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**Characterisation in Jim Corbett's Works: With Special Reference to Man Eaters: Non-Human Characters**

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**Abstract:**

The present research paper attempts to examine the art of characterisation in the works of Jim Corbett with special reference to his short stories. The study analyses Corbett's method of constructing both human and non-human characters by applying theoretical perspectives of E. M. Forster, Aristotle and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. The paper also examines Corbett's use of direct and indirect methods of characterisation in presenting real-life characters drawn from the socio-cultural background of Kumaon and Garhwal. Special attention is given to his portrayal of man-eaters as non-human antagonists, whose characteristics are shaped by circumstances and survival instincts. The study reveals that Corbett's characters, whether human or animal, are realistic, representative and deeply rooted in Indian ethos. His narratives successfully blend action with character, thereby creating a vivid and dynamic portrayal of life. The paper concludes that Corbett's art of characterisation reflects his keen observation, humanitarian outlook and narrative skill in depicting both the external and inner worlds of his characters.

**Keywords:** Characterisation, Jim Corbett, Human and Non-Human Characters, Realism, Indian Society, Man-Eaters, Direct and Indirect Presentation

**Introduction: The Art of characterisation**

Characterisation is an important feature in a narrative. The author expresses his ideas and views through character and art of characterisation. It is through characters that the author expresses his major themes, points of views and vision of life. The purpose of present research paper is to study Jim Corbett's concept of constructing characters and his modes of characterisation, as reflected through his works. The various characters reveal the author's attitude towards life and the individuals.

Numerous critics of literature have developed various theories of characterisation. E. M. Forster presented the concept of ‘flat’ and ‘round’ characters (Forster). Forster’s theory depends on the predictable and unpredictable changes in characters, occurring in the course of a narrative. A character that undergoes unpredictable and complex changes in the course of a narrative is termed as a round character and one that remains constant is termed as a flat character (Forster). Aristotle preached the supremacy of plot over the characters. In *Poetics* he argued that tragedy is a representation of action and life and not of characters (Aristotle). However, in the nineteenth century, the character gained supremacy with the advent of character-driven narratives. Marvin Mudrick in 1961 suggested two different points of views about character and characterisations:

The ‘Purist’ argument – in the ascendancy nowadays among critics – points out that characters do not exist at all... The ‘realistic’ argument – on the defensive nowadays – insists that characters acquire... (Mudrick qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 131–32). Shlomit Rimmon-Kenan suggests a reconciliation of these two different points of views... (Rimmon-Kenan 135).

The hierarchy depends on the focus of the reader. When action is the centre of attraction, the characters become subordinate, whereas action becomes subordinate when the reader’s attention focuses on the characters. Jim Corbett’s narratives are nonfictional, based on his real life adventures after the man-eaters in the contemporary Garhwal and Kumaon regions. Most of his narratives are action oriented except *My India* and *Jungle Lore*. His stories are based on his real-life experiences; hence the characters are life-like. His characters appear as a part of a design and some characters are textualised. While reading Corbett, the attention and focus keep shifting from the characters to events and from events to characters; especially in his man-eater stories. Therefore, his art of characterisation needs to be evaluated in the context of events and actions as Chatman (1978) developed Barthes’s concept of characterisation (Chatman 127).

There are two types of textual indicators of Characterisation namely: the direct presentation and the indirect presentation. The direct presentation presents characters in plain narrative, in a sort of character definition. In the indirect presentation the reader studies the character through the actions, speech, look, and the interaction with other characters. Jim Corbett is primarily a short story writer. His stories focus on one incident, has a single plot, single setting, limited number of characters and covers a short period than a novel. Creating and developing character in a short story is a challenging job. Standardisation of characters is not advisable in a short story as it can be fictional or non-fictional. He presents characters through both direct and indirect presentation. Some features of the characters are described

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in first person narrative, whereas certain characters are presented through their action and appearance. These characters guide readers through the story.

