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A History of the Tiger in British India

“The author who first used the words ‘as cruel as a tiger’ and ‘as bloodthirsty as a tiger,’ when attempting to emphasize the evil character of the villain of his piece, not only showed a lamentable ignorance of the animal he defamed, but coined phrases which have come into universal circulation, and which are mainly responsible for the wrong opinions of tigers...”

-Jim Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumoan*, 1946 pg xvi

Introduction

The tiger is the most famous symbol representing India in the British Empire and is the standard for exotic imagery. With its bright orange pelt complemented with black stripes, its large fangs, impressive size, and raw powerful presence the tiger sticks out among other animals. A huge, orange apex predator was exactly what the British desired to see when conquering exotic lands. Their desire to see profound examples of differences in the lands they were conquering made the tiger stand out immediately. It was the perfect opportunity for a British man to prove himself but inserting his superiority over the animal. Seen as a powerful display of danger and jungle beauty, the tiger was doomed from the start when the British arrived in India. It captured the attention of the British who ultimately misunderstood the creature’s nature for the British arrival disrupted the tiger’s natural state, thus the reputation the British pushed forth was false. That false reputation nearly led to the extinction of the animal, with numbers suggesting the population fell from around 100,000 in the mid-1800s to just 2000 in 1953.¹

The tiger fascinated the British colonizers and eventually all who were involved with the empire, almost to the point of fetishization. They had an excessive obsession with the animal, forcing it into fiction, art, and even into the interior design of those wanting to appear “cultured.” This only increased after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. This rebellion was a violent uprising to

¹ Sankhala, K. S., *The Vanishing Indian Tiger*, pg 40

reinstate the Mughal Empire but was violently put down by the British. After the British regained control of India, it quickly increased its direct involvement in India. There was an increased presence of British elites in the colony that came with the emphasis on royal administration in the colony and an ever-growing military presence. With the officials and the military came their families, and other families seeking adventure or economic opportunity. Quickly a movement formed to make British India truly British. The British were teaching middle- and upper-class Indian's English, the caste system was being manipulated, and India was becoming more British every year. The tiger was far from British and was a symbol of resistance to these changes. Its exoticism and history of being a symbol of the Mughal empire and Tipu Sultan made the tiger conflict with the push for more assimilation in India. The British made the tiger a scapegoat for problems they began to create with their increased involvement.

The influx of British involvement in India brought the need for territorial expansion. The timber and agricultural industries became center points for economic development as India grew more and more British. Because India had such dense jungle terrain, there was a lot of work in making it agriculturally viable. Clearing trees was a crucial part of that process. In 1878, the Forest Act was implemented, which made natural forests into commercial forests meant for timber extraction.² These forests were the main habitat of India's tigers, especially of the royal Bengal tiger, which came to be the stereotypical representation of a tiger.. In addition to the timber and agricultural industries, other activities also brought people into conflict with tigers, including the laying of railway tracks and telegraph poles, settlement work, and the movement of people conducting censuses and surveys.³ The people doing this labor, who were therefore

² John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, pg 180

³ Shafqat Hussain, *Forms of Predation*, pg 1220

brought into dangerous direct conflict with tigers, in most cases, were not the white British colonizers themselves.] The work force consisted mostly of the indigenous populations, who the British had been pressed into service. They bore the brunt of potential interactions with tigers, which proved to be dangerous if certain conditions were met.

Jim Corbett, a prominent figure in the beginning conservation movements in India, claimed that several factors could create a dangerous tiger, or “man-eater”: if the tiger was hurt or maimed so that they could not hunt down their natural prey, if they were being starved because of the disappearance of prey, or if they were being forced to hunt elsewhere because of loss of habitat.⁴ All these conditions were met as a result of the increase in agriculture and timber industries; thus, the workforce populations and tigers quickly came into conflict. The biggest contributor was the loss of tiger habitat, which occurred because the British colonizers directed indigenous workers to cut down forests and plow fields for agriculture. This habitat loss, along with various other hunting traditions, reduced the populations of tigers’ natural prey, such as deer, wild boar, buffalo, and even bears. As tales of dangerous tigers emerged, British sportsmen, eager to prove their masculinity, flooded into the remaining forests, maiming and injuring tigers. As a result of these factors, a growing number of tigers became “man-eaters.” British expansion was to blame, but even though they created the problem, the British colonists in India began to present themselves as the solution.

As tigers caused more problems, it became easy to justify killing the tigers. The damages attributed to tigers were multiple. A single tiger could kill 300 to 600 rupees worth of cattle in a year, causing much economic damage and providing reason for the destruction of tigers and

⁴ Jim Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumoan*, pg xiii

other predators. The loss of human life was of even greater concern. It is estimated that in the second half of the nineteenth century, tigers killed 1,600 people a year ⁵ Again, those people who were losing cattle and sometimes their lives were the indigenous people of India because they made up the workforce. Often the people did not even own the cattle they were dying alongside. The British created the situation that put so many people in danger and then gladly stepped in as the saviors, as part of a larger pattern of paternalism.

