has lived in it, got to know it down to the last detail, understood it and all the relationships between climate, trees, animals, birds, insects, the indigenous human inhabitants etc., and how each relates to the other. Jim was such a man—the understanding and genuine complete naturalist, who has lived in the jungle and understood and appreciated it—the very opposite to the research and TV personalities one sees so much today. (143-44) Corbett had an encyclopedic knowledge of the natural world, especially flora and fauna. In his characteristic lucid style, he defends the lowly underdog *kakar* (the barking deer), with solid reasoning in *Jungle Lore*:

The *kakar* is sometimes described as being a mean and a cowardly little animal, and unreliable as a jungle informant. With this description I do not agree. No animal can be called mean for that is exclusively a human trait, and no animal that lives in the densest jungles with tiger, as the *kakar* does, can be accused of being a coward. As for being an unreliable informant I know of no better friend than a man who shoots on foot can have in a jungle than a *kakar*. (344)

He then refers to a long and inconclusive correspondence in the Indian press about a peculiar clicking sound made by *kakar* on occasions. Some people asserted that the sound was heard only when *kakar* were running and therefore it was caused by double joints. Others asserted that it was caused by the tusks clashing together in some inexplicable way. Corbett sets the matter at rest in his calm and composed, but firm and factual manner:

Both these assertions, and others that were advanced, were incorrect. The sound is made by the animal’s mouth in exactly the same way as all other vocal sounds are made, and is used on various occasions: as, for instance, when uncertain of a seen object, when disturbed by a gun dog, or when pursuing a mate. The alarm call of the *kakar* is a clear ringing bark, resembling that of a medium-sized dog. (345)

Evidently, Corbett was no obscure theorist—he had crystal clear views, inferred from his first-hand experiences in nature’s vast observatory.

Corbett was a rare naturalist with an unmatched sense of humour. For instance, in *Jungle Lore*, he describes some peculiar habits of the hornbill:

Hornbills nest in hollow trees and have the unusual habit of sealing the females into the nests. This habit throws a heavy burden on the male, for the female moults and grows enormously fat during the incubation period and when eggs—usually two—are hatched she is unable to fly, and the male has the

strenuous task of providing food for the whole family. By his ungainly appearance, his enormous beak fitted with a sound box, and his heavy and laboured flight, the hornbill gives the impression of having missed the bus of evolution. (355)

The self-imposed plight of the male hornbill evokes sympathy mixed with a smile. It need not be mentioned that the two passages on the *kakar* and the one on hornbills contain gems of authentic naturalist information, and Corbett's books are replete with such passages.

In addition to being a remarkable naturalist, Corbett had an awe-inspiring career as a hunter of man-eaters. The active period of man-eater hunting was spread over more than thirty years from 1907 to 1938. He accounted for twelve man-eating tigers and leopards responsible for killing over 1,500 people in the hill districts of Garhwal, Almora and Naini Tal. Corbett shot his first man-eater, the Champawat tigress in 1907, the Panar leopard as well as the Muktesar tigress in 1910, the Chirgudi leopard in 1912, the Rudraprayag leopard in 1926, the Talla Des tigress in 1929, the Chowgarh tigress in 1930, the Mohan tiger in 1931, the Kanda tiger in 1933, the Chuka tiger in 1937, and the Thak tigress in 1938. When he shot his last man-eater, the Ladhya valley tiger in 1946, Corbett was over seventy! The man-eating leopard of Rudraprayag was widely believed by villagers to have supernatural powers, hence they maintained, it could not be killed. When Corbett finally shot the leopard, the event was celebrated annually with a huge fair at Rudraprayag and in true oral tradition, the exploit came to be handed down to posterity through folksongs. Corbett's man-eater legend lives on even today.

However, after Corbett's death in 1955, doubts were expressed by some skeptical Project Tiger officials over the truth of the man-eater stories. How could Corbett have possibly shot as many as twelve man-eaters? Some even went one step further and questioned the possibility of there having been any man-eaters in Kumaon during Jim's lifetime! In his book *Tracking Jim* (102), Prosenjit Das Gupta refutes these charges by pointing out that Corbett's contemporary and pioneering wildlife photographer F.W. Champion made several references to Corbett's pursuit of man-eaters, especially the Rudraprayag leopard, in his book *With a Camera in Tigerland* (1927). Champion also quotes from the *Pioneer*, referring to Corbett's successful hunts which also featured in official documents of the government and in the local and overseas press. Prosenjit Das Gupta also points out that J. E. Carrington Turner has clearly described Kumaon as "the land of man-eaters" in his book on forest life in Kumaon in the 1920s and 1930s, *Man-Eaters and Memories*. The two viceroys of India, Lord Linlithgow and Lord Wavell had sought copies of Corbett's privately published *Jungle Stories*, lending credence to his hunts. Lord Linlithgow went one step further and wrote the "Preface" to *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1944).