### **Jim Corbett's short stories: The Human and Non-Human Characters**

Corbett's short stories can be divided into two types; the man-eater stories and the other stories. In the man-eater stories, Corbett himself is the protagonist and the man-eater is the antagonist. He has written eleven man-eater hunting stories. Each man-eater has a distinguished characteristic from the other. Corbett's stories account human and non-human characters, which appear in the course of events. The human characters are the people, whom he meets during his man-eater adventures and during his stay in India. *My India* a lesser known of Corbett's works. It carries beautiful pen sketches of the Indian villagers and the poor workmen of the region. The characters in *My India* are real life characters. He has presented them from his own perception in the context of Indian culture. He deals with the issues and problems of the contemporary Garhwal and Kumaon region in his writing and the characters he has developed are a part and participant in them. His characters of the hill folk and poor villagers in *My India* are representative of their class. Corbett's was a multidimensional personality. Apart from hunting man-eaters he explored different issues through the various characters he has presents in *My India*. Some of his characterisations distinctively identify certain issues in the contemporary society. The character of 'Chamari' and 'Buddhu' highlight the core problem of Indian society namely the caste hierarchy.

Corbett's art of characterisation is in the form of the tradition of storytelling. His characters are individuals as well as types; being taken from the society, they project their closeness to the real world. True to the human nature these characters are a blend of virtues and vices. Kunwar Singh, the headman of a village, is a victim of drug addiction. Corbett presents his characters with sensitivity and understanding the multicultural Indian society. These characters also throw light on some peculiar aspects of his personality and his mindset. They help to explain his humanistic approach towards the poor of Indians.

The characters, Corbett has created, can be classified into the major and minor ones. The major character has the characteristics of a round character, whereas the minor characters are flat and serve the purpose of events. His work presents a variety of characters belonging to different walks of life, class, caste and religion. Most of the human characters except a few are simple, selfless, non-corrupt real men and women of the present-day Indian society. He met numerous people during his stay in India, but he selected and presented characters with a purpose to make them representative of the contemporary era as well as a reflection of the persons they were. He intends to present the private, public and inner world of his real-life characters. These characters represent different personal traits. Buddhu's

personal traits are certainly different from Haria's. The ease in characterisation comes from his familiarity with these persons and above all with the essence of Indianness.

The confidence to present Indian characters came from the fact that he had observed Indians very closely. For the development of Indian characters, Corbett visits the very familiar places like Mokameh Ghat, the Naini-Tal, Kaladhungi, the villages on Kumaon Mountains and the scenes of his man-eater expeditions, as he acknowledges the fact in the "Introduction" of his book *My India: My India*, about which these sketches of village life and work are written, refers to those portions of a vast land which I have known from earliest days, and where I have worked; and the simple folk whose ways and characters I have tried to depict for you are those among whom I spent the greater part of seventy years (Corbett, *The Second Jim Corbett omnibus 5/6*).

This book is an assemblage of several characters placed in real life situation. The incidents and context of these characters may seem distant in today's modern world, but Corbett has succeeded in making these characters convincing. *My India* contains twelve different stories, drawn from his working days and village life, as he points out, "The scenes of my sketches centre on these two points in India: Naini-Tal and Mokameh Ghat" (Corbett, *The Second Jim Corbett omnibus 6*). The prominent sketches are Kunwar Singh, Mothi, Harkwar, Kunthi, Haria and Narwa, Sultana, Buddha, Lalaji and Chamari. He was expert in the study of human beings. It was one of his hobbies to observe and study a person from the outward appearance. In *My India*, he reports a very curious incident when, while watching the passengers on a steamer, he exactly describes each individual's cast, professions and the objective of their travelling from their appearance. Corbett describes all the characters with exactness. This description of the passengers on a ferry boat, reminds us of Chaucer's pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*. Each passenger stands out with distinct features. Their past and future engagements, the purpose of journey and their background are exquisitely depicted by him. This is a picture gallery of Indians, belonging to different sects of the society. The description of these characters shows that Corbett had the Seeing Eye and a good memory. In his works, he presents a picture gallery of the hill folks and the nature's inhabitants, which is full of life, movement, colour and sound. **Man-Eaters: Non-Human Characters**

