

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Indian Jungle Topography in Corbett's Works**

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## CHAPTER - II

# INDIAN JUNGLE TOPOGRAPHY IN CORBETT'S WORKS

### A) Introduction:

This chapter puts in brief the features and significance of Indian forests and the topography at the foothills of Himalaya near Naini Tal and Kaladhungi as recorded by Jim Corbett in his *Jungle Lore* and *My India*.

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines topography as "Description of the features, e.g. rivers, valleys, roads, of a place or district." <sup>1</sup>

It is mainly jungle topography. Here an attempt is made to bring out the ecological infrastructure of geographical location at Naini Tal and Kaladhungi, with its geographical features, climate and vegetation as well as the forests in Jim Corbett's time.

### B) Forests in India:

India is known for many centuries as the land of forests filled with wild beasts and serpents. India is gifted with beautiful natural landscapes. Till the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century deep forests covered major part of the country. The history of the forests in India is related to the history of civilization.

The origin of Indian Civilization dates back much before the advent of the Aryans. It is a remarkable fact that the causes of the extinction of the Indus Valley Civilization are unknown. There is no clear evidence if it perished because of the wars with the foreign invaders or internal conflicts or because of the break-down of the

eco-system they sustained upon. Many sociologists and environmentalists believe that the tribals have lived in harmony with forests for thousands of years. This harmony was maintained by their small population. Their requirements were less or equal to the annual yield of forests.

Various types of forests exist in India. Dense forests are found in the heavy rainfall areas comprising the ranges of the Himalaya, their foothills and the North-Eastern hills. In these forests trees like Rosewood, Ebony, Sheesham, Bamboo, Cane etc. are found.

Evergreen forests are found at the foothills of Himalayas. The deciduous forests grow well in the areas of low rainfall (200 cm). In the dry season, when the humidity of air decreases, the trees shed their leaves. Trees such as Sal, Teak, Palash, Arjun, Moha, Peepal, Bamboo etc. are found in these forests.

Several thousand species of plants are found in India. Diversity of fauna in the country is also remarkable. The country has about three hundred fifty species of mammals, twelve hundred species of birds and more than twenty thousand species of insects. The tropical forests are rich in plants and animal species. Each species has to perform its specific role, which is integrated in the ecological system.

The existing forest cover in India is 23.81%, i.e. 778 lac. hectares.<sup>2</sup> It is desirable that there should be at least 33% area under forest cover in the region.

### C) Indian Jungle Topography in Corbett's Works :

Jim Corbett spent his childhood in both Naini Tal and Kaladhungi. Though he stayed in Mokameh Ghat for a temporary period he returned after his forties to Naini Tal for a permanent settlement. As such the topographical sketches in the selected works center around two places viz., Naini Tal and Makameh Ghat. He states,

“The scenes of my sketches centre  
round these two points in India :  
Naini Tal and Mokameh Ghat”.<sup>3</sup>

The hill station Naini Tal is located on the southern slopes of the middle Himalayas. Naini Tal literally means “The Lake of Goddess Naini.”<sup>4</sup> There is a legend behind its sacred origin. According to the *Skanda-Puran*, three ancient sages, viz. Atri, Pulastya and Pulaha to quench their thirst dug a hole at the foot of the hill and brought water into it from the sacred lake in Tibet, viz. Manasarowar.<sup>5</sup>

It was covered with dense forests and surrounded by Siwalik mountain hills. The British officer, Mr. Barron of Shahajahanpur discovered this beautiful lake in 1841.<sup>6</sup> Then he took initiative to establish a colony. After two years of its exploration, Naini Tal became prospering British settlement. Later on, it became the summer capital of the United Provinces.

In the introduction of *My India* Corbett brings out accurately the significance of Naini Tal topography referring to the map of India.<sup>7</sup> It was the summer capital of U.P. Govt. crowded by Europeans and rich Indians for six months from the summer.

There are three belts of the country between the foothills of Himalayas and the main railway that runs between Calcutta and the Punjab. The average width of this belt is forty miles. Jim Corbett divides the area into three parts.<sup>8</sup> A cultivated belt of some twenty miles wide, then a grass belt of ten miles wide known as the Terai and third the tree belt of ten miles wide known as Bhabar.<sup>9</sup> The Bhabar belt extends upto the foothills. There are number of small villages on the rich fertile soil in the Bhabar belt established by clearing the forest, Kaladhungi is fifteen miles away from Naini Tal and at the upper end of this village there is Choti Haldwani, which was reestablished by Jim Corbett. The low hills between Kaladhungi and the mountain peak, Cheena were densely covered with Sal trees.<sup>10</sup>

Jim's father built a large house for winter resort<sup>6</sup> viz. 'The Corbett House' on a donated plot at Kaladhungi. It was located on the edge of the jungle. Jungle was in his backyard; he called it "The Farm Yard". Before joining the school Jim had explored every corner of his farmyard. He learnt lessons about jungle in an area of the forest near Garuppun, seven miles from Kaladhungi, thick with wild palm trees.<sup>11</sup>

While commenting on the changing jungle environment Corbett observes,

"In my lifetime I have seen great changes in the forests of Terai and Bhabar. Some of these changes have resulted from exploitation, others have been brought about in natural manner."<sup>12</sup>

He observed that in some areas dense virgin forest was replaced by scrub jungle and the open grassland and plum bushes were replaced by forest. e.g. The south-east jungle of Garuppun.<sup>13</sup>

After completing school education , Jim accepted the job of a fuel inspector at Mokameh Ghat to shoulder the family responsibilities. So he left Kaladhungi for Mokameh Ghat. His job was to supervise the felling of timber and its transportation to the nearest railway line from the forest. However, when he stayed at Bakhtiyarpur for his job, again he was in touch with the jungle life.

