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**'A World of Stark Realities and the Rule of
Tooth and Claw': Jim Corbett and Late
Colonial Rule in British India**

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'A World of Stark Realities and the Rule of Tooth and Claw':¹

Jim Corbett and Late Colonial Rule in British India

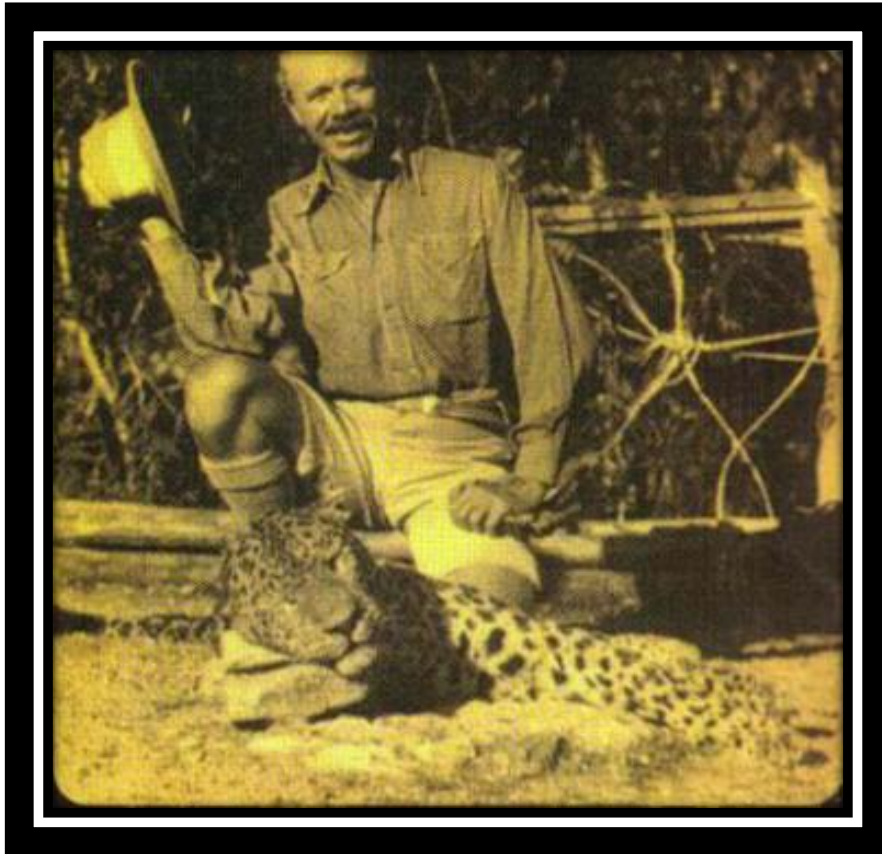


Figure 1: Corbett and the 'Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag'²

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¹ J. Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Oxford 1944), 13.

² D.C. Kala, *Jim Corbett of Kumaon* (London 2009), 84.

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Introduction

'Respected Sir,

...In this vicinity a tiger has turned out man-eater since December last. Up to this date he has killed 5 men and wounded 2. So we the public are in a great distress...The forest officials are doing every possible arrangement to kill this tiger but there is no hope of any success. 2 *shikari* gentlemen also tried to shoot it but unfortunately they could not get it. Our District Magistrate has notified Rs.150 reward for killing this tiger, so everyone is trying to kill it but no success. We have heard that your kind self have killed many man-eater tigers and leopards. For this you have earned a good name specially in Kumaon revenue Division. The famous man-eater leopard of Nagpur has been shoot by you. This is the voice of all the public here that this tiger also will be killed only by you. So we the public venture to request that you very kindly take trouble to come to this place and shoot this tiger (our enemy) and save the public from this calamity.³

Few Englishmen have been held in higher esteem in Independent India than Jim Corbett. For more than half a century he has been remembered and celebrated as a compassionate and sympathetic man with exceptional environmental awareness. The renaming in 1957 of the famous Ramganga tiger sanctuary as the Corbett National Park, 'in memory of one who dedicated his life to the service of the simple hill folks of Kumaon',⁴ is a good indication of the respect in which his memory is held. Honoured as a friend to the people and the wildlife of India, Corbett is above all remembered as a great *shikari*; the famous slayer of man-eating tigers and leopards whose unparalleled success between 1907 and 1946, is credited with killing at least 33 man-eaters in the hill districts of Kumaon. His hunting exploits made Corbett's a household name among the scattered hamlets of the region where he was immortalised in 'a dozen folk songs and a thousand tales'⁵ and venerated by the Kumaoni people as a *sadhu* or holy man. 'Carpet Sahib' (as his name is often rendered by Kumaonis),

³ Extract from a petition sent to Jim Corbett 'by the people of Garhwal' on the 18th of February 1933, reprinted in Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 154.

⁴ M. Booth, 'Corbett, Edward James (1875-1955)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004), 2.

⁵ For example:

*'In the whole of this wonderful orbit
There will never be second Jim Corbett
For his shikar fame and name
Will remain just the same
And to the end of time
As Jim Corbett.'*
Kala, *Jim Corbett*, 150.

became and remains 'one of the small band of Europeans whose memory has been worshipped' in India.⁶ Yet Corbett's revered status as protector of the weak and pioneering conservationist is misleading. Few historians today would dispute Michel Foucault's assertion that power, 'is both different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or state apparatus'⁷ and Corbett's reputation overlooks his immersion within the 'various systems of subjugation' that constituted late colonial rule.⁸ This dissertation will explore Corbett's neglected part in the diffuse 'coercive networks'⁹ and technologies of power of colonial Indian society which, in his own words, 'made it possible for a handful of men to administer, for close on two hundred years, a vast subcontinent with its teeming millions.'¹⁰

Born in 1875 in the hill country of Naini Tal and raised in the Himalayan foothills, Edward James Corbett, better known as Jim, was the eighth child of a domiciled European family. First an employee of the railways, later the proprietor of a business in Naini Tal and member of the Naini Tal Municipal Board, Corbett maintained a lifelong association with various agencies of the colonial apparatus. At the age of ten, he was already a cadet in the Naini Tal Volunteer rifles. In the First World War Captain Corbett commanded his own Kumaoni labour corps of 500 men in France. On his return, he was promoted to major and served in the Waziristan campaign of the third Anglo-Afghan war (1919-20). For a short while in the 1920s, Corbett joined the Special Dacoity Police Force in pursuit of the notorious bandit and 'criminal' tribesman Sultana. Even in his mid sixties, he was awarded the honorary rank of lieutenant-colonel for his training of Allied troops in jungle fighting techniques for the Second World War. At home Corbett governed his numerous Indian tenants with a 'fair but iron hand',¹¹ zealously policing the surrounding forests as a 'self styled game warden'.¹² Included among his close friends were Percy Wyndham (Kumaon District Commissioner), Malcolm Hailey (Governor of the United Provinces) and Lord Linlithgow (Viceroy of India). Certainly Corbett's description of himself as 'a mere man of the street, without any connection to the Government'¹³ seems doubtful.

⁶ M. Hailey, 'Introduction' in J. Corbett, *Tree Tops* (London 1955), xii-xiii.

⁷ M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977* (Brighton 1980), 159.

⁸ J. Weeks, 'Foucault for Historians', *History Workshop*, No.14, (Autumn 1982), 109.

⁹ T.C. Sherman, 'Tensions of Colonial Punishment: Perspectives of Recent Developments in the Study of Coercive Networks in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean', *History Compass*, Vol.7, issue 3 (May 2009), 659-677.

¹⁰ J. Corbett, *My India* (Oxford 1952), 161.

¹¹ M. Booth, *Carpet Sahib: A Life of Jim Corbett* (Oxford 1991), 129.

¹² Kala, *Jim Corbett*, 64.

¹³ J. Corbett, *Jungle Lore* (Oxford 1953), 122.

From boyhood, Corbett was intimately acquainted with the surrounding natural world, first making 'a hobby of reading and interpreting jungle signs'¹⁴ and soon initiated into that quintessential activity empire: hunting. Enshrined in Corbett's childhood was 'that day of days' when he was given his first gun,¹⁵ and by the time he was eleven he had shot his first leopard. In 1907 Corbett killed his first man-eater, inaugurating a vocation in which he enjoyed unparalleled success that eventually gained him global renown. Yet, although the combined depredations of the man-eaters that he dispatched over the next forty years were thought to have been responsible for over 1500 deaths, to Corbett the tiger remained 'a large-hearted gentleman'¹⁶ and he maintained that to classify the leopard 'as VERMIN, as is done in some parts of India, is a crime'.¹⁷ In the mid-1920s, amid the rapid and ongoing destruction of the India's wildlife, Corbett began to form nascent conservationist views, and by 1947 when he migrated to Kenya in the wake of Indian independence, Corbett was able to boast that he had 'earned the reputation for being keener on photographing animals than killing them.'¹⁸

Corbett's interaction with the natural world has been perceived generally to have been determined by a compassionate consideration for the vulnerable people and environment of Kumaon. However, one premise of environmental history is that the dialogue between humans and nature is worthy of historical investigation and can be 'reconceptualised as a sophisticated tool for telling better social, political, economic or any other histories'.¹⁹ Corbett was subject to the broader imperatives of colonial rule, and a consideration of the broader ecological and environmental context helps us to place him in perspective. Environmental historians of India have demonstrated processes of ecological degradation in which the exploitative colonial society to which Corbett belonged has been routinely cast in the part of the villain.²⁰ Although historians such as Ramachandra Guha have been criticised for promoting a 'golden-ageist view of indigenous, pre-colonial uses of nature',²¹ there can be little doubt that colonialism involved unprecedented exploitation of the Indian environment.²²

¹⁴ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 8.