With the increased conflict between tigers and the workforce, the British colonial administration and British sportsmen began to respond, labeling tigers as vermin and issuing bounties for killing the animals. This, coupled with the growing presence of elite British men who identified as sportsmen, meant that the tiger was quickly under attack in India. The population quickly fell as the British increased its efforts to be rid of the tiger. As mentioned before, the population plummeted to only 2,000 by 1953. Those 2,000 remaining tigers consisted of all species of tigers and were mostly only remaining on the few tiger preservasions that were established at the time. It was not until 1973, when Indira Gandhi launched Project Tiger, that efforts towards conservation increased, but even then, only with small success. The 2018 tiger census estimates that 2,967 Bengal tigers are left in India. These drastic numbers indicate that the efforts put in place by the British to eradicate the tiger were successful. They were only successful because of the attacks made on the reputation of the tiger, which justified the extermination efforts in the minds of the British and Indian populace.

That British “triumph” of tiger eradication resonates through popular culture even today. The image of the brutal and bloodthirsty tiger was widespread and infiltrated into British

⁵ John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, pg 180

literature, pop culture, and the ideas of the British sportsmen. What resulted was the justification of the destruction of an animal in the eyes of the world. While tigers were getting closer and closer to extinction, there were movies, books, newspapers, and other media portraying them as creatures deserving of their fate. This was a creation of the British, which went deeper than just the story of the unfortunate tiger. It has parallels with how the British were colonizing and exploiting every aspect of India and its culture, and in the minds of the world, were in the right for doing so. The story of the tiger serves as a comparison to Indian culture. What once was proud and ever present in India became attacked in a literal sense, with its reputation manipulated and contorted, resulting in India losing its cultural symbol both physically with the low tiger population and metaphorically in how the tiger was painted as a monster in the way of progress.

In addition to the British story of the tiger in India, it is important to analyze the other side of the story--the tiger's side. The academic conversation around the tiger has centered on how its history has shaped and impacted British society and culture. This paper will attempt the reverse, focusing instead on how British colonists affected the tiger and its fate. As Britain got more involved in India, and interactions between humans and tigers became more common, the colonists attached a negative reputation to the tiger. That reputation led to the increase in hunting and systematic killing of tigers. This complicated future tiger conservation efforts because the stereotype of them in the public eye pushed against protection. In the end, the elite sportsmen led the only conservation efforts.

Historiography

Before telling the story of the tiger it is crucial to understand what has been said before, because the British were the center focus of historian's previous discussions. The British were the aggressors in the tiger's story so having a base for their perspective helps in analyzing the tiger's story. The fetishization of the tiger permeated British culture, with sportsmen especially fixating on the animal. Out of this fixation, the culture of tiger hunting rose to incredible heights not only in India, but also in British society outside of the colony. The colonial administration participated in tiger hunting, with the hunts used as tools for oppression of Indians. These tiger hunts gained great fame and appeared in British fiction; the rising British adventure culture featured the tiger and tiger hunting frequently. Previous scholars on the history of tigers have focused on tiger hunting and related topics, often from the point of view of the British and Indian populations, not the tiger's viewpoint

The sportsmen culture led to the popularity of hunting in British society. With the expansion of the empire beginning in the 1860s and 1870s came the popularity of young men going on adventures to prove themselves, forming the ideal man was the "imperial male." Historian John M. Mackenzie describes the concept of the imperial male in his chapter in *Manliness and Morality*, written in 2013. This "imperial male" had several characteristics that expressed his dominance, but "it was in hunting that the most perfect expression of global dominance was found."⁶ Wrapped up in the identity of masculinity was imperialism, in that to be a man one had to express his superiority and dominance. Hunting provided the perfect medium for this. Elite men started emphasized hunting to prove themselves, the more prestige in a hunt, the better.

⁶ John M. Mackenzie, *The imperial pioneer and hunter and the British Masculine stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times*, pg 179.

In pursuit of more prestigious trophies, the tiger became a center piece in India. There had been a long history of hunting the tiger in India, but nowhere on the scale of the British. The main previous tradition was instituted by the Mughal Empire, with Mughal elites using tiger hunts as a way of presenting their power. The Mughal Empire being the authority the British were replacing, they often mimicked them in the beginning of their rule. The British adopted the hunts when they came to India, and later when the British attempted to distance itself from the indigenous culture, the popularity of the British sportsman usurped the Mughal tradition. Now, however, the British were hunting the tiger for British reasons. In his 2006 article, historian Joseph Sramek describes the new motivations related to masculinity, stating “While Britons hunted tigers to emulate the Mughals as well as to dominate India’s natural environment, the greatest attraction of the sport for many of these hunters was its association with masculinity.”⁷ The tiger was a dangerous animal, or at least that idea was pushed forward by the British, and served as the perfect trophy to justify one’s manliness.