In his book *Under the Shadow of Man-Eaters*, Jerry A. Jaleel mentions that Kailash Sankhala (founding director of Project Tiger in 1973) believed that man-eaters could not be identified by any means (121). About this unjust charge, Jerry A. Jaleel writes further:

About Corbett, Sankhala commented: 'He enjoyed the viceroy's patronage and therefore what he said was the last word. If he called a tiger a man-eater, who was there to dispute it?' It was a cheap shot and Arjan Singh calls it a canard, for the only viceroy who knew Corbett at all well was Lord Linlithgow, who did not take the office until 1936, 'and as all but one of Jim's man-eaters had been shot by then, it is clear that viceregal patronage was not a factor.' (121)

So having put to rest all skeptical speculation about Corbett's unique achievements, the pertinent question to be addressed is—what made Corbett an ace hunter? His intimate and encyclopedic knowledge of the jungle and the ways of the animals provided him an edge over all other hunters. His regular excursions into the forest kept all his five senses attuned and "junglecraft" honed. Then he had

an unmatched physical stamina and a tough constitution supplemented by his phenomenal mental fortitude. His humanitarian commitment to safeguard his beloved hill people always spurred him on during his extremely dangerous man-eater ordeals. On a more personal note, he always pitted and tested his sporting skills against his mighty opponents, on their own ground.

Deeply appreciating Corbett's courage and breath-taking skill in stalking a man-eater on foot, D. C. Kala writes in *Jim Corbett of Kumaon*, "One must be a Sherlock Holmes of the wild to be able to stalk a tiger on foot. The art comes after mastering the jungle telegraph, the knowledge of what every animal or bird call means, and the capacity to read the jungle floor, what a footmark or imprint means. This knowledge has to be backed with a sound eye, ear and nose" (85-86). Speaking about Corbett's growth as a hunter, Prosenjit Das Gupta makes an illuminating observation, "whereas during the earlier hunts Corbett had relied on either organizing a beat and flushing the man-eater out from its cover or enticing it to approach a bait so that he could shoot it over the kill, in the later years he preferred to stalk his man-eaters... pitting his own instincts against the predators's" (103). Corbett's most demanding and strenuous pursuit was that of the Rudraprayag leopard which lasted for ten weeks during 1925 and three months in 1926. And he was no longer a youthful man—he was in his fifties by then.

The simple hill folk hero-worshipped Corbett. They came in swarms of thousands to see the carcass of the dreaded Rudraprayag leopard. Much to the unassuming hunter's discomfort, they showered Corbett's feet with flowers to express their deep gratitude. He was indeed a saviour and a godsend to the terrorised people, as Prosenjit Das Gupta points out in the context of the Kanda man-eater hunt:

With neither a sufficient number of forest personnel available for surveillance nor medical facilities at hand, not even transport to ferry the victim of a savage attack to hospital in time for emergency treatment, the villagers of Kanda would have had no one to turn to, had it not been for a godsend: Jim Corbett, armed with his weapon, his wits and his iron will. (97-98)

It is interesting to note that during a lifetime of jungle life, Corbett came only once in physical contact with a wild animal. He was charged by a wild pig when he tried to rescue one of his Kaladhungi tenants who had been struck by the enraged beast. In a desperate attempt to fend himself, Corbett stretched his palm towards the pig's forehead when, quite inexplicably, it changed direction and disappeared into the bushes. Even more interestingly, Corbett had a lifelong dread of *shikaris* (hunters) moving around in the jungle. His fears were not unfounded. He relates in *Jungle Lore* how he had been nearly shot mistakenly by one Colonel Ward, as the former lay in a bush calling up a leopard, "I was lying flat down with my elbows resting on the ground and my chin resting in my hands, momentarily expecting the leopard to appear, when I heard the swish of leaves behind me and on turning my head, looked straight into the muzzle of a rifle" (351). Corbett explains that he got saved because the early morning light was not good, and the ageing Colonel Ward was unable to get the sights of his rifle to bear accurately on the former's shoulders [whom he mistook for a leopard] so he signalled the elephant to go a little forward, which alerted Corbett just in time. It is not hard to imagine the subsequent exchange of pleasantries between the two dumb-founded men under these most extra-ordinary circumstances.

