

## Mowgli Land: Of Tigers and Kipling

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In the predawn darkness, a sign, poorly illuminated by a single lightbulb, featured a color photograph of a snarling leopard. The sign read: “Thanks for visiting Pench National Park/ The Mowgli Land.” This was followed two lines in Hindi script. Yes, this was India and my wife and I were on a wildlife expedition to several of the iconic National Wildlife Parks of the subcontinent.

“So, what is Mowgli Land?” I asked Marco Tonoli, our excellent South African expedition leader. He was astounded that I never had heard of Mowgli, the hero of Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*. Somehow, I had skirted through life not even having seen Walt Disney’s 1967 animated adaptation. When I informally ask friends if they recognize the name “Mowgli?” My question draws a blank from roughly half while the remainder recognize the name from having seen the Disney film. Full disclosure, my limited survey is skewed to a Medicare crowd. So far, I have only identified one friend who actually had read Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*.

Somehow, I felt that tigers, and Kipling’s *Jungle Books* were part of a story I wanted to pursue. To be clear, Kipling never used the expression “Mowgli Land.” Through Mowgli’s fame, the park sought to promote tourism to Pench National Park.

If you start to look for them, tigers suddenly seem to be everywhere. It wasn’t all that long ago that Esso would have us put a tiger in our tank, there are “Tiger Moms,” the father of a future golfing legend saw fit to name his son, Tiger Woods, a squadron of World War II fighter

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planes dubbed themselves “The Flying Tigers,” the Detroit Tigers first graced the baseball diamond in 1894 and are still alive albeit a struggling member of the American League. In his novel, *The Life of Pi*,” Yann Martel places his protagonist “Pi” in a life boat with a Bengal Tiger. Inexplicably, there is a Tiger Beer, and a Tiger Emoji. In India, the tiger is used to promote any and all commercial ends. Fascinating though it might be and whatever it is about a tiger that evokes this plethora of tiger trivia, it will concern us no further.

Viewing a tiger in the wild is uppermost in the minds of tourists who visit the Tiger Reserves of India. We do not come to see a tiger pace endlessly in the confines of a cage, but free and in the wild. Excitement and anxiety are part of the visit since it is by no means guaranteed that a tiger will be seen. In the 1990s, my wife and I visited Tiger Tops, a nature reserve in Nepal. For several rainy days we rode in *howdahs* atop elephants through fields of tall elephant grass. We learned many fascinating facts about domestic Asian elephants, but never saw a tiger.

For millennia India provided the ideal “Jungle” habitat for the tiger. When the first Europeans arrived, the animal was ubiquitous. At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when Kipling wrote *The Jungle Books*, 100,000 tigers were thought to roam the subcontinent. By 1971, a critical year in the history of tiger conservation, only 1,800 animals remained in the wild. Today those numbers have almost doubled through the efforts of Project Tiger. ***(More on this to follow)*** While the Indian tiger reserves are quite large, the complex requirements for an ideal tiger habitat can support only a small number of tigers in even the most successful parks. Of the fifty National Tiger Reserves in India, only five have over 100 resident cats. For example, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in Northeast India has the highest density of tigers in the world with a

population of 118 cats. Many reserves have even fewer numbers, thus explaining the difficulty sighting a solitary animal that seeks not to be seen. Brian Phillips in his 2018 essay 'Man-Eaters' notes that "there is a sun-faded sign outside a densely forested jungle reserve in Central India, (Bandhavgarh), featuring a picture of a tiger and next to the tiger the sign reads: PERHAPS YOU MAY NOT HAVE SEEN ME, BUT PLEASE DON'T BE DISAPPOINTED. I HAVE SEEN YOU."

There has been a dramatic human encroachment and fragmentation of tiger habitat in the subcontinent. The human population of India during the three-hundred years leading up to the twentieth century was stable at approximately 200 million. Since 1900, India's population has increased to over 1.4 billion persons in an area approximately one third that of the continental United States. This translates into a population density of 1,200 persons per square mile in India compared to 93 persons per square mile in the continental United States.