¹⁵ Corbett, *My India*, 24.

¹⁶ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, xv.

¹⁷ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 74.

¹⁸ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 100.

¹⁹ J. Carruthers, 'Africa: Histories, Ecologies and Societies,' *Environment and History*, Vol.10, No.4, (November 2004), 812-3.

²⁰ J.M. Mackenzie, *Empires of Nature and the Nature of Empires* (Edinburgh 1997), xii.

²¹ P. Das, 'Jim Corbett's Green Imperialism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.44, No.15 (April 2009), 20.

²² R. Guha, *The Unquiet Wood: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley 2000).

Moreover, Mahesh Rangarajan has exposed the process of 'fencing the forest'²³ by which the British appropriated India's wilderness by imposing severe restrictions on indigenous rural communities. J.M. Mackenzie has shown how 'empires of nature are deeply embedded in the nature of empires'²⁴ and an increased interest in the relationship between ecological and social processes has found that British rule 'entailed not simply a struggle to civilise India and its population, but a more profound struggle for control over nature.'²⁵ Hunting re-emerges as a mimetic re-enactment of the violent appropriation that underlay the serene majesty of empire, and 'an effort to prevent fierce and unpredictable nature from interfering in the day-to-day governance practices' of colonial rule.²⁶ Similarly, the adoption of conservationism, whilst apparently contradicting the rhetoric of hunting, belonged to the same paternalist ideology of command that made it a 'white man's burden'.²⁷ Nevertheless environmental historians have unaccountably endorsed Corbett's exalted reputation. Guha's introduction to him in *Lives in the Wilderness* is an appreciative one²⁸ and Rangarajan gives us a friendly account of Corbett in his essay on nature writers in *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*.²⁹

The core of the primary material on which this essay is based is Jim Corbett's own writing, yet it is this same material to which the legend that surrounds him owes much of its continued vitality. Published in 1944, Corbett's first book, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, was an immediate and tremendous success. This 'breathless whirl through tigerland'³⁰ was the first of six books³¹ in which Corbett recounted in detail his life and exploits in the hill districts of Kumaon. Millions of readers across the world received these books rapturously as 'true life adventures that rival Kipling's *Jungle Books*'.³² By the time of Corbett's death in 1955, *Man-*

²³ M. Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-1914* (Delhi 1996).

²⁴ Mackenzie, *Empires of Nature*, 22.

²⁵ S. Hussain, 'Forms of Predation: Tiger and Markhor Hunting in Colonial Governance', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.46, No.5 (2012), 1212.

²⁶ Hussain, 'Forms of Predation', 1212.

²⁷ R. Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', *McClure's Magazine*, 12 (February 1899).

²⁸ R. Guha (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Lives in the Wilderness: Three Classic Indian Autobiographies* (Oxford 2009), v-vii.

²⁹ M. Rangarajan, 'Five Nature Writers' in A.K. Mehrotra (ed.), *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English* (Delhi 2003), 80.

³⁰ Kala, *Jim Corbett*, 1.

³¹ Corbett wrote six books: *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Oxford 1944), *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* (Oxford 1947), *My India* (Oxford 1952), *Jungle Lore* (Oxford 1953), *The Temple Tiger and more Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Oxford 1954), and *Tree Tops* (1955).

³² H.K. Buechner, 'Man-Eaters of India by Jim Corbett', *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, Vol.23, No.1 (January 1959), 125.

Eaters of Kumaon had been translated into at least sixteen languages³³ and adapted in to a Hollywood film. Whilst the film was an unmitigated cinematic disaster of which Corbett is reported to have drily commented that the tiger was the best actor, by 1980 four million copies of his original book had been sold world-wide.³⁴ Through his 'modest yet thrilling' writing, 'filled with jungle lore' and environmental concern 'as well as ripping-yarn excitement',³⁵ Corbett was propelled to global fame where he was received as 'a tiger among men', an untiring champion of the underdog and father of the movement to save the tiger from extinction.³⁶ Today Corbett's books are still in print and his memory remains very much alive; what was once his winter home in Kaladhungi now stands as a museum to his memory as does his summer residence in Naini Tal, not far from Corbett High School. Indian tourists still pose for photographs beside a monument that marks the spot on which Corbett killed the notorious 'Man Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag', and there has even been a sub-species of tiger, *Panthera Tigris Corbetti*, named in his honour.

The longevity and continued strength of the Corbett legend is indicative of a general failure to read his works critically. Both popular and scholarly perceptions of Corbett's invariably vaunted reputation rest on an almost canonical foundation in his own work that is unpalatable to the historian. Corbett's biographers have barely deviated from the model of his life story as he narrated it himself in his memoirs, and the resultant lack of diversity among these texts resembles an uncomfortably self-referential discourse that verges on hagiography.³⁷ Whilst the combination of postmodernist literary theory and the opportunity of the postcolonial period for historians to 'write back' against erstwhile imperial masters has resulted in the condemnation of similar texts as products of colonial discourse, the Corbett legend has survived virtually unscathed. I aim to address this oversight, and whilst it would be erroneous to consign Corbett's reputation to 'the realm of pure untruth'³⁸ as a wholly colonial

³³ These include French, German, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Czech, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, Indonesian and six Indian languages.

³⁴ Booth, *Carpet Sahib*, 230.

³⁵ Booth, 'Corbett, Edward James', 2.

³⁶ Kala, *Jim Corbett*, 1.

³⁷ Three full length biographies of Corbett's life have been published: D.C. Kala, *Jim Corbett of Kumaon* (Oxford 1979), M. Booth, *Carpet Sahib: A Life of Jim Corbett* (Oxford 1986) and J.A. Jaleel, *Under the Shadow of Man-Eaters: The Life and Legend of Jim Corbett of Kumaon* (Delhi 2001).

³⁸ A. Ahmad, 'Between Orientalism and Historicism', *Studies in History*, Vol.7, No.1 (February 1991), 150.

construction, to approach these autobiographical sources on which his legend is founded as offering an unobstructed window into the past would be equally mistaken.³⁹

Corbett's books belong to a reasonably distinct genre with a conventionalised form that was adopted by many British officials and officers who cast accounts of their experiences in India in the form of sporting memoirs.⁴⁰ However a number of methodological problems exist for the historian using these hunting narratives as sources. Despite often being corroborated elsewhere, these anecdotal texts have limitations as precise records of events. They are bounded by the personal experiences of the narrators, who cannot be treated as completely representative of British colonial society but are likely to be among the more self-conscious exemplars of their type. Tellingly, Corbett candidly admits at the beginning of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* that '*Shikar* yarns as everybody knows never lose anything in repetition'.⁴¹ Moreover, there is often a considerable time lag between the publication of the narrative and the occurrence of the events which it details. Corbett begins one hunting tale with the claim that 'the events of the five days I spent hunting the man-eating tiger of Talla Des are as clear cut and fresh in my memory today as they were twenty-five years ago',⁴² yet one cannot help but doubt the accuracy of his apparently verbatim recollections.

The very nature of the hunting narrative makes it a kind of 'stepchild of history and literature'⁴³ that does not fit easily into a wider tradition. These sources incorporate elements of autobiography and diary, both of which have been identified by historians as non-essentialist literary forms that involve a construction of the 'self' by the author and Michel Foucault has demonstrated that these 'selves' belong to various indecipherable discursive contexts.⁴⁴ However, if we cannot hope to understand the past in objective terms, the task of historical investigation is 'not to fish for the 'real' history that glides silently under the surface, or rules behaviour behind men's backs, but to address itself to these surfaces which *are* the 'real' in the way we live social relations through the grid of meaning and language.'⁴⁵ Subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible 'facts'⁴⁶ and hunting

³⁹ T. Lloyd, 'Liminal Criminals: Re-thinking Historiographies of, and through, the 'Thuggee' phenomenon', *History Compass*, Vol.5, No.2 (2007), 366.

⁴⁰ J.M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservationism and British Imperialism* (Manchester 1988), 168.

⁴¹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 8.

⁴² Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 131.

⁴³ J. Olney, *Studies in Autobiography* (New York 1988), xiv.

⁴⁴ M. Foucault, *In Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (New York 1977), 124.

⁴⁵ Weeks, 'Foucault for Historians', 110.

⁴⁶ A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* (New York 1991), 50.

narratives such as Corbett's afford us an insight into the 'affective and cognitive inside of a historical moment'⁴⁷ that shows us more than what people did, but what they wanted to do and believed they were doing. For Jenifer Wallach, this brings us 'closer to the truth than any fact'⁴⁸ and Corbett's books therefore represent valuable historical sources as expressions of his cultural values and the ethos of colonial rule.