Why did Corbett risk his life time and again during the man-eater hunts? What did man-eater hunting mean to Corbett? The answers to these questions have to be sought in the context of Corbett's identity as a domiciled European. Geoffrey C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward delineate the social predicament of "White casteism" of which Corbett was a life-long victim:

Edward James Corbett, of mixed Irish and Manx ancestry, was born in India and therefore considered 'Domiciled'—the scornful epithet was 'country-bottled'—relegated to the lowest rank among India's

white rulers, whose caste system was only slightly more yielding than that of those they ruled. Domiciled Britons were thought better than coolies by upper-class Britons...and they were thought more desirable than persons of mixed British and Indian ancestry. But they could never expect to serve in prestigious administrative posts or to climb very high in the Army or to marry any of the flock of English girls who came out to India each winter in search of husbands, even though without them and their forebears there would have been no British Raj at all. (53)

Significantly, Corbett never volunteered to shoot any man-eater because as a domiciled Englishman he would not go where he was not wanted. He was often approached by the local British officials who did the asking, having first exhausted every other option. Such a situation undoubtedly boosted his slighted identity and provided him an occasion to prove his allegiance to the British crown although there was no question about his patriotic fervour. At the same time, his man-eater hunts enabled him to serve and safeguard the people of Kumaon-Garhwal whom he loved dearly. And quite evidently, it provided him the thrill and satisfaction of extreme sport.

Corbett was only four when his father died of an acute heart problem. Mary Jane Corbett bravely took up the challenge of running the big household by becoming “Naini Tal’s first estate agent in the modern sense of the word”, notes Martin Booth (29). In 1906, Corbett found a benefactor in Frederick Edward George Matthews, proprietor of F.E.G. Matthews and Company, House and Commission Agents, Hardware Merchants and Auctioneers who bequeathed his business to him. Corbett gained the shop with ten thousand rupees’ worth of stock as well as Matthews’ four Naini Tal properties. To these he added his own recently purchased Mullacloe. In 1909, he purchased three more houses from expatriates returning ‘home’. Martin Booth writes that these three properties alone ensured a gross rental income per annum of fifteen thousand rupees (112). Corbett and his attorneys Mary Doyle and Maggie did well in business from 1908 to 1934, buying and selling houses owned mostly by Whites leaving Naini Tal. After his return from Mokameh Ghat in 1919, Corbett took over the hardware shop and the business. After the death of Corbett’s mother in 1924 who had been a big drive behind the estate enterprises, the business declined. The shop closed first and then the houses went. By 1940 Corbett had sold all of them and moved into Gurney House again, the house his mother had built judiciously on the safe side of the hill, after the devastating landslide of 1880.

That Corbett, a man of substance, continued to work for the railways at Mokameh Ghat for what he himself describes in *My India* as “the lowest paid [rates] to any contractor in India” (149), seems to defy logic. Martin Booth advances some possible theories which may all be collectively responsible for his extraordinary choice:

Quite why Jim stayed on at Mokameh Ghat after obtaining a steady income in his own home town is hard to understand. Many theories suggest themselves—he liked the comparative freedom from European contacts in the life of Mokameh Ghat where he was the undisputed sahib free of the domiciled tag; he preferred being with the local Indians whom zhe did not want to let down; he preferred this exile on the Ganges after being disappointed in love in Naini Tal where his mother scotched his chances of romances; he was bound by contract; he preferred the security of the railway job to the possible risk of the business failing; he liked doing a job he was confident he was doing well...It is indeed hard to guess why a man born and bred to the Kumaon hills and forests could accept being away from them for so long after the opportunity arose for him to return. (112)

There are no definitive answers and this aspect of Corbett’s persona remains shrouded in mystery.

Corbett also ventured into local politics as he served as a member of the Municipality Board of Naini Tal

for several years, functioning as vice-chairman from 1920 to 1923, and subsequently as senior vice-chairman till 1926. He also presided over meetings of the Finance Committee, Toll and Tax Committee and Public Works Committee. He resigned from the Board on 4 October 1940 for offering his services to the army during the Second World War. As a councillor, his concern to improve the civic amenities of the city as well as its ecological balance come to the fore.

Corbett became the patriarch of Choti Haldwani, a small derelict village he purchased for 1500 rupees sometime around 1915. He was deeply attached to his village and worked extremely hard to make it a model village, as D. C. Kala points out:

Corbett wanted his village to be a model. He parcelled the land into forty holdings, built irrigation channels, distributed vegetable seed and encouraged his tenants to grow fruit. The long wall he built over ten years to protect the crops of those tenants in not-so-solvent circumstances is still intact. While the grain ripened, he assiduously shot marauding hordes of parakeets and sat nightly over the potato patches for pig and porcupine....The elder of the town of Kaladhungi, which is half-Hindu and half-Muslim, always turned to him as an arbiter when communal riots broke out. (62)

Further, his Kaladhungi house situated on a road trijunction was open to all in distress. The family ran a free dispensary for the sick, with its apothecary background.