Jim Corbett is perhaps a pioneer in creating non-human characters. The ten man-eaters present a full sketched portrait of the wild cats. These man-eaters have unique characteristics. The circumstances and the reasons for their operation are different. These man-eaters are the antagonists of these stories. They present an antagonist in true colours: cruel, intelligent, strong, and cunning, and at times eludes the protagonist. The conflict

between the protagonist and the antagonist takes place not only on the physical level, but also on the subconscious level. Each man-eater is unique in its surrounding.

### **The Champawat Man-Eater**

A tigress arrived from the borders of Nepal as a fully developed man-eater. The tigress was one of the most notorious man-eaters, credited having killed four hundred thirty-four human beings. The tigress had created a reign of terror in the surrounding area. The tigress had lost fear of human-being. It killed victims in full day-light, in front of entire party of men and women. The victim woman of Pali was killed in front of twenty women. As Corbett writes: "... the woman was climbing down from the tree, when the tiger, who had approached unseen, stood up on its hind legs and caught her by the foot ... and pulling her into the ravine, the tiger released her foot, and while she was struggling to rise, caught her by throat" (MK 16). Hunting the tigress was a tough task because the Champawat man-eater "had the reputation of never killing twice in the same locality, never returning to kill, and whose domain extended over an area of many hundred square miles" (Corbett, The Jim Corbett Omnibus 23/24). The tigress had developed a curious habit of tearing away the clothes of her victims and carried naked, profusely bleeding bodies, either dead or alive. It would approach kills in absolute silence. "... the upper and lower canine teeth on the right side of her mouth were broken, the upper one in half, and the lower one right down to the bone" (Corbett, The Jim Corbett Omnibus 38). This injury was caused by a gunshot and forced her to be a man-eater.

### **The Chowgarh Tigress**

The Chowgarh tigress was responsible for sixty-four reported kills. She operated in an area of 1500 square miles of mountain and vale. It was an old animal and was assisted in killing by a full-grown cub. Both tigers were established man-eaters and had caused a great loss of human life. Corbett focuses on the terror caused by the man-eater, "Every man present had lost one or more relatives, and several bore tooth and claw marks, inflicted by the man-eater, which they will carry to graves" (Corbett, The Jim Corbett Omnibus 66). The tigress eluded Corbett for one complete year. It escaped unhurt on several occasions. The last encounter with the tigress is full of suspense. The tigress depended on her cub for killing human victims. The tigress became a man-eater because her claws were broken, and brushed out, and one of her canine teeth was broken and her front teeth were worn down to the bone (Corbett, The Jim Corbett Omnibus 108).

### **The Mohan Man-Eater**

The Mohan man-eater's first human victim was a young brave girl. After killing the girl, the tiger went down to Kosi valley and killed several human victims. For several years the man eater operated in Kosi valley. An interesting and curious fact about the Mohan man-eater was that it made low moaning sound while walking. The sound was an indicator that the tiger was suffering from a wound. However, the tiger perfectly carried its kills. After

tracking and stalking for days together, the tiger was shot dead, at a close range while fast asleep. Corbett regrets hunting the tiger when sleeping. The reason for the low moans of the man-eater was revealed while skinning. Some twenty-five porcupine quills were found embedded in his left leg.

### **The Kanda Man-Eater**

This man-eater tiger had the reputation of being too wary. The hunter toiled for fifteen days, up and down the valleys fruitlessly. The Kanda man-eater was cunning and a courageous beast. The first shot almost killed it and chipped off a piece of shoulder bone. It seems that the man eater kept a watchful eye on the activities of the hunter, near the kill. He almost stalked Corbett, while he was sitting on a tree, over the kill. He artfully describes its final combat. Prowling and growling below the tree, the tiger “turning with a great roar, he came straight for my tree, and as he was in the act of springing the second bullet, with great good fortune, crashed into his chest” (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 169).

