

## Depiction of Colonial Indian Women in Jim Corbett's 'My India'

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### Abstract

*Jim Corbett was a domiciled British who were working as a fuel inspector and later as transshipment contractor in Mokameh Ghat in colonial India. In his all books the reflection of contemporary cultural, social, religious Indian is found. There are also some woman characters mentioned in his books. The book My India is a picture gallery of Indian characters with whom Corbett has come across during his work period and his expeditions to hunt down the man-eaters. This article will observe the positive and negative stance of Corbett. It will be observed whether this representation of colonial Indian woman is truthful or not. This characteristic is visible in Corbett's writing. He provided details about how Anderson, Ramsay and other British administrators were doing justice to the orientals and how the application of red tape rules hindered the authority of the British Officials. Corbett features authentic cultural data to European readers. This particular marriage custom is depicted as the flaw of the Indian society that does not offer freedom to people to choose their life partner. Thus, a drawback is highlighted in this story. One more characteristic is conspicuous in representing Indian character that is use of adjectives. When a writer uses some adjectives regarding his people these adjectives, they considered as the characteristics of those people. The adjectives that are used in depicting Indians are 'poor, terror stricken, fearful, selfish, illogical, exacerbating and superstitious', etc. These adjectives are negative words and create a negative impression of Indians.*

**Keywords:** Jim Corbett, orientalism, Indian, colonial woman, culture, colonialism, postcolonial, my India

### INTRODUCTION

Jim Corbett was a British white by ancestry. His forefathers migrated to India in search of employment and settled in India. India is the birthplace and upbringing of Jim Corbett. He was a domiciled British thus he was living amongst Indians. He worked under British Raj in Railway department. He was famous hunter, who had killed the man-eaters in India. Corbett has written six

books. In his books he has written about the man-eaters of India and his hunting expeditions of these man-eaters. One more notable aspect of his writing is that the contemporary India, Indian culture, customs, people and traditions are represented in his six books. In his books along with the depictions of man-eaters the India and Indian people are represented. The contemporary Viceroy of India vouch for Corbett's writing skills he in the foreword of *Man-eaters of Kumaon* states that:

"These stories are the true account of Raj. Corbett's experience with the man-eating tigers in the jungles of the United Provinces [1,2]. I can with confidence write of him that no man with whom I

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have hunted in any continent better understand the signs of the jungle.”

The European people liked Corbett's hunting expeditions and also wanted to know more about the people of India. Jim Corbett and his writing about the Indian people and nature were helping the Europeans to generate the Image of India [3,4]. Corbett's writing was becoming instrumental in catering the information of the Indian colonial people to the European people. Corbett had more knowledge about the Indian people than any other foreign authors who writes about India by referring previously written books. He has written his own experience of people of India and Indian nature. The Indian characters that found reflection in his writing were the real human beings and the situations he has written about were the real situations. In every civilization, women have always played a necessary role. She was worshiped in the form of Goddesses in Indian culture. It is interesting to study how the Europeans perceive them in the Indian culture and projects them in their writing. This article explores the depiction of colonial women in the writings of Jim Corbett. McCarthy says “The conception of ‘man’...is, according to the radical critics of enlightenment, at the core of Western humanism.”

The book 'My India' is considered as autobiography of Jim Corbett. There are number of Indian and European characters are mentioned in this book. Though there are number of short references of woman characters some woman characters out of these depictions stand out. Homi Bhabha regarding the depiction is noteworthy and remarkable. He states that “In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth” [5,6].

In the story 'Pre-Red- Tape Days' Corbett has mentioned the character of Tilni, a tribal hill woman from the Terai community. Ibbotson the then district officer was there to resolve the legal issues if the Indian people Corbett was also with him. The case was between Tilni, Chadi and Kalu. The three characters are from the Terai community, Chadi the one who submitted the petition, against Kalu who was accused and Tilni for whom the petition was filed. Chadi accused Kalu that he made advances towards Tilni, his wife and abducted her by force against her will. However, when called upon, Tilni clarified that she left voluntarily because of her husband's pinch penny nature. And now she doesn't want to stay with Chadi and will stay with Kalu. The case was about to settle initially with the compensation amount to Chadi as Tilni was going to stay with Kalu. However, a sudden change took place as a factual detail comes into the focus that Kalu already has a wife. But Tilni voluntarily come forward and took responsibility of Kalu's old wife. She called her sister and said that she will share the food and clothes with her. Even she gave her the new Hut, which was built by Kalu for her. Even Chadi took back his accusations against Kalu and returned his money and stated that now Kalu have more person to take care of. Thus the petition was cancelled by the man himself. About Tilni Corbett states that Tilni was an eighteen year young girl of an Indian tribe from Terai region. Corbett explained her beauty to the readers as an young attractive girl, her clothing was the typical highland costume a white-bordered black sari and tight fitting red bodice her traditionally styled cone shaped hair completed her attire. She was the representative of tribal women of Terai region. The character of Tilni is an astonishing character portrayed by Jim Corbett. He represents many good characteristics of her to the reader. Tilni is portrayed as a brave young girl, who is clear in her thought, compassionate towards other, make her impression as an independent courageous and confident woman. Tilni's confidence is reflected from her behavior as well as through her dialogues. She is aware about her rights as a wife at the same time she vindicates her own demands. Her compassion towards Kalu's first wife shows her humanity, she is ready to share her hut with her. [7]