The idea that killing a tiger was a perfect way to prove one’s manliness created an influx of sportsmen into India. Sportsmanship was especially popular among the military elites that went to India. Sportsmen societies that formed in India became increasingly elitist, with viceroys, military generals, admirals, and even royalty frequently participating in tiger hunts. As Indian elites began to desire being more British, they also began hunting tigers. This was an example of how the British began twisting the traditions of the Indian people, bringing even more tenacity in the hunts. Scholar Mukund Belliappa states that it was due to the social, racial, and political insecurities of the Indian royals that the magnitude of the hunts reached such

⁷ Joseph Sramek, *Face him like a Briton*, pg 665

intensity.⁸ He describes a man named Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, who wrote a diary entry detailing his hunts that is “a testament to how many Indian royal families sought to soothe their insecurities by a mindless oversubscription to European fashion.”⁹ Bahadur claimed to have killed over a thousand tigers, killing cubs and torturing tigers frequently for his and his fellow expeditioners’ amusement.

The manipulation of the tiger hunt went further. In Shafqat Hussain’s essay, he states that the British “represented their rule as providing protection against these predators. This logic was played on a symbolic level in tiger hunting, particularly hunting of man-eating tigers which signified particular ideals of imperial governance based on care towards colonial subjects.”¹⁰ The paternal role that Britain often liked to fill was successfully filled through tiger hunting. The sportsmen were not the only people involved in tiger hunts. Once a tiger was declared a man-eater, it lost its “honor” and forfeited its rights to the rules of sportsmanship. Thus, bounties were placed by British officials, and villages that had tiger problems contacted the British if they needed someone to kill the tigers. This made the indigenous populations dependent on the British, with the who used the tiger as a political tool to gain legitimacy and support for colonial rule.

That political tool became a cultural sensation in Britain, with British fiction writers, artist, and eventually filmmakers playing up and expanding the lore of the man-eating tiger. While only a small population of tigers were harming people in India, the way it was painted in popular media suggested otherwise. Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher wrote, “The textual and

⁸ Mukund Belliappa, *A Natural History of Colonialism*, pg 14

⁹ Mukund Belliappa, *A Natural History of Colonialism*, pg 14

¹⁰ Shafqat Hussian, *Forms of Predation*, pg 1219

visual representation of tigers as unregenerate savages gained momentum in the middle of the nineteenth century.”¹¹ This momentum would only build as the decades went on, with consistently negative portrayals that painted the tiger as bloodthirsty and cruel, and also as a symbol of orientalism. Most of the images crafted were by artists who never even had seen tigers in real life before and modeled on others’ drawings. Crane and Fletcher stated “Bewick’s 1790 full side-view engraving of a tiger, mid-stride with his mouth open to show prominent white teeth, is mirrored in Sir Edwin Henry Landseer’s drawings of tigers in the first decades of the nineteenth century and remained a prototype at least until the century’s close.”¹² Portrayals of tigers were more concerned with representing an idea--of India as a place of exoticism, danger, and adventure-- rather than an accurate image. These images are pointed out to be false, but little is done to correct them, to show the truth. The wrongs of the British are called out, but the truth of the tiger finds no place.

These images were not the only fiction surrounding the tiger. Where the tiger reached the height of its fame was in British literature, including books and later, films. In these works of fiction, the tiger was the adversary to the stereotypical white hero who must slay the beast, save the village, and get prove his manliness. British works fixated on the jungle itself, as that physical landscape worked its way into representations of orientalism and adventure in India.¹³ The jungle became a place where a British man could come into his own, but because the tiger lived in the jungle, the animal had to be conquered for the British man to reign . In reality, tigers typically posed little threat, as they would try to avoid human contact, and were certainly less dangerous than diseases like malaria that were prominent in the jungle. In British fiction,

¹¹ Ralph, Crane, and Lisa Fletcher, *Picturing the Indian Tiger*, pg 370

¹² Ralph, Crane, and Lisa Fletcher, *Picturing the Indian Tiger*, pg 370

¹³ Sujit Mukherjee, *Tigers in Fiction*, pg 6

however, the tiger was at the jungle's edge, lying in wait for man to dare enter its kingdom, stalking and waiting for its perfect moment to strike. This image was very powerful and present in countless adventure tales in British literature. Again, this image was exposed but not corrected. The literature surrounding the history of tigers should be dynamic, both identifying the false and explaining the truth.

Scholars have identified the ways in which tiger hunting affected the British, how the British used tiger hunting in their colonial pursuits, and how the image of the tiger increased in popularity as a result. Though they have identified these characteristics, little has been done to put forth the truth, the facts that disclaimed the lies. The tiger hunt was a way that men could prove their masculinity, and their dominance over nature and India itself. The sportsman culture was born out of this, with British and Indian elites alike increasingly beginning to participate in tiger hunts at the end of the 19th century. These sportsmen were made up of colonial officials and military officers, the same people pushing for the expansion into India's forests that was bringing people into conflict with the tiger and producing man-eating tigers in the first place. British leaders then used these man-eating tigers as a political tool to justify further British involvement. Out of this came a growing lore of the tiger and its danger, producing harmful images that brought the tiger to the attention of people all around the British empire, as a beast in need of conquering. The historiography has done much to establish this. The wrongs of the British are being explored and their negative impact on the environments of their colonies receives scholarly attention. However, the misconception they produced of those environments and their wildlife is often only slightly addressed. The reputations centering around the animals, particularly the tiger, has continued to affect their fate today and need to be rectified.