### **The Thak Man-Eater**

The Thak man-eater was an average-sized tigress, in the prime of life. The man-eater’s identity was confirmed from its Pug-marks. The man-eater’s acts were unpredictable and it gave Corbett some real moments of anxiety. Animals also learn lessons from past experiences. The Thak man-eater hardly killed a live bait of buffalo and understood what it meant when men climbed trees near the kill:

The chance of shooting ... over a kill ... an animal that has in probability become a man-eater through a wound received over a kill, is very remote, and each succeeding failure, no matter what is cause, tends to make the animal more cautious, until it reaches a state when it either abandons its kill after one meal or approaches it as silently and as slowly as a shadow ... (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 194).

The tigress had developed uncanny intelligence, suitable to a human being. It eluded the hunter for a complete month and outsmarted all Corbett’s efforts to shoot her. The hill villagers were terrorised by the advent of the tigress and were forced to vacant village Thak. The man-eater tried Corbett’s skill to the last limit and left him depressed due to constant failure Corbett remarks: “There are few people, I imagine, who have not experienced that felling of depression that follows failure to accomplish anything they have set out to do” (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 225).The tigress had lost all fear of man and carried people in broad day light from the doorstep of a house or from the heart of a village, in front of groups of people. Thak man eater’s cunningness terrorised a vast population, covering a large area of villages and even the road to the holy shrine of Purna Giri. Corbett’s experience of long years of hunting man-eaters was at stake. His continuous failure bears testimony to the wit and cunningness of the man

eater. The man-eater is killed in the most terrifying situation. It was called up by giving a mating call and shot dead. The young tigress became a man-eater due to injuries to her shoulder caused by buckshot.

#### **The Mukteshwar Man-Eater**

The Mukteshwar man-eater was responsible for killing twenty-four human lives. Her activities endangered the lives of the people, living in the surrounding villages and the work at the veterinary office. The tigress resided in the extensive forest of Mukteshwar. She had a unfortunate encounter with a porcupine. Corbett points out that, "In this encounter she lost an eye and got some fifty quills, varying in length from one to nine inches, embedded in the arm and under the pad of her right foreleg" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 282/283). Her efforts to extract the quills worsened the condition of wounds. Injured and hungry, she turned to man-eating by sheer accident. Finally, she was shot dead, a frightened animal blind at one eye. Corbett's delineation arouses our sympathy for the man-eater.

#### **The Panar Man-Eater**

The Panar leopard was responsible for killing over four-hundred human lives. The Rudraprayag leopard was more publicised, but Panar leopard operated in remote areas and caused more loss of human life. The leopard killed during night and "was in his elements" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 325). The man-eater was unafraid of human beings and gave violent jerks to the tree by pulling the shoots on which Corbett was seated. Corbett describes the fearful situation, "Having killed four hundred human beings at night, the leopard was quite unafraid of me" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 325). The man-eater nearly got the hunter in the nerve-racking periods. The leopard was shot in the light of pine-torches. **The Chuka Man-Eater**

The Chuka man-eater disorganized life in the Ladhya valley. The tiger became a man-eater accidentally. Two animals and two human beings were killed on the same day by the Chuka man eater. The man-eater's encounters with two men carrying loads on their back proved disastrous. It was left with a sack of gur and a plough. These early experiences formed a habit in the man eater. He selected victims, who were without any broken tooth as he "only bruised the skin and did not penetrate it" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 341). Corbett killed the man-eater in a very awkward position.

#### **The Talla-Des Man-Eater**

Talla Des man-eater operated in Almora district and caused a huge loss of human-life. The man-eater possessed a marvellous strength of endurance. She survived Corbett's initial shots of gun with the courage of a fighting soldier. The animal operated for eight to ten years. The dread of the man-eater severely affected the villagers. Corbett describes the terror of the man eater:

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No one knew whether the tiger was a male or a female, but all knew it was a very big animal, the fear of which was now so great that the outlying fields were no longer being cultivated and no one was willing to go to Tanakpur to get the food that was needed for the village (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 376).