⁴⁷ J.J. Wallach, 'Building a Bridge of Words: the Literary Autobiography as Historical Source Material', *Biography*, Vol.29, No.3 (2006), 447-8.

⁴⁸ J.J. Wallach, '*Closer to the Truth than Any Fact*': *Memoir, Memory and Jim Crow* (Georgia 2008).

Chapter One:

Corbett the Sportsman



Figure 2. Corbett with the 'Bachelor of Powalgarh' in 1930.⁴⁹

Sport and above all hunting was an obsession in British India, 'an integral part of the lives of the British administrative and military community' that reached its apotheosis in the early twentieth century.⁵⁰ However this prominent cultural characteristic of colonial rule has been all too often neglected by historians for whom it is 'rendered nebulous by its very ubiquity'.⁵¹ It was not until 1988 that historical interest in hunting was sparked by John Mackenzie's *The Empire of Nature*, which successfully demonstrated its importance to the imperial project. The hunter has since been cast variously by historians as heroic provider, gallant sportsman, sensitive intermediary between humans and the natural world, as brutal or penitent butcher and as agent of extinction.⁵² Yet these various perspectives are all agreed that 'the basic underlying structure of the hunt symbolised the triumph of culture over nature, and of the

⁴⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 65.

⁵⁰ H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Harvard 1987), 254.

⁵¹ Mackenzie, *Empire of Nature*, 7.

⁵² H. Ritvo, 'Animal Planet', *Environmental History*, Vol.9, No.2 (April 2004), 207.

colonizer over the colonised'.⁵³ Jim Corbett's India was 'a theatre of the powerless and the powerful, the wild and the tamed, the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised'"⁵⁴ and his hunting reflected British 'dominance without hegemony'⁵⁵ that underpinned their command of the Indian landscape.

The British in India valued the symbolic trappings of superiority greatly, and hunting became one of the foremost 'invented traditions' of colonial rule as an expression of their ordinal theory of hierarchy.⁵⁶ As a spectacular and violent demonstration of the potency of the virile imperialist, hunting served metaphorically as 'a bulwark against revolution' that affirmed the fitness of the structure of colonial domination.⁵⁷ The more dangerous of India's wild fauna, and in particular tigers, offered especially compelling opportunities for the display of sovereign might. Kate Brittlebank has illustrated the strength of the association of the 'royal tiger' with Tipu Sultan that made tigers uniquely suitable vehicles for the metaphoric re-enactment of conquest.⁵⁸ Every right-thinking Englishman wished to possess a tiger skin and the ludicrous efforts to which they would go to acquire one are satirically conveyed in the Saki story 'Mrs Packletide's Tiger'.⁵⁹ Interestingly, Saki (Hector Hugh Munro) was a member of the same family as General Sir Hector Munroe, whose son was famously killed by a tiger in 1792 and may have provided the inspiration for the 'Tipoo's Tiger'; the gruesome mechanical model of a tiger devouring a European, complete with sound effects, that was made to amuse Tipu Sultan.⁶⁰ Hunting expeditions were expressions of political authority, and in their more extravagant forms became pageants of colonial power that consciously emulated the elephant-mounted hunts of the Mughal emperors. Only now it was the Viceroy who hunted on the grand scale, 'affirming his precedence with the gun and the size of his kill.'⁶¹

Just as India's material animals were at the hunter's command, so rhetorical animals, powerless within their own sphere of discourse, offered unusual opportunities for

⁵³ W.K. Storey, 'Big Cats and Imperialism: Lion and Tiger Hunting in Kenya and Northern India, 1898-1930', *Journal of World History*, Vol.2, No.2 (Autumn 1991), 149.

⁵⁴ Storey, 'Big Cats', 173.

⁵⁵ R. Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Harvard 1997).

⁵⁶ B.S. Cohen 'Representing Authority in Victorian India' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983), 165-188.

⁵⁷ Storey, 'Big Cats', 147.

⁵⁸ K. Brittlebank, 'Sakti and Barakat: The Power of Tipu's Tiger', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.29, No.2 (May 1995), 257-269.

⁵⁹ H.H. Munroe, *The Best of Saki* (London 1976), 36-39.

⁶⁰ Mackenzie, *Empire*, 182.

⁶¹ R. Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford 1989), 209.

manipulation when sportsmen recorded their experiences.⁶² Hunting sold well in print, and by 1906, A.I.R. Glasfurd was able to open his own hunting memoirs by noting that 'few subjects of such comparatively circumscribed bounds have elicited more literature than has Indian sport.'⁶³ The hunter's abstract re-enactment on a personal level of the violent, heroic underside of imperialism made an obvious connection between triumphing over a dangerous animal, and subduing unwilling natives. Even humble British citizens were now able to engage vicariously in the romantic and dangerous confrontation and conquest that symbolised the outward thrust of British influence. The reader accompanies Corbett on his adventures, and shares his command of the landscape as he writes that 'armed with a rifle, the jungles were open to me to wander in wherever I chose to go'.⁶⁴ We join our potent protagonist in a 'sportsman's paradise'⁶⁵ of rivers, hills and jungles, which are 'full of fish'⁶⁶, 'teeming with game'⁶⁷ or 'tiger-infested'⁶⁸ and where 'distances were measured by the imaginary flight of a bullet.'⁶⁹ This is a trophy landscape or 'sporting luxuriant',⁷⁰ dominated by the hunting imperialist through a descriptive process which appropriates wilderness as hunting territory by 'conjuring the empire as estate'.⁷¹

As well as providing an abstract expression of British political dominance, Corbett's books also make a concrete statement about the nature of the forces that supported it. The central, lethal fact of hunting served as a constant reminder that 'extraordinary violence was at all times part of the colonial repertoire'.⁷² At the climactic moments of his stories, Corbett is reduced to his gun, ammunition and devastating physicality whilst his prey is disassembled into its component parts. There is no euphemism when Corbett describes how 'my first bullet caught her under the right eye, and my second...took her in the throat'⁷³ or how 'a jet of blood issued from the bullet hole...the bullet had injured her spine and shattered the upper portion of her heart'.⁷⁴ In one memorable episode, having wounded a Himalayan bear, he dispatches the understandably enraged animal with an axe, coolly explaining that 'it had been my ambition

⁶² Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 5.

⁶³ A.I.R. Glasfurd, *Rifle and Romance in the Indian Jungle*, (London 1906), v.

⁶⁴ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 86.

⁶⁵ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 140

⁶⁶ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 8.

⁶⁷ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 24, 100.

⁶⁸ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 153.

⁶⁹ Corbett, *My India*, 28.

⁷⁰ P.K. Nayar, *English Writing and India, 1600-1920: Colonising Aesthetics* (Hyderabad 2008), 132-168.

⁷¹ W. Beinart, 'Empire, Hunting and Ecological Change in Central and Southern Africa', *Past and Present*, No.128 (August 1990), 165.

⁷² R. Drayton, *Nature's Government* (Yale 2000), 225.

⁷³ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 213.

⁷⁴ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 92.

when a boy to be a lumber man in Canada' and that he was therefore sufficiently competent that, 'the moment I got within reach I buried the entire blade in the bear's skull'.⁷⁵

Corbett's hunting narratives also provided an opportunity for the upholding of the myth of unique British competence that was the necessary counterpart to global power. Our first person narrator sets out on the hunt with 'one-in-a-million chance of getting a shot' or a probability of success that is 'about as good as finding a needle in two haystacks'.⁷⁶ He leaves no doubt in the readers mind about the danger of his exploits and that without his expertise, to venture after a dangerous predator 'on foot and alone, would be a very unpleasant way of committing suicide'.⁷⁷ Nevertheless he stoically confronts the terrifying likelihood of 'having a tiger's teeth meet in my throat'⁷⁸ with incredible *sang-froid* and wry understatement that dismisses the growl of a tiger at close range as 'liable to fret one's nerves'.⁷⁹ Corbett has no such expectations of bravery from his native assistants, and more than once at the crucial moment, he is 'not surprised when my companions...turned as one man and bolted'.⁸⁰ Yet as his Indian servants 'go screaming down the hill',⁸¹ the imperial sportsman triumphs, and modestly admits that 'on occasions one is privileged to accomplish the seemingly impossible'.⁸²

Corbett dominates the hunt which he presents in the chronological form of a picaresque novel as a series of obstacles to be overcome by the superior skill, intelligence, courage and force of the sahib, all the while maintaining those quintessentially British qualities of coolness, restraint and humour. In doing so his writing conforms to the ubiquitous model of the colonial hunting narrative which as Harriet Ritvo has demonstrated, shared a 'conventionalised format that emphasised the difficulties and dangers' of hunting in order to magnify the hunter's triumph.⁸³ Corbett was undoubtedly aware of his literary antecedents and betrays this familiarity when he compares his adventures with the celebrated and apparently 'nearly parallel case of the man-eaters of Tsavo'.⁸⁴ His books joined countless other 'true life' adventures that formed the non-fictional counterpart to the incredibly popular

⁷⁵ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 67.

⁷⁶ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 176, 11.

⁷⁷ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 132.

⁷⁸ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 206.

⁷⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 212.

⁸⁰ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 83.

⁸¹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 212.

⁸² Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 7.

⁸³ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 257, 255.

⁸⁴ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 193.

