



# JUNGLE LORE: A STUDY OF ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

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## ABSTRACT

*Jim Corbett was an eminent writer of jungle stories, belongs to Nature writing, mainly shikar literature. In his earlier age he was famous hunter, but gradually in the company of nature, he changed into preserver and lover of jungle life. Even he had developed his own philosophy of life in jungles. Present study focuses on analyzing his accounts on jungle life. It will be helpful to increase human's interest in conservation of environment and its equilibrium. For this purpose, Corbett's well-known literary work Jungle Lore is selected to study in point view of Eco-criticism. The selected work is referred as his autobiography. The undertaken study will be helpful in understanding the author's ecological sensibility in the present time of environmental crisis.*

**Keywords:** Ecology, Naturalist, flora, fauna, foothills of Himalayas, jungle ecosystem, topography, tribal's, etc.

## INTRODUCTION

The present age is the age of environmental crisis. The whole world is facing number of issues related to environment. The ecological imbalance has become a serious concern all over the world. Considering the present situation, it is necessary to review the literature from the ecological point of view. There is an urgent need to explore the ways in which contemporary literature depicts the problem of eco-crisis. Such type of study has great significance, as it is trying to increase the interest in environment and literary studies as a

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distinct discipline of eco-criticism in the recent times. Analysis of literature with the help of ecological principals is one of the acceptable methods of literary study.

Jim Corbett is a very successful writer and his works are very popular in and outside India. His writings are based on the facts of jungle but his sensibility is highly subjective and emotive. His writings come up to the merit of creative literature and also some of his books are regarded as the world classics. He has been accepted as a model for literature on jungle. Jim Corbett is one of such English writers who domiciled in India on the foothills of Himalaya. He had given accounts of wild and tribal life on jungles and its environment. He wrote with close observation and had deep love for India and jungles. On the close reading of Corbett's works, certain development can be traced in his approach to jungle, tribal and wild life in India. Jim Corbett is a lover, a hunter and an advocate of preservation of jungles and wild life. He is not only a lover of jungle life or a hunter but he has developed his own philosophy of life in jungles. So it is proposed to analyze his jungle accounts in the present study. His purpose is not only to entertain his readers but to create awareness regarding ecological balance and preservation of the jungles. His works have a great educational value and persuasive power. And they impart wisdom and persuade readers to play an important role in preserving Nature.

#### **Brief Interpretation of *Jungle Lore*:**

*Jungle Lore* is a literary work based on real life experience of Jim Corbett, so the book is considered as an autobiography by the author. The book reveals his life-long passion for the people, jungle, and animals of the Kumaon hills, and his anguish at human's alienation from its environment. Ecological perspectives on Jim Corbett's works can be significantly helpful for understanding his subjective sensibility of jungle experience in the era of eco-crisis. The book jungle lore gives the details of Jungle topography of Sub-Himalayan ranges. The author has shared his experience of Indian wild life, tribal and rural life with their myths, traditions, customs, folklores, dialects etc. at the Himalayan foothills. The book reveals Corbett's creed of jungle life and his protest against deforestation. From the earlier childhood, he was fascinated towards forest and wildlife around his home in Kaladhungi. As he grew up, he learned to identify the sounds of various birds and animals. When he became more experienced, his thinking gradually changed. Later on he wanted to shoot tigers and other animals but with a camera. Corbett brought his first camera on 1920s to record cine film of tigers. Corbett said that to shoot animals and especially tigers was a difficult task as they are very shy in nature.

*Jungle Lore* deals basically with geographical areas such as Nainital, Utrakhnad. The book is about his childhood days. Corbett has described about the changes that have occurred in nature from the time of his childhood to the time when he is writing. How the pattern of land and forests has changed in the meantime. He also explained how the changes have



occurred due to manmade and natural activities and also effected badly on animals and birds of the jungle. Forest has been exploited and its fragility is being destroyed by the man.