The Pench Tiger Reserve or Pench National Park is one of the premier tiger reserves of India. It is located in Central India in the state of Madhya Pradesh and nestled in the southern slopes of the Satpura mountain range. The Satpura mountain range is one of two east-west ranges that divide the Indian subcontinent into the Indo-Gangetic plane of northern India and the Deccan plateau of the south. The Pench Tiger reserve is named for the Pench river which flows through the park from north to south to form a boundary between the Seoni and Chhindwara districts.

The first story in *The Jungle Books*, 'Mowgli's Brothers' begins, "It was seven o'clock of a very warm evening in the Seoni [Seoni] hills when. . ."<sup>2</sup> Kipling's earliest draft set Mowgli's

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<sup>2</sup> Kipling uses an unusual spelling as the standard one at that time was 'Seoni.'

Jungle in the Aravulli hills in Rajasthan. The Aravulli Hills was an area Kipling knew well having worked there as a special correspondent for the Indian newspaper, *The Pioneer* in 1887. Kipling deliberately moved the location of Mowgli's jungle to the Seoni Hills, part of the Satpura Mountain Range so as to distance himself from his own experiences in India. Though he had never visited Seoni, his friends, Alexander and Edmonia (known as Ted) Hill, had shared their experiences and photographs with him. He also took details from Robert Armatage Sterndale's *Seonee or Camp Life on the Satpura Range* (1877).

*The Jungle Books* were written far from India in Brattleboro, Vermont during the early 1890s. In 1892, while on a honeymoon journey in Japan with his bride Carrie (nee Balesteir), Kipling lost his entire savings of 2000 pounds when the New Oriental Banking Company failed. The couple was forced to borrow funds in order to return to Vermont where Carrie's family resided. Kipling recalled the winter of '92 with the "snow at the window-sill" in his autobiography *Something of Myself*:

"It chanced that I had written a tale about Indian Forestry work which included a boy who had been brought up by wolves. In the stillness and suspense, of the winter of '92 some memory of Masonic Lions of my childhood's magazine, and a phrase in Haggard's *Nada the Lily*, combined with the echo of this tale. After blocking out the main idea in my head, the pen took charge, and I watched it begin to write stories about Mowgli and animals, which later grew into the *Jungle Books*."<sup>3</sup>

By the time he came to write *The Jungle Books*, Kipling's reputation as an author was well established. During the 1880s he had worked as a reporter for newspapers in both Lahore and Allahabad. *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Kipling's first collection of short stories gave the

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<sup>3</sup> The "Masonic Lions" refers to James Greenwood's *Lion King*, serialized in *Boy's Own Magazine* from January to December 1864.

British reading public a well-received view of India and the Anglo-Indian Community. His experiences during these years shaped his future writing career.

Our adventure began in late March 2019 in the Satpura National Park north of Pech just before the summer monsoon season. Satpura is dominated by the sal tree, while Pech features a moist deciduous teak dominated forest; a curious phenomenon dividing the subcontinent in an east-west boundary. At the time of our visit the trees had few leaves, an ideal time for sighting wildlife. If this was the setting for *The Jungle Books*, to our eyes the reserves looked like the forests in Wisconsin or Michigan in late fall. Why had Kipling chosen to use the word 'Jungle' which conjures up a lush tropical landscape? Reflecting the Indian setting, the word 'Jungle' comes from the ancient Sanskrit term *jangli* and refers to wild forests filled with dangerous beasts and tigers in particular.

Our visit included four of the most famous tiger reserves of India: Satpura, Pech and Kanha located in central India and Kaziranga in the northeast foothills of the Himalayas. To have the best chance of seeing a tiger, our day began well before dawn. Our small group assembled for coffee and quickly jumped onto the back of jeeps outfitted with open benches behind the driver for viewing the wildlife. It was a cold windy ride to the entrance gate passing through local villages that lay outside the park. Layered clothes and blankets were a must. The sky was black and filled with stars. A full moon was beautifully illuminated and unlike Chicago, the planets Venus, Mars and Jupiter were clearly visible. As the first light of the morning was appearing in the sky, we arrived at the entrance gate in time to join a small caravan of vehicles queued up along the side of the road. While we waited for the guides to purchase our entrance passes, the air was pierced by the shrill birdcall. "*Brain fever, brain fever,*" the cry of the

common hawk-cuckoo, *a cuckoo-resident* of the Indian subcontinent. Their repetitive three note call commences well before dawn and can be heard throughout the day.