'homosocial imperial adventure tales' of H. Rider Haggard, G.A. Henty and J. Fennimore Cooper.⁸⁵ Indeed the boundaries between fiction and memoir were blurred and straddled by the figure of the imperial sportsman. Haggard's famous character Allan Quatermaine was modelled on the African hunter F.C. Selous and Henty dictated his novels in a room filled with guns, spears, skins and hunting trophies.⁸⁶ Corbett himself describes how 'after reading Fennimore Cooper's thrilling books', he sought to emulate the fictional characters, and 'saw no reason why I should not be able to do the same.'⁸⁷ In fact, the idealised image of the hunter that Fennimore Cooper described as 'comparatively light and slender; showing muscles that promised unusual agility if not unusual strength...sustained by an earnestness of purpose and sincerity of feeling'⁸⁸ bares a striking resemblance to Corbett's representation of himself as physically 'fit as a man could be',⁸⁹ committed to 'the accomplishment of my mission' and deeply concerned if 'the task I had undertaken was beyond my powers of accomplishment'.⁹⁰ Corbett emerges from his text as the embodiment of the imperial hunter, a figure that was a well established trope of colonial competency, and familiar in the mutually reinforcing texts of memoir and fiction. Whilst Foucault's condemnation of such a construction of 'self' as the unfathomable product of an historically and institutionally specific system of meaning production is regarded by many historians today as overly deterministic,⁹¹ it is clear that this 'self' has origins beyond Corbett's empirical experience, and the legend that surrounds him has been constructed from substantially colonial origins.

Hunting required all the most virile attributes of the imperial male and Mrinali Sinha has demonstrated its prominence as one of the prime rituals of 'colonial masculinity'.⁹² By the early twentieth century, framed by the reinvention of the chivalric gentlemanly ideal and ideas of 'muscular Christianity',⁹³ hunting had been enshrined and codified in a distinct sportsman's code that was held in the utmost respect by such self-conscious exemplars of the imperial hunt as Corbett. Enthusiastically adopted by colonial society as an esoteric 'tradition' that fostered the esprit-de-corps and self-confidence that cemented the cohesiveness of the

⁸⁵ M.A. Procida, 'Good sports and Right Sorts: Guns, Gender and Imperialism in British India', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.40, No.4 (October 2001), 456.

⁸⁶ Mackenzie, *Empire of Nature*, 42.

⁸⁷ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 48.

⁸⁸ J. Fennimore Cooper, *The Deerslayer, or the First Warpath* (Philadelphia 1841), 8-9.

⁸⁹ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 163.

⁹⁰ Corbett, *Man-eating Leopard*, 43.

⁹¹ D. Carlson, 'Autobiography' in M. Dobson and B. Zeiman (eds.), *Reading Primary Sources* (London 2008), 178-189.

⁹² M. Sinha, *The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester 1995).

⁹³ Holt, *Sport*, 203-223.

senior official mandarin, 'sportsmanship' became an important signifier of elite colonial status.⁹⁴ Corbett constantly describes his exploits in the idiom of 'sport', describing his fellow hunters as 'brother sportsmen',⁹⁵ even castigating those that he finds in breach of the code,⁹⁶ and in doing so he betrays a pervasive concern with colonial social status. Corbett was a domiciled European, and therefore belonged to the racially amorphous realm of the 'country born' that also included Anglo-Indians. Elizabeth Buettner has shown the suspicion in which this shadowy racial category was held by the 'pure' colonial elite.⁹⁷ Moreover, Verena Martinez-Alier has demonstrated that by the late colonial period, Western racial classifications 'collapsed phenotype and genotype with socio-cultural status'.⁹⁸ Jim Corbett's 'whiteness' consequently depended upon his displaying appropriate cultural, behavioural and class markers deemed characteristic of privileged racial identity that Ann Stoler has described as 'cultural competence'.⁹⁹ By demonstrating impeccable 'sportsmanship' in his books, Corbett was making a cultural claim to elite racial status, and although it wasn't published until after his death, he would have been thrilled when Governor of the United Provinces Malcolm Hailey described him by writing, 'Sport was in his blood.'¹⁰⁰

The sporting code made hunting not only one of the sites on which the hunter tried to construct and affirm his 'superior' self, but also a site for the creation of an inferiorized 'native other'.¹⁰¹ The best 'sport' required the hunter to prove his personal and physical mettle in overcoming a dangerous and powerful animal on terms which would give the quarry the greatest possible role before death and allow hunting to be imagined as 'fair'. For Corbett, true sportsmen 'value their sport in proportion to the risk involved' and 'danger only adds zest'.¹⁰² His narratives lavish space on those encounters that were 'as hazardous as Wilson's solo attempt...to conquer Everest',¹⁰³ or 'when life hung by a thread',¹⁰⁴ thus allowing the sportsman the best opportunity to fulfil his prescribed heroic part. This 'sportsmanship' is then placed in direct contrast with the conduct of Indians. Corbett accuses 'villagers' of the

⁹⁴ Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*, 10.

⁹⁵ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 94, 164.

⁹⁶ Corbett, *My India*, 44.

⁹⁷ E. Buettner, 'Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining Europeans in Late Colonial India', *Women's History Review*, Vol.9, issue 2 (2000), 280-291.

⁹⁸ V. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage Class and Colour in Nineteenth Century Cuba* (Cambridge 1974), xvi.

⁹⁹ A.L. Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial South East Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.34, issue 3 (July 1992), 521.

¹⁰⁰ M. Hailey, 'introduction', vii.

¹⁰¹ M.S.S. Pandian, 'Gendered Negotiations: Hunting and Colonialism in the late 19th Century Nilgiris' in P. Uberoi (ed.), *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State* (Delhi 1996), 239.

¹⁰² Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 131.

¹⁰³ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 64.

¹⁰⁴ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 216.

'inhumane' and 'unsportsmanlike' method of inserting explosives in the flesh of an animal killed by a leopard which then 'blows the leopard's jaws off'.¹⁰⁵ He even describes his 'friend' and hunting mentor Kunwar Singh, 'good shot though he was', as 'not a super sportsman' and instead bestows on him the dubious title of 'the most successful poacher in Kaladhungi'.¹⁰⁶ Though they both confronted India's dangerous wildlife, Sahibs were 'sportsmen' and Indians were 'poachers', and by upholding such a distinction Corbett demonstrates his complicity in the colonial politics of exclusion that were contingent on constructing such categories and that Partha Chatterjee has called the 'rule of colonial difference'.¹⁰⁷

The 'sport' that we find exalted in Corbett's books is distinct from the 'whole hecatombs of slaughter'¹⁰⁸ enjoyed by his nineteenth-century predecessors. High velocity rifles had replaced 'light, inferior and inefficient'¹⁰⁹ smooth-bore, muzzle loading muskets, and where days of trekking had been necessary for the nineteenth-century 'Nimrod' to penetrate the wilderness, the twentieth-century sportsman arrived at the hunting grounds by train. The killing of large and dangerous quarry had become far easier, and was paralleled by a corresponding decline in game populations which made it increasingly difficult for the imperial sportsman 'to secure the unalloyed satisfaction in killing that was so often the mark of the nineteenth century hunter'.¹¹⁰ Contemporaneously, the 'forceful, confrontative model of colonial domination' of the nineteenth century was succeeded by one of administration.¹¹¹ Stewardship and judicious discrimination became more appropriate to the magisterial functions performed by the ruling class of late Raj than the simple exercise of violent force.¹¹² Whilst colonial society stubbornly insisted on attributing the disappearance of game to indigenous poaching,¹¹³ hunting evolved to reflect the more sophisticated and less overtly brutal assignment of late colonial rule and sportsmen like Corbett were forced to turn to methods of accumulation based on connoisseurship rather than the simple arithmetic of 'counting the bag'.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 100-101.

¹⁰⁷ P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton 1993), 17.

¹⁰⁸ S.W. Baker, *The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon* (London 1854), viii,

¹⁰⁹ W. Rice, *Indian Game* (London 1884), 147.

¹¹⁰ Mackenzie, *Empire*, 196.

¹¹¹ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 272.

¹¹² Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 272.

¹¹³ E.I. Steinhart, *Black poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (Oxford 2006), 10-12.

¹¹⁴ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 287.

Where Corbett's predecessors had conducted a 'campaign against nature'¹¹⁵ and blazed indiscriminately into herds of game, he places emphasis on his restraint. Often he substitutes a camera for his gun or was content to sit 'with the most modern rifle across my knees, watching a tigress and her two full-grown cubs...and counted myself no poorer for not having secured a trophy.'¹¹⁶ This ostensible magnanimity has been anachronistically mistaken by Corbett's neo-Whiggish hagiographers as an indication of nascent conservationism. In fact Corbett's restraint and apparent environmental concern were premised in the increasingly refined 'sportsmanship' and paternalist ideology of late colonial rule. Here 'the twin sports of shooting tigers with a camera and shooting them with a rifle'¹¹⁷ coexisted comfortably, and hunting, whether it was with a camera or a rifle, remained the preserve of the colonial elite.¹¹⁸ When Corbett wrote that 'the taking of a photograph gives far more pleasure to a sportsman than the acquisition of a trophy'¹¹⁹ he did so not only because of the 'beneficial effect it has on our rapidly decreasing stock of tigers' but because it allowed the hunter, that most atavistic connection between humans and animals, to manifest his sporting prowess in a way that was appropriate to the new style in which the British dominated both the human and natural worlds. The need to conquer through force had almost disappeared, leaving an urgent new need to husband and manage, to protect and exploit.¹²⁰ Susan Sontag has shown that where taking photographs consists of 'loading', 'aiming' and 'shooting' the camera becomes a 'sublimation of the gun',¹²¹ and for Corbett, 'the gift by a very generous friend of mine of a Bell and Howell 16mm camera put just the weapon I needed into my hands.'¹²²

¹¹⁵ Mackenzie, *Empires of Nature*, 4.