While depicting the character of Tilni Corbett states the following lines:

Tilni was a pretty young woman, perhaps eighteen years old, with neat legs. Her costume was finished with a voluminous, vibrantly colored skirt, a tight-fitting red corset covering her

upper body, and her hair styled in the traditional Terai women's fashion, a foot-high cone, wrapped with a black sari with a white border.

In the above extract Corbett gives picturesque description of Tilni's beauty. Further he states about her case and her stand in the case. [8]

"Look at him," she responded, pointing to Chadi when Anderson asked her why she had left her husband. As you can see, in addition to being filthy, he is also a miser; in the two years that we have been married, he has not given me any jewelry or clothing. As she touched a few silver bangles on her wrists and multiple strings of glass beads around her neck, she remarked, "These clothes that you are looking at and this jewelry were given to me by Kalu." Tilni shrugged her head when asked if she would be willing to return to Chadi, saying that nothing would persuade her to do so.

Tilni is presented as a representative of the Terai tribe of the highland. Corbett praises this tribe for two conspicuous qualities the cleanliness the independent nature of the Womens. This independent spirit is present in Tilni and exactly the same is represented by Corbett. [9]

Another woman character that is mentioned in the first story of the book that is entitled as 'Queen of the Village'. The title of the story is derived from a woman character who was working as a Headman of a village after her husband's death. In this same tale the Queen of the Village Jim Corbett provides us details of the attire, apparel and drapery of the Indian hill Women's, the ornaments they wear and the pride associated with the ornaments, their way of securing and hiding ornaments and valuable items, the cast based variances in attire and apparel and the connotations that associate with the specific clothes and the way they wear them. Dirks comments: "Under colonialism (caste) was anchored to the service of a colonial interest in maintaining social order, justifying colonial power, and sustaining a very particular form of indirect rule"

With the help of this character Corbett has elaborated many things, he comments on the cast system prevailing in India, the drapery and the ornaments used by Indian women.

He tells reader this woman can be a head woman not because of her ability or anything else but because she is a high cast in the Indian society. 'Pride of pure ancestry is inherent in all men, but nowhere is there greater respect for pure ancestry than there is in India ... her rule is never questioned and her word is law, not because of the strong arm of retainers, for of these she has none, but because she is a 'Brahmin'.

Corbett elaborates the clothing of the woman as well 'Her dress is the same as that worn by all high-caste hill women: a shawl, a tight- fitting bodice of warm material, and a voluminous sprint skirt. Her feet are bare, for even in these advanced days the wearing of shoes among our hill folk denotes that the wearer is unchaste.

The details about the attire, apparels and the belief system and connotative meanings behind the bare foot presence of the high-cast women are mentioned. It also provides the insights that how the Indians were safeguarding their valuables in their own houses. These details cater information and knowledge of Indian household to readers, more specifically the European readers. [10]

Another two woman characters that are mentioned by Corbett are Mothi's Wife and her daughter Kunthi. Mothi's Wife: The wife of Mothi was portrayed as stout, but hardcore women, who never back down from her responsibility. With her younger children's at her hand she believes in hard work and invests in building a better future with it. The discipline she imbibe in her children, the manners and the values reflected in her behavior reflects the Indians, the Indian family and its belief system. The women of our foothills are the hardest workers in India, and the hardest working of them all was Mothi's widow.

The Indian family values and the elders love for their children and grandchildren is recorded in this tale. Whatever the legacy they hold they want to pass it on to the next generation and they are willing to struggle and work hard for that. This rich value system in the family is represented by Corbett when he explains how Mothi's wife in her old age as well working hard to keep her children and grandchildren happy.

*Kunthi*: Kunthi the second eldest, a hardworking daughter of a hardworking mother. She helped her mother in every task. The tasks she performs are multiple, its amount is huge and the consistency is astounding. She cooks food, wash clothes, fetch water from irrigation, collect firewood from the jungle, milk the Cows, cut the crops, winnow the wheat and many more.

## CONCLUSION

The woman characters are mentioned under positive light by Corbett. They are portrayed as a representative of the hardworking and proud woman characters of India. The character of Tilni is praised for her courage and sympathetic nature towards other. She was strong and firm towards her need and right. Also she treats other with compassion. Corbett has given her individuality. The character of village queen is not mentioned by her name. Corbett praises her beauty and her administration over the village. Character of Mothi's wife and his daughter represent the hard work and the major role performed by the woman's in their household. One could argue that Jim Corbett's portrayal of colonial women is significant and favorable.

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