The parks admit their first visitors just after 6 AM. Vehicle traffic in the parks was very orderly. The dirt roads fan out in multiple directions and the park guides and drivers all have their favorite areas to explore. The roads went deep into the forest and cellphone communication between drivers was prohibited to prevent a mad crush of vehicles rushing to an area where a tiger was sighted.

Illustrating the point that seeing a tiger was not always a certainty, during our three “game” drives at Satpura Tiger Reserve, which served as a wonderful introduction to the flora and fauna of the park and included a dramatic view of a leopard at night and during the day, my wife and I did not see a tiger. It was at Pench that we had our first sighting. The guides and drivers are drawn from the local villages. They have a wonderful understanding of the forest and are skilled in tracking the animals. They attentively listen to the sounds of the jungle and can “read” the alarm calls of birds, deer and monkeys when a tiger is moving through the forest. The first tiger we observed in this setting quietly walked out of the woods in the early morning light. One moment we were scanning the underbrush of the forest not knowing what to expect and suddenly there he was, a fully-grown male emerged into full view. His stripes, coloration and powerful build were thrilling to behold.

Deliberately, never looking from side to side, he circled a pond and moved down a well-traveled path leading into the water. He noiselessly submerged most of his body in the water reclining on his right side with his head and neck above the bank. In that position, he would intermittently scan the pond or lay his head down to doze. As the heat of the morning rose, the

rays of the sun passed over the tiger and onto the water, the dappled light obscuring the tiger's presence. Airborne insects flitted through the beams of light illuminating the brackish water. The tiger seemed to be oblivious to the vehicles gathering on the opposite side of the pool. The only indication that he was aware of our presence was a flicker of his ears when a car started its engine. We observed him in this position for about an hour thinking he might move on, but he was clearly enjoying the coolness of the water and never changed his position.

Returning late in the afternoon for a second game drive of the day, we found the tiger in the same position. With the sun now coming over our shoulders and beautifully illuminating the tiger, the scene was ideal for photography. Perched on scattered branches that rose out of the water were several iconic birds of India: a King Fisher, an Indian Cormorant, and a Red-wattled Lapwing. On the far side of the pond on a sandy area leading into the water, shore birds explored the shallows and several Spotted Deer cautiously came to drink.

Our second tiger sighting was at the Kanha Tiger Reserve a few hour's drive northeast of Pench Tiger reserve. In the early morning, we came upon a female tiger and her almost full-grown cub just as they entered a small lake at the edge of the forest. Both animals bathed for about 20 minutes and then left the water and disappeared into the forest.

Tigers are solitary hunters and with the exception of a female and her cubs, are usually seen alone. They establish and maintain territories by spraying their urine or depositing scat, by their distinctive pug marks (foot tracks) and by prominently scratching trees. Male tigers generally require up to 40 square miles of territory while females less. Young females generally establish territories close to their mothers while young males migrate farther and seek new

territory free of other males. They may remain in the territory of another male until they are strong enough to challenge the older male, but many perish in this endeavor.

The Bengal tiger is the iconic animal of the subcontinent and the apex predator of the Indian Jungle. While the impressive dark mane of the African male lion earns the sobriquet “King of the Beasts,” both in length and weight, he comes in a significant second to the Bengal tiger. The tiger is not invulnerable and can be fatally injured attacking one of its larger prey. For example, the Indian Gaur, the largest bovine in peninsular India weighing up to 2000 pounds. There is even hazard in attacking the lowly Indian Crested Porcupine. Its long quills embedded in the paw or body of an inexperienced young tiger may lead to infection and death. One morning we observed a group of park rangers riding domesticated Asian Elephants in search of a tiger that had been sighted with quills embedded in its neck.