¹¹⁶ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 160.

¹¹⁷ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 216.

¹¹⁸ J.R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire* (London 1997), 137.

¹¹⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 29.

¹²⁰ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 288.

¹²¹ S. Sontag, *On Photography* (London 1979), 14-15.

¹²² Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 217.

Chapter Two:

Corbett and Colonial Governance



Figure 3. 'Corbett in Dhikala'.¹²³

In many ways a man-eating tiger or leopard with its attendant notoriety, added element of danger and the irreproachable righteousness of its destruction represented the ideal sporting adversary. Any perusal of the voluminous hunting narratives of the Raj would suggest that the slaying of a man-eater was almost a 'rite of passage' for the imperial sportsman to report and glory in,¹²⁴ and in this Corbett enjoyed unparalleled success both as a hunter and as an author. He framed his encounters with man-eaters in the familiar form of the sporting memoir, where the 'game of man-eater hunting'¹²⁵ fitted easily among his various hunting anecdotes. However, the elimination of man-eaters stands out as a great anomaly, for here the elaborate, masculinist codes of sportsmanship often did not apply.¹²⁶ The paramountcy in

¹²³ Kala, *Jim Corbett*, 86.

¹²⁴ A.S. Pandian, 'Predatory Care: The Imperial Hunt in Mughal and British India', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol.14, No.1 (March 2001), 84.

¹²⁵ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 18.

¹²⁶ Hussain, 'Forms of Predation', 1225.

which Corbett held the sportsman's code is beyond doubt, yet there is a tension that runs throughout his writing in his approach to man-eaters who, on the one hand represented 'a very worthy antagonist' and on the other, 'a job that badly needed doing'.¹²⁷ Ultimately, man-eaters had to be eliminated at all costs, even if that meant resorting to unsportsmanlike tactics. Corbett is filled with 'regret that the finish had not been satisfactory' when he kills the 'Mohan man-eater' as it was 'lying five feet from me, in his sleep'.¹²⁸ He writes concernedly that the reader 'might not think it was cricket' that 'I did not awaken the sleeping animal and give him a sporting chance' but, he also makes it clear that the tiger 'was better dead than alive'.¹²⁹ A man-eater was 'to be fired at under any circumstances'¹³⁰ and in the course of his numerous encounters with man-eating leopards and tigers, Corbett uses various methods ranging from the irreproachable and highly dangerous 'sport of man-eater hunting on foot',¹³¹ to the mildly controversial and 'much debated subject of sitting up over kills'¹³² and even to the use of traps and poison which were anathema to sportsmanship. Though Corbett 'hated the very thought of poisoning',¹³³ he is unambiguous when he writes that 'the killing would have to be done no matter how unpleasant the method might be.'¹³⁴ This is the same reluctant sense of obligation that George Orwell famously expressed in *Shooting an Elephant*¹³⁵ and by suspending his usually strict adherence to the hunting code, Corbett concedes to a higher priority that locates his shooting of man-eaters within the sphere of governance rather than sport.

The British confronted fierce and unpredictable nature as it threatened to interfere in their day-to-day governance practices in Indian society. This was consistent with a broader colonial imperative to create order as a necessary precondition to revenue collection. In India in the early twentieth century, man-eating tigers caused roughly 1200 deaths annually,¹³⁶ and beyond the direct impact of their depredations, the 'shadow of a man-eater'¹³⁷ was a major threat to the agrarian revenue base. One hunter observed that a single man-eater 'may so terrorize a district that miles of arable land are wasted because the peasants dare not

¹²⁷ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 63.

¹²⁸ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 136.

¹²⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 136-7.

¹³⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 137.

¹³¹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 46.

¹³² Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 160.

¹³³ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 76.

¹³⁴ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 113.

¹³⁵ G. Orwell, *Shooting and Elephant and Other Essays* (London 1950), 2-10.

¹³⁶ P. Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World* (Yale 2001), 77.

¹³⁷ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 13.

plough'¹³⁸ and another remarked how man-eaters 'rendered working in the forests dreaded by the natives, and consequently costly for the Government'.¹³⁹ Moreover, the figure of a man-eater, commanding space through the force of terror was a powerful symbolic challenge to colonial authority.¹⁴⁰ Undoubtedly this threat was taken very seriously by the British. Corbett describes how 'the Government did everything in its power to remove the menace'¹⁴¹ and how 'at the District Conference...the man-eating tigers operating at that time were classed in order of importance'.¹⁴² He even reports that 'questions were asked in the House of Commons' about the 'Panar leopard' which was credited with claiming over 400 human victims.¹⁴³

The Raj attempted to extirpate the man-eater problem by offering generous rewards for the skins of leopards and tigers, and it has been estimated that between 1875 and 1925 around 80,000 tigers were killed by bounty hunters.¹⁴⁴ Ironically however, by encouraging the expansion of agriculture into uncultivated landscapes in order to improve revenue, the Raj intensified contact between humans and dangerous predators, and the man-eater 'scourge' was actually magnified.¹⁴⁵ The colonial state did not possess any suitably refined formal administrative machinery that it could put into place to effectively eliminate specific man-eaters, scattered across India's vast landscape. Here the Raj relied instead on personal appeals to sportsmen. Thus Corbett represented the informal point of intersection between sport and colonial governance that is particularly well illustrated by his 'campaign' against the 'Thak Man-eater'.¹⁴⁶ Though he was 'not an officer of any kind',¹⁴⁷ Corbett is informed of the depredations of this tiger by 'a report that reached me through Donald Stewart of the Forest Department'.¹⁴⁸ The tiger was known to frequent an area of forest that was intended for felling by the Forest Department and 'it was feared that if the man-eater was not accounted for' it would 'terrorize the labour force' and impede the Government's extraction of timber.¹⁴⁹ Although he claimed that 'it was more in the interests of the local inhabitants than in the

¹³⁸ T.H. Hendley, 'Sport in Indian Art', *Journal of Indian Art and History*, 17, (1916), 65.

¹³⁹ J. Forsyth, *The Highlands of Central India* (London 1871), 267.

¹⁴⁰ Pandian, 'Predatory care', 85.

¹⁴¹ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 19.

¹⁴² Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 126-7.

¹⁴³ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 64.

¹⁴⁴ Hussain, 'Forms of Predation', 1222.

¹⁴⁵ K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forest: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (Stanford 1999), 90-92.

¹⁴⁶ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 168-217.

¹⁴⁷ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 115.

¹⁴⁸ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 168.

¹⁴⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 192-3.

interests of the contractors that I gave my promise',¹⁵⁰ it was only when the labourers were 'too frightened to go to work'¹⁵¹ that Corbett set out to hunt the tiger. Thus Corbett's individual pursuit of this errant predator constituted an informal but necessary counterpart to the colonial state's policy of 'scientific forestry' which Rangarajan has shown was a crucial element in the territorialisation of state power.¹⁵²

However, the British claim to sovereignty and effective governance depended on their successful representation of the protection of their colonial interest, as the protection of Indian society itself.¹⁵³ Time and again Corbett's narratives imply the vulnerability and utter incapacity of native villagers in the face of a man-eater, which is only resolved by the heroic, masculine intervention of the white hunter. He describes how 'fear of the man-eater had sunk deep into the countryside'¹⁵⁴ where Indians were 'the most helpless of all animals'.¹⁵⁵ He is repeatedly approached by 'villagers' who 'begged me not to leave them to the tender mercies of the man-eater'.¹⁵⁶ Corbett responds with patriarchal resolve, in contrast with the vulnerable Indian villagers who are clearly depicted as childlike dependants when he condescends that 'hillmen, like some boys are very good at whistling through their teeth...all of them were expert tree climbers'.¹⁵⁷ Similarly Indians provide the narrative with amusing anecdotes of their incompetence and Corbett laughingly recalls a woman who 'complained that her son had had great difficulty in eating the linseed poultice that had been given to her the previous evening to apply to a boil'.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile the man-eater becomes a 'cruel and malignant presence',¹⁵⁹ terrorizing the hapless rural populace. Corbett explains that 'there is no more terrible thing than to live with one's being under the shadow of a man eater'¹⁶⁰ with its 'unbelievable fury' and a 'dreadful, blood-curdling [roar]...than which there is no more terrifying sound in our jungles'.¹⁶¹ Here Corbett recuperates the motif of the oriental despot, and the 'royal tiger' becomes a terrible and arbitrary monarch, reigning over the area's servile inhabitants through fear. As the hunter, Corbett confronts this tyranny with liberating sovereign might, securing the natives' bodies and hearts through the spectacle of responsible

¹⁵⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 164.