The notable thing is that, the very title of the book '*Jungle Lore*' is crucial from the point of view of Eco criticism. Corbett himself explained it clearly in the book. According to him, lore means a body of traditions and knowledge on a particular subject held by a particular group, typically passed from person to person by orally. And in case of the book's title Jungle Lore, it means the traditional knowledge about nature which is passed from one generation to other. The same thing happen with Corbett, he was given this knowledge by his elders in the childhood when he was taken to jungle to show that no animal attack on human until unless he is not wounded, and to show that both human beings and animals can live peacefully. According to him, jungle lore is not a science which can be learnt from textbooks, instead it is something which can be absorbed a little at a time and this is a continuous process which goes on. The book of nature has no beginning or end. There is no age limit of learning; it can be learnt at any stage of life. As he says in chapter four,

"I have used the word 'absorbed', in preference to 'learnt', for jungle lore is not a science that can be learnt from textbook; it can, however be absorbed, a little at a time, and the absorption process can go on. Open the book where you will, and at any period of your life, and if you have desire to acquire knowledge you will find it of intense interest, and no matter how long or how intently you study the pages your interest will not flag, for in nature there is no finality."(165)

In chapter three, there is an instance of how as a young boy he was given the traditional knowledge by his elders, especially by his brother about the nature and its rules which they were also given in their childhood and which they are passing on to Corbett. That tigers and leopards or any other animal do not harm you until unless they are not being wounded. And as Corbett grow and matured in his life and while he was writing he experienced that all that was being taught to him was right. That's why he said,

"Lessons taught when young are never afterwards forgotten, I had learnt my lessons well. I had been taken into jungles in which there were tigers and bears with the object. I believe, of showing me that no danger was to be apprehended from unwounded animals. Lessons well learnt when young are never afterwards forgotten, and I had learnt my lessons well. (157)

And this is what he did during the season when the birds were nesting, he abstain from shooting while birds were busy caring their young ones. In the very first chapter Corbett shows his concern about the changing pattern of the forest and its effects on the flora and fauna of the nature. He also revealed the ill effects of the over exploitation of forests, which

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not only leads to deforestation but also makes drastic changes in it. Corbett had shown how during his childhood and after 30 years there is a huge change in the pattern of jungle of Terai and Bhabar due to human intervention. When he was child, there were waist high grass and jungle, but due to over human interference and exploitation it has changed. Corbett tries to emphasize that one have to live in harmony with our flora and fauna because it is beneficial for stopping the global extinction crisis of birds and animals and to achieve true ecological sustainability and this is also followed by the village folks.

The ill effect of the increasing population is, it put pressure on the nature and natural resources. To satisfy the needs human start to exploit nature. Corbett had explained it how the pressure of population has brought the destruction of forest by cutting and making it cultivable land. Corbett regretted on the fact that what he enjoyed during his childhood will never be enjoyed by the present and future generation, as the place where he used to roam and play, is now made farm lands. It has influenced animals and birds too, as the trees on which they depend for food and shelter are totally destroyed. As he says:

“Opportunities which will never be enjoyed by another, for pressure of population has brought under cultivation large areas on which in my time game wandered at will; while standardization of forests, with all the evils it brings in its train of wild life, has resulted in the total destruction of the trees that bore the flowers and the fruit that birds and animals live on.”(167)

The destruction of natural habitat of monkeys, by destroying the forest has resulted in scarcity of food for monkey, which have effect both physically and mentally on them, as they retort to come out to cultivated land for food, Corbett says that this small problem due to human over exploitative nature, will result in a big problem, as in future all animals, will come out in search of food towards villages and cultivable land, as their natural habitat and their food is destroyed by humans. As he says:

‘One result of this destruction, which in my opinion was quit unnecessary, has been to drive millions of monkeys out of the forests on to cultivated land, presenting Government with a problem which they are finding it difficult to deal with owing to the religious prejudices of the population, who look upon monkeys as sacred animals. A day will come when this problem will have to be faced, and the lot of those who have to face it will not be an enviable one, for in the united provinces alone the monkey population in my opinion is less than ten million, and ten million monkeys living on crops and garden fruit present a very major problem.’ (167)

Corbett’s description of jungle landscape is very precise and graphic. He portrays perfect topography of the jungle around Naini Tal and Kaladhungi. He also comments on the natural phenomena like hailstorm, forest fire etc. Corbett is skilled writer, his vivid



description of topography give the readers a sense of witnessing the landscape from the close quarters. The region and the land come to life in his works with its pictorial quality. The jungle topography is proved to be a significant background to the wild life and the tribal life described by the writer in the selected works.