As a mammal, the tiger is an obligate carnivore and a member of the family known as the *Felidae*. As a species the tiger is designated by its Linnaean classification as *Panthera tigris*, and the Bengal tiger, a subspecies is designated *Panthera tigris, tigris*. While there is a wide spectrum of variation in the *Felidae* family in size, color, and coat pattern, they are still all instantly recognizable as cats. From the common domestic cat to its largest members, the Bengal or Siberian tiger, all *Felidae* share certain common traits. They all have five toes on their forefeet and four on their hindfeet. Their claws are actively protractile and attached to the terminal bones of the toe. As carnivores, they share a similar dental formula adapted to cutting and tearing flesh. They have highly sensitive whiskers on the face used to navigate in the dark. Their eyes are relatively large and feature several anatomical adaptations that enhance night vision. Tigers are crepuscular, they hunt primarily in the twilight and at night. It is said that if



you stripped all the domestic and wild cats down to their skeletons, save for small details, they would appear quite alike, a testimony to the elegance of their basic design.

The tiger, as might be supposed, did not evolve and migrate out of Africa. Its ancestors first appeared two million years ago in Asia. Historically, the range of the tiger extended throughout Asia from eastern Siberia to the islands of Indonesia and west to the Caspian Sea.<sup>4</sup> With the expansion of human populations throughout the world and rising sea levels, tiger populations became isolated and differentiated into a number of subspecies. The Indian tiger has always been the most numerous, other subspecies were isolated in Indonesia including: the Bali tiger, the Javan tiger and the Sumatran tiger. Elsewhere in Asia, we find the South China tiger and the Amur tiger also known as the Siberian tiger.<sup>5</sup> The number of tigers outside of India drastically plummeted during the twentieth century to numbers that are barely sustainable. The now extinct Caspian tiger was last sighted in Iran in 1964. The South China tiger is the most threatened of the tiger subspecies. In the late 1950s, there were thought to be 3000 to 4000 of these cats in southern and eastern China. Mao Zedong instituted an ambitious program to eradicate them as “pests” employing the Chinese military to hunt and kill them. Recognizing his

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<sup>4</sup> DNA technology has revolutionized the study of *Felidae* evolution. Geneticists subdivide the cat family into thirty-seven species that fall into eight distinct lineages. The evolution of the cat family began almost eleven million years ago (mya). The Big Cats, or the *Panthera* lineage appeared over six million mya currently represented by the lion, the jaguar, the tiger, the leopards including the snow leopard and cloud leopard. Vivek Menon’s field guide to *Indian Mammals* lists fourteen species of *Felidae* endemic to the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>5</sup> A tiger subspecies that has received significant attention is the Amur or Siberian tiger. There are perhaps 500 of these Amurs in the unpopulated conifer forests of eastern Russia. At one time they were believed to be the largest of the *Panthera* subspecies weighing in excess of 700 pounds. Currently they are found to be slightly smaller than the Indian tiger; adult males weighing approximately 500 pounds and adult females approximately 400 pounds.

countrymen's appetite for tiger parts, Mao harvested the kill for tiger bones that were stockpiled and sold for Chinese traditional medical practices.

Tigers figure prominently in the cultural history of India. The earliest humans of the subcontinent were hunter gatherers, tribal people called *Adivasis*. Their descendants make up approximately 9% of the Indian population today and can be still found among the forest dwellers of India. The tiger is fundamental to their cosmology. The *Naga* of eastern India believed that man and tiger were brothers. For the *Warli* of western India, the tiger was a god and for the *Bhils* of Rajasthan, all men were descended from the tiger. *The Mahabharata*, the Sanskrit epic poem of India dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C counsels:

“Do not cut down the forest with its tigers and do not banish the tigers from the forest. The tiger perishes without the forest and the forest perishes without tigers. Therefore, the tigers should stand guard over the forest and the forest should protect all its tigers.”

Hindus venerate the tiger. The great mother goddess *Durga* who protects the people from evil and preserves the moral order, is depicted riding a tiger. *Shiva* the destroyer, who embodies the energy of creation, is often represented sitting on a tiger skin.

Following Indian Independence in 1947, *shikar* (tiger hunting) became a major 'sport' bringing much-needed foreign exchange into the country. Tiger skins were a much sought-after trophy as they were during the Raj. In 1970 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi banned tiger shooting over the objections of the *shikar* lobby: “We do need foreign exchange, but not at the cost of life and liberty of some of the most beautiful inhabitants of this continent.”