¹⁵¹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 199.

¹⁵² Rangarajan, *Fencing*, 150-197.

¹⁵³ Hussain, 'Forms of Predation', 1214.

¹⁵⁴ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 21.

¹⁵⁵ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 83.

¹⁵⁶ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 76,154.

¹⁵⁷ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 155.

¹⁵⁸ Corbett, *My India*, 87.

¹⁵⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, vii.

¹⁶⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 13.

¹⁶¹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 102.

force. The late Raj was thus able to parasitize both the threat of despotic terror and protective sovereign force as buttresses to its own moral authority through the destruction of man-eaters.¹⁶²

The hunting of man-eaters belonged to colonial strategy of 'pastoral' care that symbolised a British welfare oriented governance ideology, crucial for the legitimization of the Raj.¹⁶³ Corbett's books helped to develop myths and legends of startling proportions that surrounded man-eaters, who consequently approached equivalent status to the werewolf of European lore.¹⁶⁴ In actual fact however, the lore of man-eaters was allowed to assume a disproportionate level of importance. Paul Greenhough has shown how other creatures such as snakes were actually responsible for far more deaths in India,¹⁶⁵ yet we do not see any corresponding tradition of the British hunting snakes other than Corbett's peculiar superstition that 'when after man-eaters I have a deep rooted conviction that...all my efforts will be unavailing until I have first killed a snake.'¹⁶⁶ Only man-eaters wielded sufficiently potent dread and symbolism, cultivated by the hunters themselves, for the spectacular valorisation of protective British rule. Diana Taylor has argued that such public spectacles of terror aimed to produce identity with the state by constituting subjects as passive and feminized spectators,¹⁶⁷ and Anand Pandian has characterised this technique as 'predatory care'.¹⁶⁸

From the governance point of view, a successful hunt was about controlling wild animals and wild people. The labour patterns of Corbett's hunting expeditions resembled those of the colony in general. He was invariably accompanied by a number of servants, namelessly referred to as 'my men' or 'my coolies', and not considered to provide any companionship to the hunter who considers himself 'alone' and with 'no-one I could ask for advice.'¹⁶⁹ Moreover, Corbett regularly summons local villagers to act as beaters to drive his quarry towards him, on one occasion collecting two thousand men for this purpose.¹⁷⁰ However, man-eaters were not the only rebellious agents in the Himalayan foothills. Corbett's hunting adventures coincided with widespread nationalist disturbance, Ghandi's noncooperation

¹⁶² Pandian, 'Predatory Care', 83

¹⁶³ Hussain, 'Forms of Predation', 1237

¹⁶⁴ Mackenzie, *Empire*, 180.

¹⁶⁵ P. Greenhough, 'Naturae Ferae' in J.C. Scott and N. Bhatt (eds.), *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge* (Yale 2001), 141.

¹⁶⁶ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 145.

¹⁶⁷ D. Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'* (Durham 1997), 125.

¹⁶⁸ Pandian, 'Predatory Care'.

¹⁶⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 32.

movement and the advent of a local peasant campaign to reassert customary rights over forests that the Indian Government had appropriated. Escalating restrictions on Kumaoni villagers' access to fuel wood, fodder and other resources through the extension of scientific forestry met with fierce local resistance in the form of labour strikes and incendiarism.¹⁷¹ In 1921, peasants burned down more than half of the 400,000 acres of forest reserve in Kumaon.¹⁷² Incredibly however, though it was in these very forests and at this time that Corbett did the majority of his hunting, the only hint he gives of registering this disturbance is a single, euphemistic reference to 'unsettled conditions' which had 'necessitated the dispatch of a small police force'.¹⁷³ Instead he continually evokes the 'honesty of the hill folk'¹⁷⁴ who were 'simple and hardy' and 'big-hearted sons of the soil'.¹⁷⁵ In the India of Corbett's books, 'the interest of one was the interest of all' and 'in no other part of the world...are servants as tolerant of the vagaries of their masters'.¹⁷⁶ This stubborn adherence to colonial stereotype betrays a vainglorious attempt to maintain the appearance of British authority at a time when the locus of power was actually moving towards the Indian National Congress.

The utility of men like Corbett in the colonial project was well understood and enshrined in that archetypal imperialist handbook, *Scouting for Boys*. Baden-Powell lauded those men 'who in peace time carry out work that requires the same type of abilities as war':¹⁷⁷

'real men in every sense of the word and thoroughly up in scout craft, i.e. they understand living out in the jungles...are able to read meaning from the smallest signs and tracks...are strong and plucky and ready to face danger...accustomed to take their lives in their hands and, to fling them down without hesitation if they can help their country by doing so.'¹⁷⁸

It is not surprising therefore that Corbett should be called upon to apply his skills to unambiguously imperial tasks. In the 1920s Corbett was recruited into the Special Dacoity Police Force specifically because the tracking and stalking skills, that he had honed in the pursuit of dangerous animals, were viewed as directly applicable to the hunt for fugitive

¹⁷¹ Pandian, 'Predatory Care', 87.

¹⁷² Storey, 'Big Cats', 168.

¹⁷³ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 114-115.

¹⁷⁴ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 33.

¹⁷⁵ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 164.

¹⁷⁶ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 34.

¹⁷⁷ R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (Oxford 1908), 5.

¹⁷⁸ Baden-Powell, *Scouting*, 5.

criminals.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, his talents were enlisted in 1941 for 'training boys for jungle warfare'¹⁸⁰ against the Japanese. Corbett's skills were readily adaptable to human prey and just as with animals he found that 'it is possible to glean a lot of useful information from the footprints of human beings in the jungle'.¹⁸¹ Corbett emerges from his texts not as the representative of the formal colonial apparatus, but as the embodiment of capable British sovereignty.

¹⁷⁹ Corbett, *My India*, 98-141.

¹⁸⁰ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 150.

¹⁸¹ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 150-1.

Chapter Three:

Corbett and The Law of the Jungle

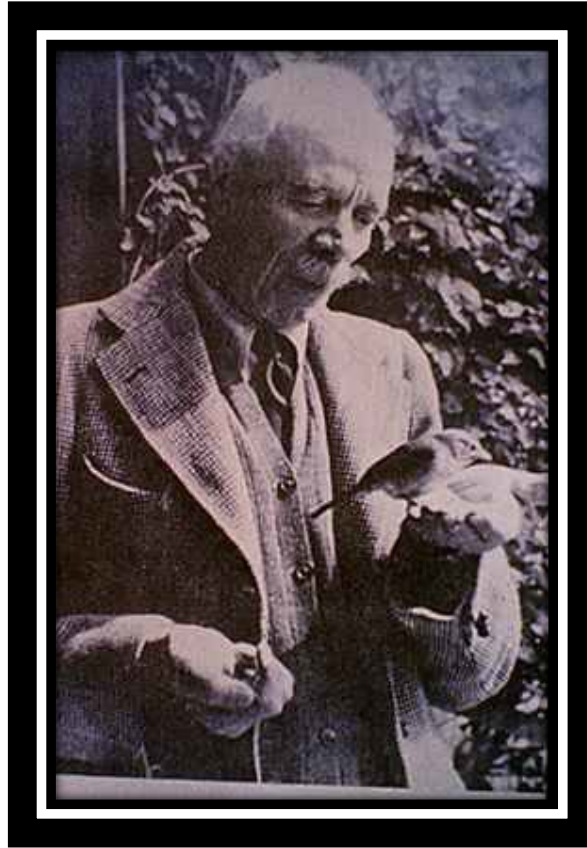


Figure 4. 'Corbett in Nyeri'.¹⁸²

As late as the 1980s it was considered 'unusual and eccentric to take animals seriously as historical subjects'.¹⁸³ Today however, this prejudice has been largely eroded as it has become increasingly clear that interactions between people and animals represent valuable historical currency as expressions of contemporary human concerns.¹⁸⁴ In what has been called 'the animal turn'¹⁸⁵ scholars have lavished their attentions on nonhuman creatures, and the once insurmountable barrier between 'people' and 'wildlife' has become more permeable. One noteworthy historical phenomenon that has emerged is the 'othering' of human groups

¹⁸² Kala, *Jim Corbett*, 86.

¹⁸³ Ritvo(ed.), *Noble Cows and Zebras: Essays on Animals and History* (London 2010), 1.