Corbett would be one of the first naturalists who had made the classification of birds, animals and the crawling creatures in the jungle. He made the classification on the basis of the role these life forms play in the environment. It shows his awareness of their significant presence in the eco-system. He not only experienced but also revealed the interrelationship of living creatures to one another and to their environment. Corbett had given the social pattern of behavior of wild animals with the help of pug marks and calls of the animals which is part of their eco-system. His comments on animal behavior are based on very minute observation and own experiences. Corbett's writing is quite informative and it is very remarkable and useful thing for reader. His narration and description of the scene is really great, that one can have feel of witnessing the real incident. It feels, especially when he records the skill of the predators like tiger, leopards and their actual movements at the time of hunting the prey. He had given very important and realistic information about the hunting habits of carnivorous animals. He had also provided very interesting and useful information of the number of rare species in the jungles such as barking deer, leopard, tiger, serpent eagle, hornbills etc.

While talking on the wild life he thinks from human point of view, at the same time he thinks from animal view. It is really remarkable approach showing his eco-sensitivity. His works shows and studies the social system of the animals living in the groups or herds. His jungle stories are sensational and gives feel of detective stories. In the book *Jungle Lore*, Corbett had revealed his sense of exploration and adventures. Thus his surprising jungle detective stories become the timeless archetype of jungle literature occurred in future. He had given the records of the natural phenomena like forest fire, hailstorm and their subsequences on the birds and animals in the jungle.

Being learned ecologist, Corbett believes in the scheme of Nature. According to him, Nature is system, all living and non-living animals are part of it and depending on each other. He appreciates harmony in the Nature. He is also conscious of the role of a particular species in nurturing the environment. He proves successfully that nothing in the jungle is vain and intentionally violent. The efforts taken by him are significant in inspiring eco-sensitivity among the readers. In the book *Jungle lore*, he had mentioned a particular term as the law of jungle and his perception about it, which explains his faith in ecological balance. According to him, the law of the jungle allows great freedom to each individual to live his own life. It keeps every individual always attentive but never makes him deprived of the joy of living. This is very basic supposition of ecology. The theme of preservation, conservation and retention of forest occurs repeatedly in his works. They display his urge of conservation and protection of the environment.

Corbett had also depicted birds of Northern India effectively. From very childhood, Corbett was fond of observing birds in the nature. His views on birds in the nature are the outcome of his systematic and detailed study of them. Like a naturalist he is able to present the life-cycle of birds in the region and also maintains record of the events. He had recorded the flights of the birds, their habits and habitats which is rather study of ecology. He discovered interrelationship between the wild animals and the birds in the jungle and also shared the knowledge he gained in the company of nature with the readers. Corbett had interpreted co-existence of man and wild animals, birds which will prove to be a vital ecological pattern.

Corbett has also shown how the villagers use various plants for medicinal use. In a particular incident in the story, a small plant juice is applied on the wound to save the wound from infection and it helped in healing also. The villagers can easily identify it in the jungle. It needs only to squeeze the leaves and pour its juice and it will heal the wound in one -two days. And is named as Brahmi Buti, 'God's flower'. As he says:

“ you ever get a flesh wound in the jungles I will show you a small and insignificant little plant that will not only cauterize but also heal your wound better than anything else that I know. The plant which is found in all jungles, grows to a height of twelve inches and has a daisy like flower on a long slender stem. The leaves are fleshy and serrated like the leaf of a chrysanthemum. To use the plant break off a few leaves, rinse them in water to wash off the dust-if water is available and then squeeze the leaves between finger and thumb and pout the juice freely into the wound. No further treatment is needed and if the wound is not a deep on, it will heal in a day or two. The plant is well named. Brahmi Buti, 'God's flower'.” (250)

Corbett has tried to convey that human beings should use natural resources but to such an extent that nature can regenerate itself. Corbett believed in sustainable development. He tried to create awareness about the ecological balance of nature and its importance for survival of human beings on Earth.

Although Jim Corbett was a patriotic Englishman who contributed in both world wars and served the mankind in many ways. He addresses India as My India, and native people as his own people. He also loved and cared for the Flora and Fauna of India; for that he took many efforts and tried to preserve nature. He had taken initiative in conservation of forests and protested the unnecessary hunting of carnivorous animals He had also contributed to the world of literature by his writing of real life jungle stories. In the stories, his deep interest and love for nature is clearly visible. He observed and highlighted the cultural traits and habits of the tribal people; he praised the natives for their strong sense of loyalty. The author will always be remembered whenever the word conservation will come. He was the first person in India, who had given the thought of conservation of forests and wild animals. The





movement of conservation and preservation begins from him. Though the world knew him as a tiger hunter but the awareness of conserving nature and wildlife, which he and his works inculcated will not forgotten.

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