In April 1973, responding to fears that this iconic animal of the Indian subcontinent would become extinct, the Indian Government with the support of Indira Gandhi launched

Project Tiger. The aim of the project was to ensure a viable population of Bengal tigers and preserve their natural habitat.<sup>6</sup> Tiger reserves were created on a 'core-buffer' strategy. The core areas were to be free of human activity with the status of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Buffer areas surrounding the parks would consist of forest and non-forest land serving to protect the villages from tigers or leopards that might stray beyond the core areas. A system was developed to compensate villagers for the loss of livestock killed by these predators. Implementing this plan required relocation of villages outside the core areas on a voluntary basis. Riding from the lodges to the parks gave us a view of the agricultural activities and life of the villagers. In the parks there were large open meadows and plentiful deer in places where villages and their cultivated fields once existed.

Protecting the tigers from poaching and minimizing human/tiger interaction has been a major challenge facing Project Tiger. The history of Man-Eating Tigers in India testifies to the terrifying impact that even a single animal that has acquired a taste for human flesh can have on forest dwelling communities. Villagers had to be convinced of the benefit the Tiger Reserves provided to the community. Today, the reserves and national parks through the tourists they attract, provide career opportunities for the young men and women of the villages as guides and forest rangers. The lodges outside the parks afford further employment opportunities and income for the community.

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<sup>6</sup> A successful tiger habitat requires a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Thirty-five mammalian species are found within the reserves and include: leopards, wild dogs, wild cats, foxes, wolves, sloth bears, primates and jackals. Herbivores are the essential tiger prey and are plentiful in these parks. They include: gaur, sambar deer, spotted deer, hog deer, Barasingha, and swamp deer. Kaziranga Tiger Reserve is notable for its large population of wild water buffalo, Asian elephants and one-horned rhinoceros.

In 2018, a report estimated that the number of tigers in these reserves had risen to almost 3,000, accounting for 80 percent of the tigers in the world still living in the wild. The increase from a nadir of 1800 in 1973 represents a slow but definite progress in saving the tiger from extinction. Fragmentation of tiger habitat is a further challenge facing Project Tiger. In an effort to reduce inbreeding, the Tiger Conservation Authority is creating corridors connecting the tiger reserves to accommodate the large territorial needs of male tigers.

Many of the animals indigenous to Central India make their appearance in *The Jungle Books*. Though Rudyard Kipling was not a naturalist, his stories are credibly set in the forests of Pench National Park. Kipling used details from Sterndale's *Natural History of the Mammalia of India and Ceylon (1884)*.

Kipling enjoyed a close personal and working relationship with his father John Lockwood Kipling. His father was a gifted artist and illustrator who at the time of Kipling's birth in late December 1865, was teaching at a newly founded school, the Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy School of Art and Industry in Bombay. It was his father who provided illustrations for the first editions of *The Jungle Books*. Kaori Nagai's informative introduction to the 2013 Penguin Edition of *The Jungle Books* describes these stories as an "imaginative reworking" of John Lockwood Kipling's *Beast and Man in India (1891)* asserting that "Father and son shared similar perception of and an adoring gaze towards, animals ..."

Having spent the first six years of his life in Bombay, Rudyard and his sister Alice, known as 'Trix,' were taken back to England to begin their education. Kipling returned to India in 1882 when he was sixteen to begin his career in journalism. He joined his family in Lahore where his father had moved to become the curator in the National Museum of Art. In the opening chapter

of his novel *Kim*, Kipling used his father as his model for the curator of the National Museum who reveals to Kim and his *lama* or holy man the cultural treasures of India.

*The Jungle Books* grow out of a Western tradition of animal fables harkening back to those of Aesop. Kipling was also influenced by classic Indian texts such as the Jataka tales; Buddhist fables and parables telling of Buddha's previous incarnations in animal forms.<sup>7</sup>

In traditional animal fables, the beasts are stand-ins for various human types and the stories are satires on human society. *The Jungle Books* may be read as an allegory for "imperialism, racial politics, childhood, or anything else we care to read into the text." However, Kipling's "borrowings from the ancient genre of beast fables," place his stories more in the Eastern tradition of "universal brotherhood among living creatures."