Later on, he accepted the contract from the railways for handling the transshipment of goods across the Ganges at Mokameh Ghat. It was a key junction towards Calcutta. Corbett has drawn few character-sketches from Mokameh Ghat. There he missed the jungles of Naini Tal and Kaladhungi. He could enjoy only fishing there. However, he spent a lot of time in the study of bird life and collection of butterflies.<sup>14</sup> He lived there for about twenty two years. But during his contract period with the railway he spent many holidays at Kaladhungi and kept acquaintance with the wild life and jungle folk.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Jim Corbett spent his life-time in Kumaon region, at Naini Tal and Kaladhungi. He was in love with Kumaon and Kumaoni people. He had completely identified himself with the local region and therefore he was able to depict jungles of Kumaon realistically. When he decided to leave India, in 1947 his sister Maggie thus wrote,

“It was hard for us to imagine ourselves living anywhere but in India. Our home and the home of our ancestors, which was so dearly loved with its simple, kindly people with its beautiful mountains, lakes and rivers all seemed a part of ourselves;”<sup>16</sup>

He was able to describe the jungles, flora and fauna so accurately because of his first hand knowledge acquired during his lifetime. For example, description of the village in *Queen of the Village* is very vivid.<sup>17</sup> He describes the villages from the top of the mountain peak, Cheena like a birds-eye view. He describes the narrow terraced fields and stone houses with great accuracy.

When Jim Corbett gives account of his childhood hunting expeditions, he presents accurate topography of the lake Sarya Tal. He has described the jungle on the edge of the valley.<sup>18</sup> Similarly he has described the hunting of jungle – fowls near the Garuppu road below Naya Gaon.<sup>19</sup>

His description of jungle topography is not very broad and general but it is very precise and graphic. For example, even the cursory reading of the description of the fight between an angry elephant and a pair of tigers will illustrate this remark.<sup>20</sup> Jim Corbett was reported about this fight by the Naib-Tahsildar of Tanakpur and he went to that location and guessed the encounter in the topographical situation. He describes the sight of Sarda river, with geographical details. Corbett presents topography of the jungle adjoining his farm yard. He has described the two watercourses covered with sandy beds meeting at the lower end of his estate. He

carefully provides the exact length and width of the strip of jungle between the two watercourses.<sup>21</sup>

Corbett is very careful about presenting the topography more effectively and realistically. While narrating a jungle story he depicts jungle topography very accurately In *The Brothers*<sup>22</sup> so that readers visualize the topography of that spot where an angry tiger attacked on Narwa. He has described in detail the tree and grass jungle, the valley and footpath passing through it . With his keen sense of observation he has reported that the same footpath was used by the tigers also.

Corbett portrays accurate topography of the jungle to comment on the natural phenomenon like a forest fire. He narrates,

“For a half mile the watercourse runs through scrub jungle before entering a strip of grass a quarter of a mile long. Nal grass is hollow, jointed like bamboo, grows to a height of fourteen feet,-----<sup>23</sup>.

Thus Corbett shows the skill of presenting the facts and correct information about the jungle.

The character-sketch of Kunwarsingh helps us to know how he developed the skill of jungle reading.<sup>24</sup> Corbett admits that he learnt to read jungle from Kunwarsingh in the early career. He learnt from him the skill of making mental maps of the jungle. He mentions the manner of recording the maps as follows –

“We had a name for every outstanding tree, and for every water hole, game track and mullah. All our distances were measured by imaginary height of a bullet fixed from a



muzzle-loader, and all our directions fixed by the four points of the compass.”<sup>25</sup>

One comes to know, therefore, that Corbett has developed a great skill of presenting jungle topography accurately. For example, the Haldu tree and the Runi tree are referred to as landmarks in the jungle by Jim Corbett. He says,

“The Runi tree became a----Some twenty five years later It Was destroyed by forest fire.”<sup>26</sup>

To sum up, this chapter shows Corbett’s skill in presenting Indian topography as the background to the life in jungle. He has vividly and graphically described the region in very simple language. The region and the land come to life in his works by its pictorial quality. It is noteworthy because the jungle side life is remote, unfamiliar and thus romantic to the civilians. But Corbett’s vivid description of Indian topography around Naini Tal and Kaladhugi give the readers satisfaction of witnessing the landscape from the close quarters.

Since his childhood, the landscape he has seen was well wooded and picturesque. He refers repeatedly to his early home and the scenery around on that landscape. An exact picture of the scene as it still exists around ‘The Corbett House’ occurs in his works.

Corbett developed wandering-thrust for the jungles and during these trips he observed the scenery that forms the background of his jungle stories. He learnt to read his native country and retained lasting impressions of the landscape. They are reproduced in his stories. Corbett’s birthplace adjoining the

jungle, resulted in his intimate acquaintance with the wildlife, and village life with all their aspects and the same he portrayed realistically with all its hue and colour in his jungle works.

The jungle topography is the significant background to the wild life and the tribal life recorded by Corbett in his selected works. As such the ensuing two chapters focus on the wild life and the tribal life as occurred in the said works.

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