Martin Booth opines that Corbett bought Choti Haldwani for “philanthropic or sentimental reasons rather than to turn it into a new source of income” (125). Geoffrey C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward describe Corbett and Maggie as the “benevolent proprietors” (56) of Choti Haldwani. In my opinion, Corbett clearly looked at Choti Haldwani as his extended household. It was to be a substitute for his own family which never got started as he remained a bachelor all his life. A more uncharitable way of looking at the situation would be to castigate Corbett as a colonist or to accuse him of perpetrating ‘green’ imperialism. Although Corbett was possessive about Choti Haldwani and the surrounding jungles to a fault, he was motivated by the deepest love for the poor people of the land of his birth, as well as the forests which were his second home.

Corbett was never the one to settle for a sedentary indoor life. During the First World War, he got a war-time commission to the army as a captain in 1917. He raised five thousand volunteers and recruited a personal unit of five hundred young Kumaoni men, known as the 70th Kumaon Company. Martin Booth observes that Corbett’s jungle adventures before his mobilization to the trenches at Flanders in France “would have satisfied even the most rabid taste for excitement in most ordinary men” (104). That he still sought new pastures, is a comment on his stamina and lifelong curiosity.

Corbett visited England for the first time in 1919 as a war-hero, Major Corbett. He found London awe-inspiring and examined the Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, Piccadilly Circus and every other important place with a boyish inquisitiveness and excitement. After all he was visiting ‘home’. As he walked into the heart of London as if under a magical spell, he realized that he had got lost! In his excitement, he could recall neither the name of his hotel nor the street on which it was located. Eventually, he reached the hotel in the hours just before dawn, having used his junglecraft skills of tracking.

Corbett’s military adventure continued during the Second World War as he was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in February 1944. He was appointed as a senior instructor in jungle lore at Chhindwara in Central Provinces. Corbett, the diehard naturalist and loyalist, now aged 68, “was in his element” (244), remarks Martin Booth. Providing details about the master’s lessons, D. C. Kala writes: These lessons were on direction-finding, identification of edible flowers, fruits and tubers, the pinpoint-

ng of sounds, and training the eye to a full field of 180 degrees of vision. An applied junglecraft lesson sought to teach soldiers how to assess the human tracks on a jungle path, the number of men in a party, if loaded or unloaded, and if hurrying—there are then more toe marks and fewer heel marks. The apothecary's son also taught about the medicine available in the jungle for wounds, fevers, sore throat and stomach disorders. Further, he gave instructions on how to kill game without a firearm and prepare tea without a metal pot. (112-13)

In addition to teaching them jungle warfare and survival skills, “He allayed fears in British and American Troops for whom the jungle was as much of an enemy, in their own minds, as were the Japanese” (224), observes Martin Booth. It was around this time that Corbett became a best-selling author with the publication of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* in August 1944.

Corbett got into print for the first time when *The Hoghunters' Annual*, Vol. IV, of 1931 published the story of the Pipal Pani Tiger, which was later included in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. His second dated writing on wildlife featured in the *Review of the Week* of 31 August 1932, published by the Government Branch Press, Naini Tal under the heading, “Wild Life in the village : An Appeal.” D. C. Kala aptly hails this path-breaking article as “the swansong of the wildlife of the foothills” (108). The first two books *Jungle Stories* (published for private circulation in 1935), and *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1944) were written in India. In 1947 Corbett and his sister Maggie withdrew to the white Highlands of Kenya where they rented a cottage in the garden of the Outspan Hotel at Nyeri. This cottage had been earlier occupied by Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of scouting and a renowned British sportsman. Corbett turned this cottage into a writer's workshop where he churned out five more books—*The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* (1948), *My India* (1952), *Jungle Lore* (1953), *Temple Tiger* (1954), and *Tree Tops* (published posthumously in 1955).

The publication of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* in 1944 brought instant international renown to its unassuming author. The book had been dedicated to “the gallant soldiers, sailors and airmen of the United Nations who during this war have lost their sight in the service of their country.” *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* was chosen by book clubs in England and America. 250,000 copies were brought out in the first printing of the American Book-of-the-Month Club in 1946. The book was also issued as a Talking Book for the blind and translated into 14 European languages, 11 Indian languages, Africans and Japanese. A substantial part of the royalties on the first edition (1944) went to St. Dunstan's Hostel for Indian soldiers blinded in the war that was still being fought.

In a letter written in 1949 to a friend, Corbett expressed surprise at the response evoked by *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. The letter, included in Jerry A. Jaleel's book, reads:

“I was amazed at the number of people—men, women, boys and girls—who took the trouble to write to me, an unknown man living in a remote part of the world, to thank me for having taken them into the forests of the Himalayas and enabled them to forget for a while the sorrows and troubles of the world they were living in” (133). R.E. Hawkins, Corbett's publisher from the Oxford University Press, attributed the book's success a good deal to its appearance in 1944 during the Second World War. Corbett, the knightly hero whom he described as the “contemporary dragon killer”, brought the hopeful message of truth and justice in the face of the terrifying gloom of nihilism perpetrated by the War.