¹⁸⁴ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ Ritvo, *Noble Cows*, 1.

through their association with certain animals in order to pave the way for their mistreatment, however, in the case of dangerous predators this process was just as effectively reversed.¹⁸⁶ In colonial discourse, 'recalcitrant wild animals' such as man-eating tigers and leopards were readily equated with 'disobedient human beings' such as 'thugs' and dacoits.¹⁸⁷ They were rebels who refused to accept the divinely ordained hierarchy of the animal kingdom of which the British considered themselves the apex. Their carnivorous way of life disposed them to challenge rather than to serve or flee authority, and their eating of human flesh symbolised the ultimate rebellion and the radical reversal of roles between master and servant.¹⁸⁸ Man-Eaters were dangerous and depraved deviants and their anthropomorphic comparison with criminals was a compelling one for colonial society, made even easier by the prevalence of crude social Darwinism. Nor was this comparison merely rhetorical. Corbett makes no antithetical distinction between the people and creatures of Kumaon, both of whom he generally refers to under the ambiguous denomination of 'the jungle folk'.¹⁸⁹ He is unmistakable however in his accusation that man-eaters were guilty of a 'crime', 'not against the laws of nature, but against the laws of man'¹⁹⁰ and, in accordance with the law's unswerving application to human beings, 'the criminal had [to be] executed'.¹⁹¹ Thus Corbett clearly locates his killing of man-eaters within the realm of colonial discipline where rebels, human or animal, were shown little or no tolerance by their colonial masters who sought their destruction in any manner that was effective.¹⁹²

Corbett's account of the part that he played in the campaign to capture the 'criminal tribesman' Sultana is seamlessly interwoven with his more conventional hunting adventures. The reader joins Corbett in the familiar process by which he 'tracks'¹⁹³ and 'stalked'¹⁹⁴ his quarry, and the substitution of a 'famous dacoit'¹⁹⁵ for an unruly tiger is a perfectly straightforward one. Not only does Corbett hunt disobedient human subjects by precisely the same method as he does unruly animals, but he encounters them in the very same forests. Rebellious animals and humans shared the 'wild jungles' and 'recalcitrant spaces' at the

¹⁸⁶ P. Coates, 'Unusually Cunning, Vicious and Treacherous': The Extermination of the Wolf in United States History', in M. Levene and P. Roberts (eds.), *The Massacre in History* (Oxford 1999), 167.

¹⁸⁷ Rangarajan, *Fencing*, 145.

¹⁸⁸ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 34, 46, 86.

¹⁹⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 158.

¹⁹¹ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 160.

¹⁹² M. Rangarajan, 'The Raj and the Natural World: the War Against Dangerous Beasts in Colonial India', in J. Knight (ed.) *Wildlife in Asia: Cultural Perspectives* (New York 2004), 207-232.

¹⁹³ Corbett, *My India*, 125.

¹⁹⁴ Corbett, *My India*, 123.

¹⁹⁵ Corbett, *My India*, 100.

fringes of cultivation which Nitin Sinha has shown were a perpetual source of unease to the Raj.¹⁹⁶ The impenetrability of the wilderness was a recurrent trope in colonial discourse on crime for explaining the limitations of state power. Most conspicuously, it figured in discussions about that 'hideous religion of murder',¹⁹⁷ 'thuggee'. While Corbett's man-eaters prowled in 'thick' or 'dense forests',¹⁹⁸ William Sleeman's 'thugs' lurked in 'wild jungles, difficult of access'.¹⁹⁹ In fact the comparison between 'thugs' and man-eaters was particularly striking as both of these predatory felons were stealthy, peripatetic operatives who committed their crimes far from home, disposed of their victims bodies quickly and fuelled a pervasive colonial anxiety about 'a nexus between mobility and crime'.²⁰⁰

Corbett's man-eaters were as disturbing to contemplate as his reflections on domesticated animals were gratifying. Indeed, he finds subservient animals compliancy so praiseworthy that they are elevated to a position in contrast with their wild counterparts that reflected the dichotomy between 'civilised' and 'savage' people that was so prevalent in colonial discourse.²⁰¹ An entire chapter of Corbett's first book is devoted to his dog Robin, 'the biggest hearted and the most faithful friend man ever had',²⁰² a higher accolade than he ever extends to any of his human servants. Corbett is similarly full of praise for those luckless animals that he uses as bait in his pursuit of man-eaters. They become 'brave buffaloes'²⁰³ and for the goat that was used to successfully lure the particularly problematic 'man-eating leopard of Rudraprayag' to Corbett's waiting rifle, 'his night's adventure was to make him a hero for the rest of his life'.²⁰⁴ By abandoning their wild, un-regenerative state and fulfilling roles that were amenable to the demands of the most enthusiastically exploitative culture of the era, certain animal species satisfied the colonial impulse for homogenised, duplicable and supplicant subjects. Whether they were submissive or rebellious, the animals of Corbett's stories serve as suitable conduits for the more salient concerns of colonial society, among which, anxieties about the exercise and maintenance of British authority were preeminent.

¹⁹⁶ N. Sinha, 'Mobility Control and Criminality in Early Colonial India, 1760s-1850s', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.45, No.1 (January 2008), 28.

¹⁹⁷ W.T.F Horwood, 'Foreword' in J.L.Sleeman, *Thug: Or a Million Murders* (London 1918), 7.

¹⁹⁸ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 158, 198.

¹⁹⁹ Sleeman, *Thug*, 150-1.

²⁰⁰ Sinha, 'Mobility', 29.

²⁰¹ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 6.

²⁰² Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 40.

²⁰³ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 71.

²⁰⁴ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 159.

Few thinkers have been more influential in historians' approaches to colonial authority than Michel Foucault. This study has already validated his conception of polymorphous power relations extending far beyond the limits of the formal state apparatus.²⁰⁵ However, not all of his theories of 'discipline' have proved as neatly appropriate in the colonial setting. Foucault posits a process by which the modernising state turned from traditional, public, violent and exemplary forms of power which targeted the 'body', towards a more subtle, calculated technology of subjection of the 'soul' in an effort to increase 'the docility and the utility of all the elements in the system.'²⁰⁶ Described through the paradigm of the Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon',²⁰⁷ hierarchical observation, normative judgement and an economy of discipline were the hallmarks of 'the age of sobriety in punishment' that was based on knowledge.²⁰⁸ Yet this model has proved problematic in its applicability to the colonial context. Not only is there a danger of re-inscribing the West as the subject through the transferral of an essentially European theory, but it is also clear that there persisted in Corbett's India, 'fossils from an earlier Europe of costly violent display'.²⁰⁹

In Corbett's books the disciplinary project that Foucault discerned in France followed a different course. Certainly there are elements of 'panopticism' evident in his command of Indian wildlife which rests on 'a knowledge of the language, and the habits of the jungle folk' which, 'apart from adding hundredfold to one's pleasure in the jungle, can, if so desired, be put to great use.'²¹⁰ This knowledge was 'not a science that can be learned from textbooks'²¹¹ but a framework of reference that could only be acquired by 'close observation and experience'.²¹² Thus armed, Corbett was able to make normalizing judgements on the behaviour of 'jungle folk' and 'divided the principle birds and animals into groups according to the functions they performed'.²¹³ He explains how 'tigers...are on the whole very good tempered'²¹⁴ and thereby constitutes man-eaters as deviants whose behaviour transgressed certain 'universal criteria'²¹⁵ of an otherwise docile environment. Isolated through their

²⁰⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 159.

²⁰⁶ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York 1979), 195.

²⁰⁷ M. Kaplan, 'Panopticon in Poona: an essay of Foucault and Colonialism', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.10, issue 1 (February 1995), 94.

²⁰⁸ Foucault, *Discipline*, 14.

²⁰⁹ Kaplan, 'Panopticon', 93.

²¹⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eating Leopard*, 123-4.

²¹¹ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 31.

²¹² Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 147.

²¹³ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 51.

²¹⁴ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 153.

²¹⁵ R. Singha, 'Providential' circumstances': The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.27, No.1 (1993), 88.

violation of these normative points of reference specific animals could be suitably punished in the most efficient way, consistent with a Foucauldian 'economy of discipline'.²¹⁶

However, Corbett's domination of Indian wildlife also incorporates various 'pre-modern' disciplinary techniques that were engendered by the colonial context of 'inclusionary impulses and exclusionary practices'.²¹⁷ In keeping with the discriminatory colonial urge to draw clear distinctions between 'predatory' and 'peaceable' sections of the population,²¹⁸ Corbett attempts to describe man-eaters within a definitive typology. He opens his first book with the categorical declaration that 'A man-eating tiger is a tiger that has been compelled through stress of circumstances beyond its control to adopt a diet alien to it. The stress of circumstances is, in nine out of ten cases, wounds, and in the tenth case old age.'²¹⁹ In order to ensure that this categorisation is effective he adds that 'personally I would give a tiger the benefit of the doubt once and, once again, before classifying it as a man-eater.'²²⁰ Corbett thus confines man-eaters within a crude taxonomy that reflects the powerful colonial imperative to confine criminals within totalizing epistemologies that was notoriously embodied in the contemporary adoption of the Criminal Tribes Act. Corbett's writing betrays the same anxiety to constitute criminality in communitarian terms that the Raj exemplified in its artificial creation and denunciation of such 'criminal tribes' as the 'Bhantus' to whom Sultana apparently belonged. Just as Corbett endorses the 'inherent' Bantu 'preference for violent crime',²²¹ the man-eaters of his books are re-imagined as irreclaimable, professional criminals, even incorporating a suspicion of hereditary criminality as on one occasion Corbett resolutely punishes a man-eater's cubs 'for the sins of their mother.'²²²

The immutability of man-eaters' criminality like that of their human counterparts placed them 'beyond the pale' of the ostensible universalism of colonial disciplinary rhetoric. The irreclaimability of such 'predatory' denominations as 'man-eater' and 'thug' meant that they could not be effectively socialised into nor prosecuted through conventional structures of discipline that were premised on the punishability of the 'soul'.²²³ Their inexorable transgressions could only be resolved by establishing in practice 'a rule of colonial

²¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline*, 24.