The man-eater was hit by the bullet from Corbett's gun, but luck seemed to favour the animal. She fell unconscious, crashed down through the trees and after regaining consciousness dozed off following her nose. At first instance, her lying in thick cover saved her and the cub was shot dead. The second shot of bullet struck a bone that prevented a fatal injury. On the third time, her fall was cushioned by branches and sand and the onset of rain saved her on the fourth attempt. A wounded tiger was the most dreadful animal. The man-eater starved, but fought out with Corbett till her last breath. It took six shots from Corbett's gun to kill the tigress.

### **The Rudra Prayag leopard**

Rudra Prayag leopard is the only one of its types, whom Corbett has dedicated a complete book, a sort of novella. The man-eating leopard is introduced with a theory to support the reasons that turned a leopard into a man-eater. During epidemics of diseases disposing a large number of bodies pose a big problem. The Rudra Prayag leopard emerged after the epidemic of influenza of 1918 and operated from 1918 to 1926, killing over one hundred and twenty five people. The leopard was the most publicised man-eater by press and the pilgrims of Badrinath and Kedarnath. The leopard created a reign of terror over the Garhwal region. The leopard imposed a strict curfew after evening. Corbett remarks, "No curfew order has ever been more strictly enforced, and more implicitly obeyed, than the curfew imposed by the man-eating leopard of Rudra Prayag" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 437). The leopard had developed the uncanny habit of entering houses by breaking door and windows. He carried his kills in absolute silence. The leopard's characteristics are scattered in the text. The various episodes unfold the mystery that shrouded the leopard. The element of supernatural is conspicuous.

Constant failure to kill the leopard convinced the villagers that the leopard is endowed with some supernatural powers. The leopard carried his kills so silently that people of Garhwal considered it not an animal, but an evil spirit in the form of a carnivore. The herdsman remarks, "The evil spirit that is responsible for all the human deaths in this area is not an animal, as you think it is, that can be killed by ball or shot, or by any of the other means that you have tried and that others have tried before you" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 444/445).

An experienced and expert hunter like Corbett failed on numerous occasions. The leopard's immunity to all forms of attempt, sporting and unsporting, made Corbett doubt the credibility of his own sanity, when he also thought of the leopard as something unusual than a mere animal. The leopard eluded all of Corbett's efforts. In fact, he was the hunted one on several occasions and narrowly escaped deaths.

The leopard created an aura of mystery and supernatural. Corbett could ascertain no reason for the unusual movements and the sound the animal made: "..., but the sound he made when walking I could not then, nor can I now, account for; it was like the soft rustle of a woman's silk dress, and could not be explained by stubble in the field - for there was none - or by the loose straw lying about" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 473). The people of Kumaon credited Corbett with supernatural powers in hunting man-eaters. However, this power seemed to elude Corbett in the chase of Rudra Prayag leopard. The gin-traps were set, kills were poisoned, but the leopard had strange immunity to poison. In fact, he seemed to retrieve on it. The leopard hunted the hunters. He challenged Corbett and Ibbotson. When he killed a goat and left it untouched and instead followed the hunters down to the village, with an intension to secure a victim. Corbett interprets the leopard's intention, "It was as though the man-eater - for no other leopard would have killed the goat and laid it on the track - had said, 'here, if you want your goat so badly, take it; and as it is now dark and you have a long way to go, we will see which of you lives to reach the village'" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 526). The acts and escapes of the leopard were unbelievable. Finally, after eight years of strenuous chase and many escapes the leopard was shot dead by Corbett from a machan, setup before the pilgrim shelter of a priest, a close friend of Corbett. Corbett's final comments are best on the leopard. It sums up its personality:

But here was no fiend, who while watching me through the long night hours had rocked and rolled with silent fiendish laughter at my vain attempts to outwit him, and licked his lips in anticipation of the time when, finding me off my guard for one brief moment, he would get the opportunity he was waiting for of burying his teeth in my throat (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 597/598).