There was some shady speculation about the authorship of Corbett's stories. Prosenjit Das Gupta writes, “Rumours abounded for a while that Ibbotson had ghost written the stories for his friend” (171). The manuscript of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* which was an extended version of the privately published *Jungle Stories* (1935), was received by R.E Hawkins of the Bombay Branch of Oxford University Press in

1943. D. C. Kala writes in the context of the authorship controversy:

And to silence a host of schoolmasters and typists at Naini Tal, who claimed to have rewritten or corrected the manuscript, Hawkins affirmed that all Corbett's books are his unaided work, except for the help he got from Maggie, who also had a good memory. When the book was written, Corbett's exploits were already legendary in Kumaon. (115)

Corbett's life was closely bound to that of his sister, Maggie. "Here is a remarkable example of sibling harmony at its best", writes Jerry A. Jaleel (162). A tribute to Maggie, published in the spring edition of the *Periodical* (1964) and cited by Jerry A. Jaleel, gives due credit to Maggie in the making of Jim's books:

The books—*Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* and others—were his, but her part in their creation was a key one. She looked after her brother; she made the home to which he returned from his long days in the jungles of Kumaon; she was the first to hear the stories and reminiscences which were to be read by thousands in many lands. And she read the proofs. Together, they appeared an almost incongruous pair: Jim very tall, gentle, soft-footed; Maggie very small, smiling and silent. (169-70)

Martin Booth cites a long cable sent by Corbett on 1 April 1946 to his publishers on the occasion of the publication of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* in the U.S.A. in which he provides a detailed and very interesting history of the inception and shaping of the book over the years. Overhearing an account of a man-eater hunt by Corbett at the dinner table, his hostess Lady Violet Haig (the wife of the Governor of the United Provinces, Sir 'Harry' Haig) coaxed him into writing down his experiences as not doing so would be "intensely selfish" (221). Corbett relied heavily on the vast store-house of photographic impressions in his memory, to write the stories. They were published by an acquaintance who ran a small printing works named London Press, at Naini Tal. The book was titled *Jungle Stories*. It was 104 pages long, and only one hundred copies were printed and circulated among friends. The book became so popular that even Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, demanded a copy. Corbett writes that a "concerted demand was then made for me to publish my stories in regular book form" (223). Martin Booth reports further, "By August, 1943, Jim had completed his book. It was, as he put it, an 'enlarged manuscript copy of jungle stories', although in fact the book as it stood was much different. With the exception of Maggie's help in reading the text and Lord Linlithgow's in checking for errors, Jim wrote the whole book himself" (227).

The publishers, Oxford University Press, Bombay made a significant contribution by suggesting the title *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* in place of the rather bland *Jungle Stories*. D. C. Kala writes:

In true Corbett style, he found the two biggest in the land to sponsor the book: Lord Linlithgow, whom Corbett had hosted at tiger hunts at Kaladhungi, wrote the foreword, and Sir Maurice Hallett the preface. Linlithgow wrote: 'These stories are the true account of Maj. Corbett's experience with man-eating tigers in the jungles of the United Provinces...I can with confidence write of him that no man with whom I have hunted in any continent better understands the signs of the jungle.' (116)

Martin Booth reports that the book sold more than four million copies world-wide by 1980 (231). A Hollywood cinematic version of the book was a disaster as it had very little resemblance to the original and Corbett who saw the film once, said with his characteristic humour that the best actor was the tiger. Sometime during the early thirties, Corbett had a very fruitful association with an officer of the education department, Colonel Archie White. On being told by Corbett that some of his writings had been rejected by *Blackwoods Magazine* on more than one occasion, Colonel White looked at the

manuscripts. These were, probably, the first draft of *Jungle Stories*. The writings had some elementary and amateurish technical problems as well as some troublesome glitches in terms of expression. Colonel White's observations as recorded by Jerry A. Jaleel, read:

Some [stories] were written in school exercise books, others typed through a disintegrated ribbon onto filmy paper. Worse still, the stories were hard to follow. Several thoughts would be running on parallel lines, like the rails at Clapham Junction, while the full stops were not points in the grammatical sense, but more like railway points, switching the traffic without halting it. In short, his ideas were getting in his way. Jim's shooting had been sound, and he was a wide reader. But in his years as a contractor, his pen had done no more than log a string of facts—load, volume, time and cost. (89)

Subsequently, during his next visit to Naini Tal the following year, Colonel White and Corbett spent a few evenings together, "Smoking and working out the function of the comma and the purpose of the paragraph" (89). Corbett, the avid learner, picked the cues to perfection and set out to metamorphose his diffused and rather clumsy pieces into gripping accounts of timeless appeal. Colonel White must have had the surprise of his life when, after the Second World War, he received a copy of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. Corbett, with sheer hard work and characteristic determination, trained himself rigorously to hit the bull's eye with his second lethal weapon—the pen.