²¹⁷ Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts', 514.

²¹⁸ Singha, 'Providential' Circumstances', 104.

²¹⁹ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, x.

²²⁰ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, xi.

²²¹ Corbett, *My India*, 100.

²²² Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 143.

²²³ Foucault, *Discipline*, 24.

difference²²⁴ that relied on the 'pre-modern' punishment of the subject's 'body' in order to implement governance that historians have identified elsewhere as 'colonial corporeality'.²²⁵ Just as the successful prosecution of the elusive 'thuggee' phenomenon necessitated the suspension of existing judicial order to ensure the unobstructed implementation of capital punishment,²²⁶ Corbett was obliged to suspend his adherence to what he called the 'unwritten law'²²⁷ of sportsmanship with its codified economy of violence in order to effectively eliminate man-eaters. In both cases, the tension between 'law' and the requirement of the colonial state is only resolved through a Schmittian state of exception; a form of sovereign power precisely defined by the ability to decide whether or not 'the law' applied in specific cases.²²⁸

Corbett despised what he called the 'red tape brigade'²²⁹ of strict adherents to the intricacies of the formal colonial administrative and legal apparatus. He considered their pedantry to have played 'an important part...in the fall of the British Raj'²³⁰ and holds their conduct in contrast to his own *de facto* implementation of corporeal colonial authority against man-eaters. However, it was still in the language of legality that Corbett found coherence, stability and a sense of authority for his command of the Indian landscape. Where the persistence of exceptional, violent disciplinary methods for colonial rule's human subjects threatened its legitimacy by jeopardising rhetoric on the consistency of the 'rule of law', in Corbett's untamed domain of forests and man-eaters, colonial despotism was successfully explained and translated into an idealised and divinely ordained 'law of the jungle': a forceful mode of governance that was 'older and infinitely better than man-made laws.'²³¹

²²⁴ Chatterjee, 'Colonial State', 22.

²²⁵ A. Rao and S. Pierce, 'Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality and Colonial Rule', in D. Arnold and D. Hardiman, *Subaltern Studies VIII* (Oxford 1994), 164.

²²⁶ P. Roy, 'Discovering India, Imagining Thuggee', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol.1, No.1 (Spring 1996), 133.

²²⁷ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 94.

²²⁸ T. Lloyd, 'Thuggee, Marginality and the State Effect in Colonial India circa 1770-1840', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.45, No.2 (June 2008), 220.

²²⁹ Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 43.

²³⁰ Corbett, *My India*, 65.

²³¹ Corbett, *Jungle Lore*, 158.

Conclusion

The study of the exercise of power and the establishment and maintenance of authority lie at the very heart of the historiography of empire.²³² Here it has gradually become clear that colonialism, far from being a crushingly over-determined and concentrated historical force, was far more complicated, diffuse and pervasive than any formal set of laws or state apparatus.²³³ The 'imperial monolith'²³⁴ has been increasingly fragmented by historians who have uncovered a de-centralised, diverse, even chaotic landscape of power relations.²³⁵ Colonial rule has consequently been re-imagined as a polymorphous, omnipresent and 'hazardous play of dominations'²³⁶ within which Corbett was necessarily and inextricably immersed. The continued vitality of the Jim Corbett legend in postcolonial India is therefore indicative of a general failure to acknowledge the inherent, deep and intricate connections between the exploits he describes in his books, and the context of late colonial rule in which they took place. Historians have long been aware that 'heroic status has very little to do with historical reality'²³⁷ and the myth that surrounds Corbett, with its canonical foundation in his own autobiographical writing, owes much of its continued vitality to a general failure to read his works critically which this dissertation has addressed.

Corbett's memorialisation as a friend to the vulnerable people and wildlife of Kumaon overlooks the paternalist ideology of colonialism that underpinned his behaviour. Moreover it neglects his position at the informal point of intersection between colonial governance and hunting which transforms his shooting of man-eaters from sporting adventure, into the forceful protection of colonial interest. Corbett undoubtedly did kill numerous man-eating leopards and tigers whose depredations on the people of Kumaon were very real, but it would be naive to assume that philanthropic benevolence was his sole motivation. The competent colonist's destruction of a predatory threat to Indian society prevented unruly nature from interfering in the quotidian practices of colonial governance whilst also legitimising the righteousness of the structure of colonial domination. The natural world was made subject to

²³² D.M. Anderson and D. Killingray, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940*, 1.

²³³ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 159.

²³⁴ Mackenzie, *Empires*, 21.

²³⁵ J.L. Comaroff, 'Colonialism, Culture and the Law: A Foreword', *Law and Social Inquiry*, Vo.26, Issue 2 (July 2006), 311.

²³⁶ Weeks, 'Foucault for Historians', 109.

²³⁷ J. Larner, 'North American Hero? Christopher Columbus 1702-2002', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol137, No1 (March 1993), 62.

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the same disciplinary structures as Indian society, and Corbett's late colonial India was thus 'a world of stark realities and the rule of tooth and claw'.²³⁸

Words: 10,741.

²³⁸ Corbett, *Man-Eaters*, 13.

Appendix

COPY OF PETITION

SENT TO THE AUTHOR BY THE PEOPLE OF GARHWAL

The promise mentioned on page 112, was made after receiving
this petition

From The Public of patty Painaun, Bungi and Bickla Badalpur
District Garhwal

To Captain J. E. Carbitt, Esq., I.A.R.O., Kaladhungi
Distt. Naini Tal

Respected Sir

We all the public (of the above 3 Patties) most humbly and respectfully beg to lay the following few lines for your kind consideration and doing needful.

That in this vicinity a tiger has turned out man-eater since December last. Up to this date he has killed 5 men and wounded 2. So we the public are in a great distress. By the fear of this tiger we cannot watch our wheat crop at night so the deers have nearly ruined it. We cannot go in the forest for fodder grass nor we can enter our cattles in the forest to graze so many of our cattle are to die. Under the circumstances we are nearly to be ruined. The Forest Officials are doing every possible arrangement to kill this tiger but there is no hope of any success. 2 shikari gentlemen also tried to shoot it but unfortunately they could not get it. Our kind District Magistrate has notified Rs. 150 reward for killing this tiger, so every one is trying to kill it but no success. We have heard that your kind self have killed many man-eater tigers and leopards. For this you have earned a good name specially in Kumaon revenue Division. The famous man-eater leopard of Nagpur has been shoot by you. This is the voice of all the public here that this tiger also will be killed only by you. So we the public venture to request that you very kindly take trouble to come to this place and shoot this tiger (our enemy) and save the public from this calamity. For this act of kindness we the public will be highly obliged and will pray for your long life and prosperity. Hope you will surely consider on our condition and take trouble to come here for saving us from this calamity. The route to this place is as follows Ramnagar to Sultan, Sultan to Lahachaur, Lahachaur to Kanda. If your honour kindly inform us the date of your arrival at Ramnagar we will send our men and cart to Ramnagar to meet you and accompany you.

We beg to remain

Sir

Your most sincerely

Signed Govind Singh Negi

Headman Village Jharat

Dated Jharat
The 18th February 1933

*followed by 40 signatures and 4 thumb impressions of
inhabitants of Painaun, Bungi and Bickla Badalpur Patties.*

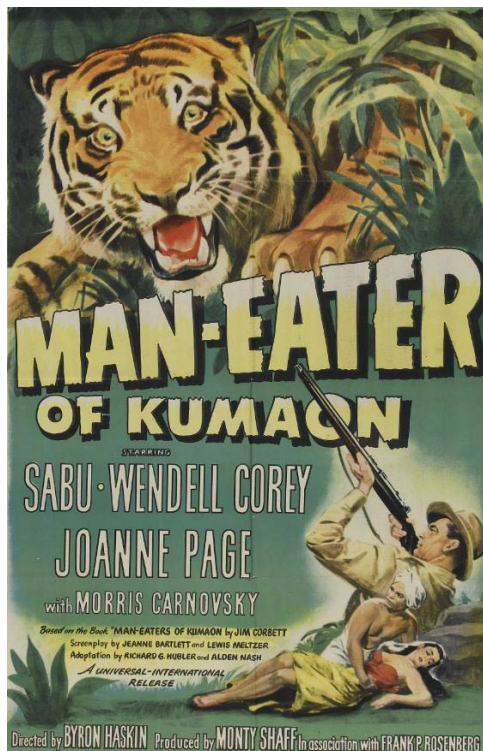
Address

The Govind Singh Negi
Village Jharat Patty
Painaun, P.O.
Badialgaon Dist., Garhwal, U.P.

-
1. Copy of a petition sent to Corbett by 'the People of Garhwal', reprinted in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, 154.



2. Corbett in uniform as an with the honorary rank of lieutenant-colonel during the Second World War.



3. A promotional poster for the 1948 film *Man-eater of Kumaon*, loosely based on Corbett's books.



4. A tourist poses beside the monument that marks the spot where Corbett killed the notorious 'Man-Eating leopard of Rudraprayag'.



5. 'Tipoo's Tiger': the remarkable mechanical model of a tiger devouring a European that was made to amuse Tipu Sultan and is believed to have been inspired by the death of General Sir Hector Munroe's son in 1792. Now on display in London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

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