The Tiger's Negative Reputation

The previous academic work established that the tigers gained a negative reputation. But what did that reputation mean for the tiger itself? In their natural state, tigers avoid people. They do not prey upon people unless the previously outlined man-eater circumstances drive them to do so, and even then, those circumstances do not guarantee that tigers will take to people as a food source. These ecological facts do not deter people from fearing the tiger, however, for those facts struggle to compete with the fiction. The fiction is known to be fiction, but the truth often does not appear. As is the case with many of the world's apex predators, there is an underlying, innate fear that is associated with animals large enough and powerful to harm people. There are animals that kill many more people than predators do. For instance, the elephant fatally tramples people every year and the hippopotamus drown and kills thousands of people annually, but these animals escape the stigma of being monsters. They do not have that stigma because they do not eat their victims. There is something about an animal capable of eating a human that, in writer David Quammen's words, makes it "transcend the physical dimension of sheer mortal struggle, finding their way also into mythology, art, epic literature, and religion."¹⁴ The tiger is one such animal.

The harm of the predator's unfair legacy is perfectly shown in the story of the tiger. It reached the fame of myth and monster in the eyes of the British. The fetishization by the British painted the tiger as an adversary to civilization, an exotic symbol of evil, and a danger to the people of India. People who never had never seen a tiger in person or had any experience with them were especially likely to believe inaccurate representations in fiction and art. T. As part of

¹⁴ David Quammen, *Monsters of God*, pg 6

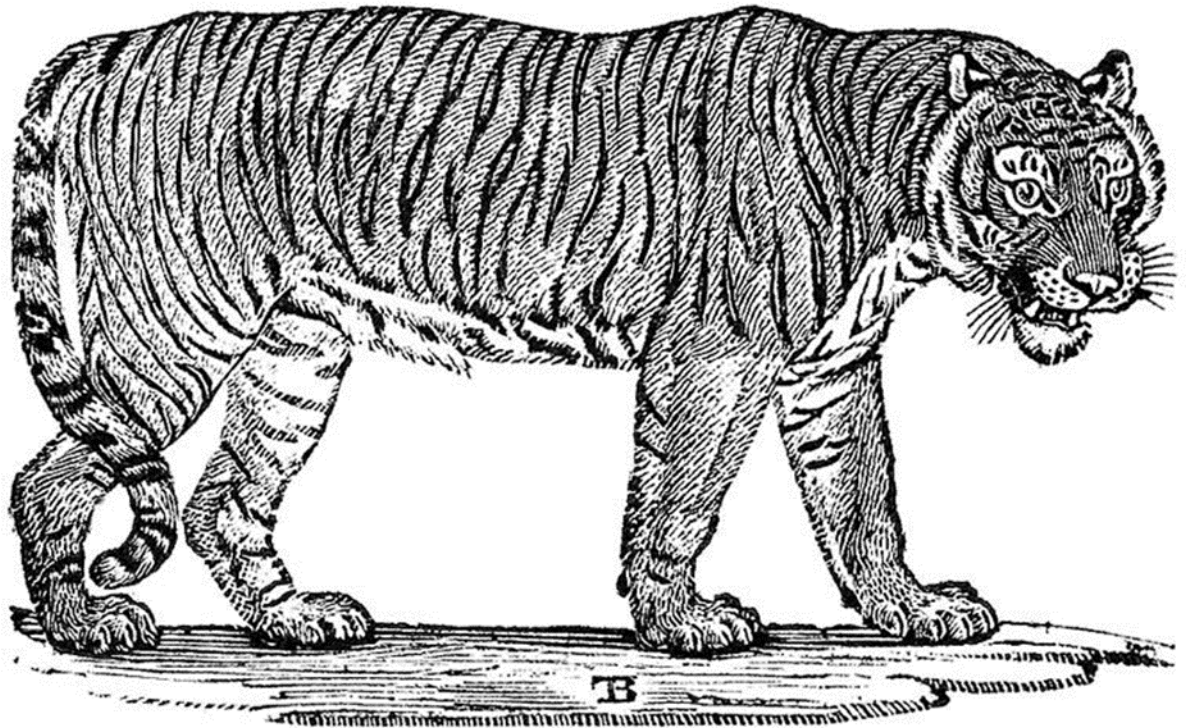
a trend of celebrating exoticism in mainland Britain o, it was even common for newspapers to present stories of tigers for British audiences.

One early account that helped create the myth of the man-eating tiger and made the case for its destruction was an article titled “Tiger Shooting in India, published in *The Economist*, in 1850. This helped set the stage for the craze of the man-eater, which increased around the turn of the 20th century, with the more frequent appearance of man-eaters. In the article, William Rice is the noble white hero who ultimately kills the beast. Indeed, the article’s original purpose to promote his collections of writings about his travels.¹⁵ This simple newspaper article, together with similar articles and accounts of returning military officials, started the foundation of the tiger’s reputation.