Man-Eaters of Kumaon was received very well by critics world over. Jerry A. Jaleel catalogues some brief reviews that appeared in the British Press:

A review appearing in the *Spectator* said, 'Often my heart almost stopped and I had to lay the book down, it was so exciting.' The *Birmingham Post* described the book as a 'display of jungle lore remarkable not least in its modesty—and the many encounters at very close quarters are immensely exciting'. The *Listener* observed, 'He has an eye, in his narrative, for other things besides the tracks of his prey, and it is a long time since any book came out of India more illuminating about the landscapes and the people of these remote hills.' (95)

R. W. Burton, a contemporary author and hunter of tigers in India, wrote in his book *Tigers of the Raj* that he considered Corbett "either extremely foolish, or inaccurate, or not well-informed about wildlife in general" (95). Although Burton, a seasoned hunter himself, had the right to differ with Corbett with reference to junglecraft, he definitely goes overboard in castigating a man who was an institution in himself.

D. C. Kala points out that the American Press reviews of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* were also appreciative. Sterling North commented in the *New York Post* that he had been carried away by the "factual recital" (118) of events. Kala observes further:

Christopher Morley, in the *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, called it 'a story of murder, of detective skill and courage, also of natural history, of the life of primitive people, of marvelous scenic beauty, and an unconscious revelation of rare human character....The chapter on his half-breed spaniel, Robin, who was an invalid with a bad heart, is one of the most charming tributes in all the peculiar literature on dogs. James Hilton, commenting on the biographical material in the book, called it the self-portrait of 'a man in whom an intense kinship with nature has quieted many of the problems that beset the rest of us' and that the portrait was so clear because it was 'largely unconscious'. (118)

Jerry A. Jaleel quotes a statement made by Corbett's publishers in the U.S.A. which mentions that the *Christian Science Monitor* found these true stories "an enormous relief after a diet of modern novels. The tales unfold with a simplicity of treatment, with a freshness and novelty, and a true unselfishness of action" (105).

D. C. Kala points out that a lone fault-finder was Edmund Wilson, who wrote in the *New Yorker*, “the style in spots is like ruptured Kipling” (118). Countering this dissenting whisper, Jerry A. Jaleel points out judiciously that those who compare Corbett’s writings to Kipling’s must not lose sight of the fact that “Kipling’s works were fiction, drawn from a superficial knowledge of the men and beasts of India” (105) whereas Corbett spent a lifetime in India, living close to its people and animals for seventy two years. Corbett himself wrote to a friend, Captain J. S. Eyton in a letter dated 28 November 1946, “I am not a writer of books [fiction] ... but I have a memory in which everything I have ever seen in the jungle is stored and the scenes are as clear today as when they happened years ago.” In the same letter, Corbett admits in no uncertain terms that “my field is limited to what I have seen, and my descriptions are of necessity limited by my lack of words.” Corbett’s realism and unpretentious prose style strengthen the appeal of his books as Martin Booth writes about *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, “The painstaking and prolonged hunt is brought to a climax all the more effective for the fact that it is truth” (234). Geoffrey C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward also support the view that truthfulness consolidates Corbett’s writing, “One of the reasons his accounts of his own adventures are so vivid and persuasive is that he never flinched from detailing his own weaknesses and frustration” (59). Reeta Dutta Gupta also points out appropriately that “he was not drawn to Nature as a poet but a keen observer of her laws. This helped him to hunt with confidence, and later, take her cause against the wanton destruction of wildlife and their natural habitat” (12).

In terms of their political leanings as well, Kipling and Corbett stand on very different planes. According to Jerry A. Jaleel, Kipling’s writings focused on the British as a ‘master race’ (105). In order to substantiate his view, Jaleel cites a paragraph from William Shirer’s book *Gandhi—A Memoir*:

There now began for India another episode in its experience of British domination, the Victorian era, celebrated by the Indian-born jingoistic poet and story-teller, Rudyard Kipling, from whom the West, principally England but also to a large extent America, got its British-biased, colourful but superficial view of India. To Kipling and his immense following, the English were the master race, destined to rule over the ‘lesser breeds’. The governing of the hundreds of millions of Indians, Kipling was sure, had been ‘placed by the inscrutable design of providence upon the shoulders of the British race.’ (106)

Kipling, thus, represents the forces of aggression that operated under the thin garb of ameliorative reform. Jerry A. Jaleel cites an incident which unmasks the brilliant poet’s biased sympathies for inhumanly brutal imperial oppression:

When the *Morning Post* launched a fund-raising campaign for the benefit of Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, who masterminded the Amritsar massacre in 1919, Kipling contributed 10 pounds to ‘the man who saved India’. By contrast, Corbett’s unselfishness and sympathy for the poor of India were already known in Kumaon long before his books were published, and these qualities are reflected throughout his writings. (106)

Corbett was also a part of the imperialistic set up insofar as he was a member of the ruling white class, but he represented a benevolent and humane face of imperialism. His man-eater exploits to protect the poor of India, even by risking his own life, are a living legend. As mentioned earlier Corbett’s family had a history of amateur physicians, they selflessly treated thousands of poor Indians for all kinds of ailments and epidemics. He did everything within his means to improve the lot of the oppressed Indians. Jim Corbett was indeed one of the select band of Europeans who truly understood the way of life in India. Jerry A. Jaleel clinches the issue with Kipling in favour of Corbett as he writes, “Hindus, Muslims and Christians, young and old, male and female, working and unemployed, all found a haven in the

home of the ‘White Sadhu’ ” (112). It is true that Jim Corbett was neither a great poet nor a master craftsman like Kipling, but what sustains Corbett’s work is not conscious artistry but a selfless, living humanitarianism which appeals powerfully to readers across the world.

Corbett followed up *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* with *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* in 1948. This book was dedicated to the victims of this man-eater. This is the only book by Corbett which has a continued plot while his other books were written as short stories with episodic plots, unified by the figure of the hunter-narrator. Martin Booth calls it “possibly his [Corbett’s] best book but the least known of all of them” (233). The book manifests Corbett’s immense humanity, Spartan hardiness and incredible hunting skill. Once again, the book has a powerful conservationist undercurrent.

Corbett’s next book, *My India*, appeared in 1952. In his introduction to the book, he describes it as “Sketches of village life and work” (5), and adds, “The scenes of my sketches centre around these two points in India: Naini Tal and Mokameh Ghat [near Patna in Bihar]” (6). The book presents minute, first hand observation and accurate representation of poor people and their lives. *My India* depicts the customs and beliefs, ailments and superstitions, sorrows and sufferings of the common man under the British Raj. Corbett, the perennial humanitarian, could see the injustice meted out to Sultana, the notorious outlaw and prized dacoit, as he belonged to a tribe castigated as criminal and had been denied an alternative chance to prove otherwise. The book is dedicated to “my friends, the poor of India.”

In the last section of *My India*, “Life at Mokameh Ghat”, Corbett writes that his additional responsibility of being in overall charge of cross-river steamers at Mokameh Ghat provided him “an opportunity of indulging in one of my hobbies—the study of human beings” (180). The steamer and railway junction was an important place and a great multitude of people crossed there round the year.

Jungle Lore, Corbett’s fourth book, appeared in October 1953. It reveals his insatiable interest in plants, flowers, birds, beasts, pets, ghosts, spirits, places and people of Kumon as well as his lifelong acquisition of jungle lore and hunting skills. In *Jungle Lore*, Corbett came closest to writing an autobiography. Prosenjit Das Gupta calls the book “a veritable primer for future generations of wildlife enthusiasts” (169). Corbett invites the urban reader to partake of the joys of nature as he writes, “with the air throbbing with the joyful songs of a great multitude of birds, we can forget for a spell the strains and stresses of our world, and savour the world of the jungle folk” (360). Martin Booth observes, “He wrote simply to entertain and educate, preaching his philosophy of live and let live, of natural justice and simplistic morality. After the years of the Second World War, this was very much admired and needed” (242).

Corbett’s fifth book *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* which appeared in 1954 repeated the success of his first book. It contains the story of Corbett’s futile attempts to hunt the temple tiger who was credited with divine protection by the local people. It also contains the tales of the hunts of the man-eaters of Muktesar, Panar, Chuka and Talla Des. In order to satisfy the skeptics about the veracity of details presented by him while hunting the man-eaters of Thak and Chuka, Corbett recommends in the “Epilogue” that they should visit the Thak village and:

...get the headman or any of the other men sitting round to give you his version of the shooting of the Thak and of the Chuka man-eating tigers. Tewari, a relative of the headman ... will then show you where his brother whose body he helped me find was killed, the mango tree with a spring at its roots, and the rock on the way down to Chuka where I shot the Thak man-eater. He will also... show you the ficus tree from which I shot the Chuka man-eater. At Chuka inquire for Kunwar Singh, and hear his story of the hunting of the two tigers. (181)

About the Talla Des man-eater hunt, Corbett writes, “my story to many should seem incredible” (180)—he had followed and shot the wounded man-eater on foot. In order to verify the facts, Corbett suggests that the reader should meet Dungar Singh, the land-holder of Talla Kote village and:

...get Dungar Singh to point out the bush where his mother was killed, the oak tree under which she was eaten, the *wyran* field on which the young tigers were shot, and the grassy hill up which the wounded tigress went. Then turn round, walk a few steps, and face the valley to the west. Dungar Singh will now point out where the six goats were killed, where the tigress was standing when my bullet went through her, and the footpath along which she dashed and along which I ran after her.