*The Jungle Books* and his *Just So Stories* are classified as children's literature, a publishing category that emerged in the Victorian era. W.H. Auden wrote, "there are good books which are only for adults, because their comprehension presupposes adult experiences, but there are no good books which are only for children." Children's books become adult literature when they are really good. Auden was speaking of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, but his remarks easily apply to Kipling's *The Jungle Books*.

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<sup>7</sup> A telling example is the tale of 'The Brahman, the Tiger and the Six Judges.' A caged tiger pleads with a passing Brahman to release him so he may quench his thirst. The Brahmin at first declines fearing that the tiger will eat him, but feeling pity for the beast, he finally consents. Released, the Tiger reveals his intention to eat the Brahmin first and drink later. The Brahmin persuades the Tiger to submit to the verdict of six judges. The first five judges: the Banyan-tree, the Camel, the Bullock, the Eagle and the Alligator, all have grievances against 'man' and rule that the Tiger should 'eat the man.' The sixth judge, the Jackal, prevails upon the tiger and the Brahman to return to where the case began, where the Brahman stood and the tiger's position within the cage. When the tiger enters the cage, the Jackal closes the cage-door and saves the Brahmin. 'Mowgli's Brothers,' the first story in *The Jungle Books*, features both a fearsome tiger, Shere Kahn, and a clever jackal, Tabaqui.

Writing his autobiography, *Something of Myself*, Kipling would claim that parents were his ultimate target. The author Kingsley Amis describes Kipling as a paternalist.

“Kipling believed in something ill-defined, though practical and unmysterious, called ‘The Law.’ It pervades his *Jungle Books*, *but it has nothing to do with the law of the jungle as we usually think of it (that is, the weak finish last)*. What is envisaged is society as a network of obligations, each individual doing the job appropriate to him to the best of his ability.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1894 Kipling presented his two-year old daughter Josephine with a special copy of *The Jungle Book* inscribed: “This book belongs to Josephine Kipling for whom it was written by her father, May 1894.” An undated photograph of Josephine taken on the porch of “Naulakha,” the house Kipling and his wife Carrie built in Vermont, reveals a beautiful child of perhaps four or five years of age, blond hair and dressed in a white gown. She gazes directly into the camera while seated on a dark wicker chair prominently draped with a tiger skin, a trophy from Kipling’s years in India. In February 1896, Carrie gave birth to their second daughter Elsie. Later that year as a result of an embarrassing quarrel and court action with Carrie’s brother, Beatty Balestier, the family decided to leave Vermont and return to England. Their third child, a son John, was born in August of 1897 while they were living in East Sussex. Two years later Kipling and his family returned to America. When they arrived in New York all three children and Kipling himself were suffering from influenza. Kipling’s condition became critical, his lungs were severely congested, he became feverish and delirious. For weeks his recovery was uncertain. Josephine, who at first seemed to improve, suddenly worsened and died. Her death was a terrible tragedy for Carrie and Rudyard, they returned to England and then on to South Africa

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<sup>8</sup> Rudyard Kipling, Kingsley Aims, *Literary Lives*, Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 55

where Kipling became involved in and reported on the Boer War. They could never bring themselves to return to America or the home they built in Vermont.

The publication of *The Jungle Book* in 1894 was received with great acclaim. Its success was followed by *The Second Jungle Book* published in 1896. The two volumes, collectively *The Jungle Books*, include a total of fifteen stories. They afforded Kipling the opportunity to display his talent for verse. Each story is preceded by a short epigraphic poem and concludes with a longer set of verse paraphrasing the story. Eight of the stories are devoted to Mowgli and his life in the jungle. The non-Mowgli stories as with the Mowgli tales feature animals that talk and interact with humans. The non-Mowgli stories have been overshadowed by Mowgli's fame but are masterpieces in their own right. Five of them retain a setting in India and of those, my personal favorites are 'Servants of the Queen,' and 'The Undertakers.'

Mowgli makes his first appearance in Kipling's short story, 'In the Rukh.' It was written before *The Jungle Books* and first published in the journal *Many Inventions*. The story later appeared with the subtitle: "Mowgli's Introduction to White Men" and is sometimes included in later editions.