As stated before, the most common way British audiences were exposed to the tiger was through artists’ renditions and works of fiction. Scholar Sujit Mukherjee has established the dangers of these inaccurate renditions, describing how they painted the tiger as the adversary to the white hero coming into his own in the jungles. Exploring the renditions themselves, there are several key harmful features in the standard image drawn by artist Thomas Bewick and widely reproduced. The first is the trend to have the tiger’s fangs exposed, which puts the image of the tiger’s predatory nature directly into the minds of the audience. That predatory nature is often misunderstood and relates back to David Quammen’s statements about how it instills innate fear in people. The second harmful feature is the trend of having the tiger be depicted in side view, making its intimidating size and exoticized stripes hard to miss. Anything in the minds of the British that was perceived as exotic tended to lose a sense of its reality. This made it easy to

¹⁵ "Tiger-Shooting In India." *Economist*, January 2, 1858, 8+. *The Economist Historical Archive, 1843-2015*

forget tigers are not creatures of myth and horror, but rather real creatures that live and die like any other. These artist renditions combined with depictions of dangerous tigers in literature and film were devastating to the reputation of the tiger.



This was the standard image of a tiger, created by Thomas Bewick, that served as the basis for portrayal by British artists for over a century.¹⁶

The full extent of the tiger in British fiction is hard to quantify because of its omnipresence. Any story that took place in any type of jungle setting began to include the tiger and even nonjungle settings had villains that possessed the “traits” of the tiger. Those traits were associated with traversing the shadows, being intelligent and smart, and striking at the most opportune time. These traits did not accurately represent the tiger, but provided convincing

¹⁶ Thomas Bewick, *A General History of Quadrupeds* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: S. Hodgson, R. Beilby, and T. Bewick, 1790), 206

villains that needed to be taken down. These stereotypes appeared in books at first, depicting the coastal area of Bengal in the beginning of the 1800s and moving inward along with the British.

When the Americans began to take interest in the tiger, after big game hunting was made popular by President Theodore Roosevelt and others, and its potential for a convincing presence on the silver screen, movies began expanding the negative reputation of the tiger even further. Two works that began as books and have stayed relevant through Disney movie adaptations are *Winnie the Pooh* and *The Jungle Book*. Looking closer at both pieces reveals just how fiction came to affect the reputation of the tiger.

Winnie the Pooh, first written by A. A. Milne in 1926, and later bought by Disney in the 1960, features a wide array of animal characters in comical and satirical situations. The character of Tigger, the book's tiger character, is annoying to Winnie the Pooh, easily distracted, creates mischief, and in general causes a lot of problems the other characters must deal with.¹⁷ Milne, being British, let the empire's presence seep into his work. The characters represent different holdings in the British empire, for the empire infiltrated into all aspects of British fiction, even children's books. Tigger was the representation of India, a character in constant need of supervision by Winnie the Pooh, who represented the British Empire. Christopher Robin represents the British people, who finds a friend in Pooh. And if Pooh can quit obsessing over the honey, which represents colonial power, then the two had a lot of fun together and Pooh was a very good thing in Christopher's life. The depiction of Tigger as annoying and a liability that Pooh must deal with shows how the empire viewed India. Tigger also provided a sense of

¹⁷ Milne, Alan Alexander, and Ernest Howard Shepard. *The complete tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*. Penguin, 1994.

adventure for Christopher, so their relationship was complex, again showing that India as an exotic place one could find adventure in.

Winnie the Pooh once again put the tiger at the forefront as a symbol of India and exoticism. The negative traits of being annoying, creating mischief, and causing problems resonate with how tigers stood in the way of British expansion. But the representation of tigers also shows the duality, with Tigger being a source of adventure for Christopher representing how British men could find adventure with tiger hunting in India. Tigger suggests the idea that the tiger is both a hindrance to order and prosperity and something positive that offers the adventure of killing an exotic animal. Neither meaning bodes well for the tiger, with the British people in both cases being encouraged to kill the animal, whether it be to ensure prosperity or to have an adventure.

Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, written in 1894, is the story of a young Indian boy named Mowgli who was raised in the jungle and must escape the jaws of the evil tiger Shere Khan while also returning to the civilized world. This book, like *Winnie the Pooh*, is wrapped in imperialism and its ties. There is a strong message of the dangers of going native, for Mowgli is an over-exaggerated example of what will happen if the British person goes native. This is an old idea for the British, promoting the effort to make the colonies British, rather than have the colonies' culture pose a threat to the superiority of British culture. Shere Khan encapsulates the perceived dangers of going native, while also being a bloodthirsty tiger that is obsessed with revenge.¹⁸ He is Mowgli's punishment if the young boy does not become more civilized. Later, when Disney made their animated version in 1967, they attempted to reimagine *The Jungle Book*

¹⁸ Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Book*. The Works of Rudyard Kipling. New York: Century, 1899.

as a more kid friendly story, with success, but the role that Shere Khan played remained the same. The most recent iteration was made in 2016, a live action adaptation that painted Shere Khan as truly terrifying. His scars, his teeth, and the fire imagery in the final scene all encapsulate the tiger as truly fearsome and dangerous.¹⁹

The reputation of the tiger suffered from Kipling's depictions in *The Jungle Book*, which became very popular. Kipling's time spent in India gave the book legitimacy in the eyes of its readers, who believed that the setting must be accurate, even though it was a fictional story. Kipling did add the accurate detail that Shere Khan was maimed, which distinguished him as a man-eater. The common conception at the time was that all tigers were man-eaters, but some sportsmen knew that only wounded or desperate tigers would take to eating humans. So, the addition of that detail in Shere Khan's character shows that Kipling must have known this fact. The book's popularity misconstrued the small minority of man-eating tigers as much more widespread. The lore of the man-eater overtook the reputation of the natural tiger, causing all tigers to be labeled as dangerous. In *The Jungle Book*, we see an example of how playing upon the lore of the man-eater has negative results.