The hunting of no other tiger has ever been witnessed by a greater number of non-participants than witnessed the hunting of the Talla Des man-eating tiger [actually, tigress]. Some of those will have passed away, but many will still remain and they will not have forgotten my visit or the thrilling events of the week I spent with them. (181-82)

Princess Elizabeth and her husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, paid a state visit to Kenya in February 1952. The Princess invited Corbett, the grand old man of wildlife in his late seventies, for his company, when the royals visited Tree Tops, the famous wilderness lodge built in the upper branches of a wild ficus tree, with an excellent game-viewing post. Corbett spent some twenty hours—an afternoon and a night here—in the royal company. Corbett also spent an anxious night, zealously guarding the royal couple as he feared a strike by the Mau Mau activists. “This was the culmination of all his patriotic fervour” (248), writes Martin Booth. Reeta Dutta Gupta cites a letter Corbett wrote to his publisher Geoffrey Cumberlege in which he made a lucid statement about Princess Elizabeth, “When I helped her into the tree, she was a princess, and when I helped her down she was a Queen” (81), for that very night of 5 February 1952, she lost her father, King George VI. Corbett’s last book, *Tree Tops* which describes all these events, was published posthumously in 1955. The book also records Corbett’s wildlife experiences including photography in the jungles of Africa. Lord Malcolm Hailey, the former governor of the United Provinces and a fishing companion of Corbett in Kumaon, wrote a memorable introduction to *Tree Tops*.

Jim and Maggie faced the worst crisis of their life as Indian Independence drew closer and anti-British feelings raged everywhere. It was generally feared that Britishers would be expelled or deported from India or worse still, British women would be raped and their menfolk murdered. There was also a talk of the impending collapse of India after the abrupt expulsion of the British machinery of government. This fluid and scary scenario brought back ghosts of the Mutiny of 1857 in the minds of the elderly Corbett siblings as Geoffrey C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward point out in a poignant manner:

Corbett’s own father Christopher Corbett, the Naini Tal postmaster, had helped lift the siege of Delhi during the 1857 Mutiny. That sudden and bloody rebellion by Indian troops thought faithful to the British Queen had traumatized the Raj. Afterwards, the British never fully trusted their Indian subjects. Corbett and his brothers and sisters were steeped in Mutiny lore: their father’s younger brother had been tied to a stake and burned alive by the rebels; their mother’s first husband had been pulled from his horse and hacked to death. No matter how gentle and amiable Indians seemed, the children were taught, one had always to be on guard. (53-54)

The political upheaval, coupled with unnerving rumours and apprehensions, clouded the minds of Jim and Maggie. Corbett, the benign colonial, felt alienated and intimidated by the new face of aggressive India, as observed further by Geoffrey C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward:

His India was always that of the peasant. ‘Simple, honest, brave, loyal, hard-working souls’, he called them once, ‘whose daily prayer to God, and to whatever Government is in power, is to give them security of life and of property to enable them to enjoy the fruits of their labours. ‘Modern India-urban, educated, increasingly stirred by politics, increasingly impatient with British rule—was alien to him, and always menacing. (56)

At last, the Corbett siblings left India with a heavy heart on 30 November 1947 for their new home, Kenya. It was a colony where white supremacy was still acknowledged. It also had a rich wildlife which was ideal for photography and they had a number of close friends and relations settled in that country. They occupied the Baden-Powell cottage at the Outspan Hotel at Nyeri in the heart of Kikuyuland. As mentioned earlier, Corbett wrote his last five books at this quiet retreat facing Mt. Kenya. Corbett was hospitalized on 19 April 1955 after a severe heart attack and died the same day. His last words to his sister Maggie were, “Always be brave, and try and make the world a happier place for others to live in”. In his memorable tribute, D. C. Kala compares Corbett to Albert Einstein who had died just a day before Corbett, on 18 April 1955, “They both were unpretentious wizards, one of mathematics and physics and the other of jungle craft. They both spent a lifetime studying the laws of nature in their own light” (141). Geoffrey C. Ward and Diane Raines Ward capture in their tribute the tragedy of Corbett’s forced separation from his beloved India:

Corbett represented within himself—as hunter and conservationist, author and outdoorsman, and loyal subject of the Crown—all the gentlemanly attributes of the British imperial system at its best. The tragedy was that partly because he also shared that system’s worst delusions, he became its victim, ending his days in sad, self-imposed exile from the land he never stopped loving. (53)

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