In this story Gisborne, a dedicated officer of the Department of Woods and Forests, lives in a bungalow at the edge of the forest with his "Mohammedan" butler, Abdul Gafur. When Gisborne first encounters Mowgli, he is a wild youth, barely clothed with a superior knowledge of the forest and its creatures. Mowgli aides him in tracking a tiger that had killed one of his forest guards. To the disdain of his butler, Gisborne invites him to dinner and learns of his mysterious origins. Gisborne seeks to bring Mowgli out of the jungle and secure a job for him. He introduces Mowgli to his superior, Muller, a "gigantic German" who is the head ranger

of the Woods and Forests for all of India.” Muller is quick to recognize that Mowgli is a true child of nature, suckled by wolves and raised by the animals of the forest. Muller aids Gisborne in his plan to provide Mowgli with an official position. Mowgli and Abdul’s daughter fall in love and she joins him to live in the jungle. The story ends with his daughter nursing their newborn child while Muller takes the credit: “It’s nothing. Gott in Himmel! Und I work miracles – und dey come off too!”<sup>9</sup>

The occurrence of such children was a topic of interest to German anthropologists during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. “*An Account of Wolves nurturing Children in their Dens*,” was published in 1852 by William Henry Sleeman, a British officer and administrator in India. According to accounts, several of these wolf-children when rescued by villagers would “walk on all fours, eat raw meat, and die soon after being captured.” Sleeman’s pamphlet was frequently quoted “during the latter part of the nineteenth century and reinforced by eye-witness accounts.” However, the anthropologist Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900), emphasized that these accounts were “woven from myth and native superstition.” While Kipling’s father felt the topic beyond the scope of his *Beast and Man in India*, his son embraced the idea and fashioned a literary gem.

In the first story, ‘Mowgli’s Brothers,’ we are introduced to the wolf-family just after they have rescued a naked brown baby, a “man cub,” from the tiger Shere Kahn. The jackal, Tabaqui, tells Father Wolf that Shere Kahn, had shifted his hunting grounds and stolen the child

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<sup>9</sup> Muller is based on Berthold Ribbentrop who joined the Indian Forestry Service in 1866 and was the Inspector-General of Forests to the government of India from 1889-1900. He knew Kipling and his father and met Kipling when he worked as a journalist in Lahore.



from the village. In their den, Mother Wolf suckles the infant along with her four wolf cubs. Enchanted by the helpless child, she gives him the name, Mowgli or little frog. Shere Kahn appears demanding the wolves give back the infant, but Father and Mother Wolf chase him away. The story spans ten or twelve years as Mowgli grows with his wolf family. He is then presented for membership in the wolfpack at a special ceremony on council rock. Akela, the leader of the wolfpack, urges for his acceptance, but Shere Kahn, Mowgli's sworn enemy, turns the wolfpack against Akela and Mowgli. Mowgli promises that he will return wearing Shere Khan's coat.

'Kaa's Hunting,' the next Mowgli story, fills in the twelve-year gap with an adventure from the man-cub's education. Baloo, the wise old bear and stand-in for India's indigenous sloth bear, is his teacher. Mowgli is tasked with daily lessons on the Law of the Jungle. Baloo is delighted to have such a quick pupil but doesn't shrink from a gentle cuffing when he falters. This rough treatment causes Mowgli to rebel and run away. He encounters the *Bandar-log*, the monkey people, who carry him far away through the tree tops to an abandoned fortress in the jungle. The monkey people are a lawless group; all too similar to man, they have no respect for the Law of the Jungle. Mowgli is ultimately rescued by Baloo, his teacher, Bagherra, a black panther, and Kaa, a rock snake. He is punished by Bagherra with a half-a-dozen love pats from the panther's point of view, but a severe beating for a seven-year-old boy. He returns to his wolf family a wiser man-cub.