Breaking Down the Lore of the Maneater

Once the tiger earned its notorious reputation and the lore of the maneater made the animal infamous in the eyes of the British and Indian people, the downfall of the species followed. The lore of the maneater reached far and wide in the British Empire. The sportsmen who had attached hunting dangerous animals to defining their masculinity were attracted to the

¹⁹ Jon Favreau, *The Jungle Book*, Film, 2016

tales of animals who were killing people. The elite hunting culture that formed sought the tiger, distinguishing it the tiger into two groups: the noble tiger and the maneater. The “noble tiger” category was reserved for the tigers not perceived to be maneaters, who elite men hunted in order to claim a tiger trophy. They would hunt the tiger using the strict guidelines and regulations set by other sportsmen, so the hunt and trophy would have a certain prestige. Being labeled as a “noble tiger” was the lesser of the two evils. The label still meant the tiger would be hunted, but it came with a certain, complex level of protection, to be explored further in this paper. The other label, the maneater, wrapped up in the fictionalized lore of the tiger in India, was the label that spelled doom for the animal. That label was misunderstood by the people of India and still is today. Breaking it down and revealing the truth behind the animals that suffered because of the misinformation is important to understanding the story of the tiger.

The writing of British hunter Jim Corbett (1875-1955) is crucial in understanding the man-eating tiger. Corbett had a complex relationship with the man-eating tiger in India. In his early life, Corbett was raised in India, taking up the skill of marksmanship at an early age and killing his first leopard at the age of 11 in 1886.²⁰ He grew up to become a contractor for the trans-shipment of goods across the Ganges at Mokameh Ghat and worked there almost twenty years. During his time in India, he participated in a wide array of hunts, with an interest in killing man-eating leopards and tigers, an act he viewed as a social obligation. Later in his life, he worked to establish the first national park in India, trained troops for the battles against the Japanese in the Burma jungles during World War 2 and published his accounts of hunting in India. Throughout his life, he tried to set the standard for how a true sportsman was supposed to behave by respecting nature and its wildlife. In many ways, he fit the description of an imperial

²⁰ Jim Corbett, *My Kumoan, Uncollected Writings*, pg xi

man perfectly and his writings show those influences, but his writings also show an attempt at truth, that truth being an accurate representation of the tiger. His 1953 book *Jungle Lore* demonstrates that he both had gained great knowledge of the jungle and sought the truth of the man-eater.²¹ Above all, his experience with the maneater and attempt to look past the lore of the maneater make him a great source for analyzing the idea of the man-eating tiger and how highlighting the truth behind it helps in saving the animal.

Before exploring the truth behind the animal, it is also important to explore the truth behind the Indian people who interacted with the man-eating tigers. It was an extremely rare case for a victim to be a white person, and even rarer for it to be a woman or child, despite what the common artist renditions showed. In both the hunts and in the daily life encounters, the tigers' victims were members of the indigenous workforce populations. Corbett's 1952 book *My India* details the Indian people he knew—those he worked alongside during his travels, the people he interviewed about the maneater, and the people who helped him during the hunts of the animals.²² In the book, the people are far from helpless and greet Corbett with gratitude but do not paint him as their savior. This goes against what the British myth that India's people needed the heroic white hero to keep them safe from the jungle. The Indians in Corbett's writing helped him and simply relied on his knowledge of the tigers to ensure the hunt was successful. Corbett acknowledges their help and their importance to his work, thus the reason for the book. His work pushes against the part of the man-eater's lore that depicts Indians people as helpless victims that need protection from the monsters.

²¹ Corbett, Jim. *Jungle Lore*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953

²² Corbett, Jim. *My India*. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1952.

When a tiger was labeled as a maneater, it lost its rights to an honorable hunt and thus was to be killed by any means necessary. This was common practice for the British government in India, with immense cruelty being expressed in these hunts. Jim Corbett still wished to treat the animals with some respect and sought to hunt down maneaters in a sportsmanlike fashion, with guidelines for tracking and shooting the animal that expressed respect for the animal. In Corbett's *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, he mentions several different hunts, writing about them in a way that both expresses his knowledge of sportsmen as imperial males, but also in a way that teaches much about the tiger. In his story of the Mohan Man-Eater, he details facts about the tiger's habits, its trails, why it leaves the signs it does, the natural diet of the tiger, and how it traverses through the jungle.²³ In the depiction, after killing the tiger he goes and inspects him, noticing that the tiger had many porcupine quills lodged in its body, from his chest to the pads of its foot. He said the quills were "cause enough to have made the poor beast moan when he walked, and quite sufficient reason for his having become—and having remained—a maneater, for porcupine quills do not dissolve no matter how long they are embedded in flesh."²⁴ This served as an example of how maneaters are caused by circumstances, with this particular tiger being driven to hunt porcupines because of the disappearance of natural prey due to habitat loss caused by the British expansion activities.