### **The Temple Tiger**

The Temple tiger was blessed by the goddess of the temple at Dabidhura and no hunter could hunt her. The priest of the temple challenged Corbett to try shooting the temple tiger. The temple tiger escaped unhurt many an attempt of Corbett, for no apparent reasons. Corbett's failure on five consecutive days proved the truth of priest's words. Corbett expresses his views, "... as the days went by I was not have been able even with the heavy rifle I would have been able to kill the tiger that evening" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 257).

The last encounter with the tiger reveals a curious aspect of its character. Corbett was sitting over the kill to keep a close view. In the meantime, the tiger skirted round the bushes silently and started to claw the tree on which Corbett was seated. The tiger drew pleasure from the act as he clawed the tree with force. The author explains the tiger's curious act, "I know that crows and monkeys have a sense of humour but until that day I did not know that tigers also possessed this sense. Nor did I know that an animal could have the luck and the impudence that particular tiger had" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 280). All the actions and the moves of the tiger exhibit its confidence at being immunity to any attack.

### **The Pipal Pani Tiger**

This episode is a complete character sketch of a tiger since its birth. It shows the growth of a tiger in its natural surroundings. The cub's growth and movement were detected from the marks he left on the sandy bed of a stream, Pipal Pani. Deprived of its mother's assistance, it learned to kill the smaller preys, graduating to the bigger ones, as days passed. Details of his shikar, his home and habits are discussed in detail. The cub leads a comfortably protected life in a giant of a felled forest. Corbett describes the peaceful life of the cub, "Here he brought most of his kills, basking, when the days were cold, on the smooth bole of the tree, where many a leopard had basked before him" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 176). The cub grew to be a handsome tiger and his baby hair changed for a rich coat. As a grown up male tiger, he setup his territory in a "thick belt of scrub skirting the foot hills" (MK 179). In the growing years, he found a mate for him. Over the period, his nature changed. He started objecting to Corbett's visits over his kills with angry growls. The cub had grown into a full grown male tiger with all the majesty and strength. Sadly, he disregarded the lessons learned as a cub. He returned to a kill carelessly and was shot. The wound healed, but left him with a permanent defect in his right leg. Disabled to hunt big game, he took heavy toll on the cattle. Corbett remarks that, "In the succeeding year he gained as much in size as in reputation" (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 182).

He became a prized trophy and many sportsmen tried to bag him. A fatal wound by a gunshot forced Corbett to shoot his long year companion, the Pipal Pani tiger. Corbett feared that the tiger may turn to man-eating. However, Corbett's fear turned out to be wrong because the wound was completely healed. This episode is a beautiful pen-portrait of the life of a male tiger.

### **The Bachelor of Powalgarh**

The Bachelor is introduced as the most sought after big-game trophy of the province. Bachelor's character has a majestic fervour. He was the real king of the jungle, whom all the inhabitants of nature paid their homage:

In his rich winter coat, which the newly risen sun was lighting up, he was a magnificent sight as, with head turning now to the right and now to the left, he walked down

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the wide lane the deer had made for him ... as he entered the dense tree jungle beyond, called three times in acknowledgement of the homage the jungle folk had paid him (Corbett, *The Jim Corbett Omnibus* 110).

Bachelor escaped many attempts of the elite hunters of the region. However, he could not outsmart Corbett's expertise. He fought gallantly and measured 10'.7" over the curves after death.

### **Conclusion**

Corbett provides details about characters, their physical features, behaviour, expression, and their dresses, which help in building the characters. He makes use of this method in both major and minor characters. These details make the character lively and real. Corbett's portrayal of man-eaters as non-human antagonists, are characteristics and shaped by circumstances and survival instincts. The study reveals that Corbett's characters, whether human or animal, are realistic, representative and deeply rooted in Indian ethos. His narratives successfully blend action with character, thereby creating a vivid and dynamic portrayal of life. The paper concludes that Corbett's art of characterisation reflects his keen observation, humanitarian outlook and narrative skill in depicting both the external and inner worlds of his Characters.

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