In Kipling's story, Mowgli is carried by two of the strongest of the Monkey-people through the tree tops "fifty to seventy or a hundred feet above the ground" swinging through the tree-tops, "twenty feet at a bound." Kipling's description of the flight of the *Bandar-log*

brought to mind a memorable afternoon just as we were nearing Kaziranga in the state of Assam. Stopping at the side of the highway, we craned our necks to watch a group of gibbons literally fly through the upper branches of a grove of tall trees at the side of the road. The gibbons, with their extraordinarily long arms, almost double the length of their legs are the jungle gymnasts.<sup>10</sup>

‘Tiger – Tiger,’ the title a nod to William Blake, is about Mowgli’s return to the village of his birth. He encounters Messua, who is convinced he is her infant son who was stolen years earlier by a tiger. Mowgli learns the language and ways of the village. He is put to work herding in the fields. While working near the edge of the forest, he meets Akela, now an outcast of the wolfpack, who tells him that Shere Kahn is planning to kill him. Together they drive the bulls of the village into a ravine where Shere Kahn is trampled to death. Mowgli skins the tiger but refuses to give it to the village elder, Buldeo, who wants to collect the 100 rupees the government will pay for the tiger’s coat. Buldeo convinces the villagers that Mowgli is a sorcerer and he is chased from the village. Mowgli takes the tiger skin back to the council rock as he had promised and Akela is restored as leader of the pack. Kipling ends the story telling us that Mowgli went away and hunted with the four wolf-cubs. “But he was not always alone, because years afterward, he became a man and married.” Slyly adding: “But that is a story for grown-ups.”

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<sup>10</sup> Gibbons are the only member of the great apes (*hominids*) indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. The six great apes include; the gorillas, the bonobos, the chimpanzees, the orangutans, the gibbons and *Homo sapiens*.

In Kipling's story, 'How Fear Came,' the elephant Hathi tells the tale of how fear came to the jungle. In the beginning the animals of the jungle ate no meat and did not kill. Tha, the first of all the elephants made the tiger master and judge of the jungle.<sup>11</sup> All the animals brought him their disputes. The tiger was "very beautiful in colour all over like the blossom of the yellow creeper," but he had no stripes. Then the tiger killed a buck and by this act of killing, the tiger brought fear to the jungle. The trees and the creepers remembering the order of Tha, let down their branches and marked him with stripes on his yellow hide, across his flank, his forehead and his jowl: "*And those stripes do his children wear to this day!*" Hathi's tale brings to mind Kipling's *Just So Stories* such as 'How the Leopard Got His Spots' or 'How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin.' The *Just So Stories* were also written in Brattleboro and published in 1902. Quoting Kipling, they inform children what transpired "In the beginning of years, when the world was so new . . ."

"Red Dog," the next to the last story in *The Jungle Books* relates an epic battle that occurs when a large pack of *Dholes*, Indian wild dogs, invade the hunting territory of the wolf-pack. Though greatly outnumbered, Mowgli leads the wolf-pack to victory and though many animals on both sides perish, the *Dholes* are expelled. In the battle Akela is fatally injured. Before dying, he tells Mowgli that he is a man and not a wolf. That he must leave the jungle and return to his own kind.

*Dhole* is the Hindi name for the Indian Wild Dog. As a group they are fearsome predators; ever on the move, they hunt in large packs. They are able to surround larger prey

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<sup>11</sup> Hathi is the Hindi word for elephant; 'Tha' is a name Kipling made up.

and rapidly kill and consume an animal. While in Kanha we observed a group of *Dholes* surround and bring down a large swamp deer in a matter of minutes.

The Mowgli stories are a *bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story. We follow Mowgli from a helpless infant to a self-confident young man. We learn of his education, his mishaps and his triumphs. By the time we reach the final story, 'The Spring Running,' his lair-mother, *Raksha*, and lair-father are dead. Akela, the leader of the wolf pack has died. His protectors and beloved mentors; Baloo, the wise old bear, Kaa, the cobra, and Bagheera, the black panther, tell him he must "make thy lair with thine own blood and pack and people." Some literary critics interpret Mowgli and his Jungle as an Edenic state in contrast to the post-lapsarian state of man represented by the villagers and the village.<sup>12</sup> Little wonder that Mowgli is inconsolable as he contemplates his fate.

I shall end as Kipling ends this last story of *The Jungle Books* - "And this is the last of the Mowgli stories, because there are no more to be told."

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<sup>12</sup> Kipling's Jungle Eden, James Harrison in *Critical Essays on Rudyard Kipling*, Harold Ortel, G.K. Hall & Co., 1989

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