In another story, Corbett depicts another tiger whose man-eating tendencies were directly human induced. Like in the previous story of the Mohan Maneater, this story of the Thak Maneater demonstrates further natural knowledge about tigers and their habits and appetites, while also describing the dangers of going into a dense jungle in pursuit of a maneater. This

²³ Jim Corbett, *Man-Eater of Kumaon*, pg. 136-149

²⁴ Jim Corbett, *Man-Eater of Kumaon*, pg. 148

tiger put up quite the fight, charging at Corbett and causing him and his company to struggle to get back up. Corbett shot two shots, followed with five more, and finally the tiger was dead. As he did with every maneater he killed, Corbett inspected the tiger in hopes of finding the cause of it becoming a maneater. He found that “she had two old gunshot wounds... and when healing the skin, over quite a large surface, had adhered permanently to the flesh... it had evidently taken a very long time to heal, and could quite reasonably have been the cause of her becoming a maneater.”²⁵ Again, Corbett exposed that the maneater was created by human action, which was the case in all the maneaters he hunted. The man-eating tiger was not natural but was instead caused by interactions with the tiger and its natural habitat. The tigers were victims alongside the Indian people who were harmed by the tigers themselves, both groups victims of the British economic expansion into the interior of India.

Neither the people interacting with the maneaters nor the maneaters themselves were truthfully represented in the British popular imagination. The Indian people were not helpless, just as the tigers were not natural bloodthirsty killers. Indians helped Corbett in his pursuit and were crucial to his success. The man-eating tigers were the result of human activities, not mythical beasts that lurked in the jungles waiting for people to kill. The lore of the maneater proved a false representation, but the lore still affected the tigers, nonetheless. Many tigers fell victim to unwarranted killings and there began a market for their pelts, driven by the bounties that the British put out on suspected man-eaters. The populations quickly fell due to both habitat loss and false man-eating labels. The idea that these animals were terrors and vermin to the people of India kept them from receiving sympathy from the government officials and people of

²⁵ Jim Corbett, *Man-Eater of Kumaon*, pg. 232

the British Empire. Thus, the tigers' only chance for survival came from those who sought to kill them for prestige, and hoped to continue to do so, the elite sportsmen.

The Hunters Saved the Hunted

Towards the end of British occupancy in India, the relationship between the British and the tiger began to change as the British realized the populations of tigers had fallen so drastically, from 100,000 in the mid-1800s to 2,000 by 1950. Concerns emerged from a perhaps unexpected party. It was not the workforces in India nor the Indian nationalists, for they were the people suffering most from the interactions with tigers, and thus had an attitude of disdain for the disappearing tiger. The people who showed the most concern were the elite sportsmen, particularly the white elite sportsmen. Jim Corbett was the most popular among this group and the prime example, but it was a widespread movement throughout the elite hunters. This is a trend seen elsewhere in the world, for most conservation efforts are private enterprises for the purpose of ensuring there is game to hunt. The elite sportsmen culture infiltrated into the leaders of powerful nations, like the United States and Britain, which led to the push for national parks around the world.

As the conservation movement rose in popularity at the turn of the twentieth century, there was a major push from the United States and Britain to establish national parks and nature reserves around the world. The push in India was expected, for it was a major playground for the British elite and offered many game animals. This extended to the highest of public figures, with several royal hunts occurring as power display throughout Britain's colonial rule of India, much like those of the Mughal Empire's previous rulers. The participation of royalty in a hunt is the

highest example of the elite sportsmen culture and shows just how popular it had become. The invention of photography in the late nineteenth century took that popularity to new heights. Photography helped distribute the image of the royal sportsmen across the empire and even the world.

One of the most well-documented and popular hunts was King George's royal hunt in 1911. As was the norm for hunts of this scale, it involved not only King George himself, but also several viceroys and military officials. The hunt took place mostly in Nepal because by 1911 the animals in India were being pushed further and further north, but the tigers taken were from the forests in northern India. An aspect of these royal hunts is that the prize animals are reserved for the royalty; they get first pick. The tiger was the most prized animal to hunt, for it granted the most prestige. This is evident when looking at the animals taken by the party. There were significantly more tigers killed than the other main animals who had been sought after in the hunt, the rhinoceros and the bear, and King George took significantly more tigers than any other participant. He shot 16 tigers, more than all the other participants combined.²⁶ The documentation for the hunt was thorough, but what truly set this hunt apart from others was the photography, which made this one of the most famous Indian hunts in British history.

²⁶ Rookmaaker, Kees, Barbara Nelson, and Darrell Dorrington, *The royal hunt of tiger and rhinoceros in the Nepalese terai in 1911*, pg. 92



This a picture from the album of over 179 photos taken from the expedition, the clearest photo of King George and a tiger he shot.²⁷

The same group of people who frequently participated in these hunts were the main advocates for the conservation of the tiger. Jim Corbett, while not partaking in a royal hunt, was still associated with the group, for he was a sportsman above all else. His attitude toward the tiger solidified his involvement in the conservation of the animal. And the fact that he was widely respected and admired by fellow sportsmen helped him garner support for his efforts. The sportsmen class began building tiger preserves when it became apparent the populations were falling. There already existed the attitude of excluding lower class people from participating in the hunts, which created the first notions of tiger preserves. These were sections of forests set

²⁷ James Dunn, *King of the Jungle: Archive pictures from George V's hunting trip in India in 1911*, pg 1

aside by powerful individuals that excluded unwanted people from hunting in those forests. These were the only areas where the tiger was somewhat protected before the creation of the first national park. It was created in 1936 and was originally named the Hailey National Park after Governor Hailey.²⁸ It was later renamed the Jim Corbett National Park for he was the main lobbyist in favor of its creation. This was the third national park in the world and the second established by the British Empire.

The British began showing legitimate concern for the tiger after the influences of the sportsmen, that extended past Indian independence in 1947. Jim Corbett's books were released after Indian independence, with the goal of combatting misconceptions of the tiger. His accounts and fame had been in circulation prior to his published books, but the authors' notes, and additions in his books were made to garner support for the preservation of the animal.

The British caused the tiger's decline through their expansionism and false representation of the tiger as a dangerous symbol of exotic evil. Then, they became the people attempting to save them, albeit so they could continue to shoot them. Nevertheless, the private conservation efforts of the elite sportsmen and the creation of the Jim Corbett National Park are the reasons the tiger still exists today. The attitudes towards the tiger in the minds of the common British people began to change as well. They changed as more became aware of the truth behind the tigers. Evidence of this can be seen in *The Times* newspaper article titled *Preserving the Tiger*, written in 1955, almost a decade after Indian Independence, which expressed concern for the success of the Hailey National Park and highlighted with positivity the continued existence of

²⁸ Payal Pandey, *Jim Corbett National Park of India-A Case Study on Project Tiger Reserves*, pg 1

tigers on the reserve.²⁹ The change in attitude makes the British relationship with the tiger and its conservation history very complex.

Conclusion

The tiger was a victim of British expansion in India. The economic activities that the colonial rulers enforced on the indigenous population of India put them into direct contact with tigers. Those activities created the circumstances that allowed for man-eating tigers to appear, such as the maiming of tigers, starvation, and the loss of their habitat, all of which became commonplace as the British forced their way into the forests and fields of India. This increased interaction caused a reputation in British culture to form, which misrepresented tigers as naturally bloodthirsty animals that harmed humans. This myth appeared in artwork, British fiction, and eventually films. That misrepresentation led to the systematic killing of tigers, most of which had never even attacked a human, let alone killed and eaten one. The tiger's only chance for survival ironically came in the form of the men who enjoyed hunting them. A leading sportsman, Jim Corbett, worked to correct the misconceptions of tigers and eventually became a lobbyist for the conservation movement supporting tigers in India. The power of the sportsmen culture was immense, extending to royalty. Through their private hunting forests and conservation movements led by Jim Corbett, the tiger survived and British attitudes towards the tiger changed.

The British came into India and exploited its people and its land. The story of the tiger serves as a prime example of this, for it suffered in the name of supposed "progress." This was

²⁹ L.E. Maxwell, *Preserving the Tiger*, 1955

commonplace within the British empire, for the story of the tiger mirrors the stories of fellow animals of South Asia, Africa, and Australia. It was also common for the indigenous populations to suffering alongside the non-human animals =. As the British empire evolved and the conservation movement gained momentum amongst the elite sportsmen who also were royalty and high officials, the empire began to focus on correcting some of their mistakes. While never admitting that their involvement was the cause of these environmental problems, they nevertheless created parks and institutions that served to protect the endangered animals, including the tiger. When India gained independence in 1947, it first rejected these notions of conservation, so that conservation at first remained mostly private except for the Jim Corbett National Park. However, those attitudes also changed eventually.

In April of 1973, Project Tiger was launched, which sought to protect the animals as both an essential part of the ecology and a cultural symbol of India. The population has risen slightly since the efforts began, with almost 3,000 tigers in India today, most residing in the several parks dedicated to protecting them. Jim Corbett National Park has become a tiger sanctuary and is one of the most well protected national parks in the world. While Indian farmers at times complain about tigers that stray off the reservations and kill cattle, and though poachers are still a threat, with tigers killed every year for their pelts, this animal that for over a century suffered from persecution is now being protected and has had a slow but steady increase in population.

It is important to know and remember the history of the tiger, to not forget the British involvement in its suffering while also acknowledging the role of the British in its salvation. Throughout the world today, many parallel stories exist. Stories of people exploiting the land and driving the people of lower classes into direct conflict with the local wildlife. That wildlife suffers immensely, and the world loses species every day. The tiger's reputation might have

contributed to its downfall and the attitudes towards the animals for over a century, but that reputation also brought fame. That fame is important when involving conservation movements, because only the famous are fought for. The story of the tiger is distinct because the tiger itself is distinct, but the need for protection nevertheless translates to animals across the world. Protecting predators, those that take life to survive, is a difficult concept but can best be understood through exposure to histories like that of the tiger in India.

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