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THE GAZE OF THE COLONIZER: COLONIZING NATURE IN KENNETH ANDERSON'S JUNGLE-NARRATIVES

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Abstract

The paper proposes to analyze the real-life adventure narratives of Kenneth Anderson from an eco-postcolonial perspective in order to find out the difference in perceptions of the white colonialist and the natives regarding nature and wildlife. The paper also intends to see how anthropocentricism of the game-narrators stems from their Eurocentric attitudes, how 'Speceism' is a form of environmental racism, and how power operates in the domain of the privileged speakers, the humans against the mute 'Other', the animal kingdom, the 'natural', and how the equation is directly proportionate to the colonizer-colonized relationship in the political domain, and how one equation corresponds to the other.

A crucial question that remains partly unanswered in several discursive formations in post-colonial studies, as well as nature-studies, is how nature appears to the colonizer and the colonized. How does nature appear in the cultural discourse of the colonizer? Is it merely a category among several others that fall within the ambit of a colonizer's domain of subjugation? Does the colonized land become a metaphor for a larger structure of domination in the socio-economic-cultural spheres? How does nature, or an attitude to it demarcates between colonizer and the colonized? Does the encroachment on nature by civilization effectively and actually is a repetition of racist and imperialist ideologies on a planetary scale? How an adherence to nature, worshiping and fearing it become mediums of passive resistance to the phenomena of categorization, domination, and exploitation? These questions intend to mirror nature as a nexus between the colonizer and the colonized, the civilized and the savage, the ruler and the ruled. In order to address the questions the author proposes to

analyze the representation of the dynamics of relationship between the colonizer and the colonized junglescapes of India in Kenneth Anderson's real life adventure stories. The paper will try to analyze a colonizer's perception of nature, the jungles in India, its vast repertoire of flora and fauna, from a post-colonial/ecocritical perspective, and see if his views regarding the natural world are subject to and moulded by his social position—that of a representative of the ruling class—and if he really takes an anthropocentric position which is subsequently a product of his Eurocentric upbringing.

According to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, within several cultures and discourses, anthropocentricism has been naturalized, something that is most apparent in the western ideologies: "The absolute prioritization of of one's own species' interest over those of the silent majority is still regarded as being only natural" (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 5). The same prevalence of anthropocentric sentiment is highlighted by Christopher Manes in his seminal essay, Nature and Silence: "Michel Foucault has amply demonstrated that social power operates through a regime of privileged speakers, having historical embodiments as priests and kings, authors, intellectuals and celebrities" (*The Ecocriticism Reader*, 17). However, on a peripheral plane, Kenneth Anderson's jungle-narratives appear to be a celebration of naturescapes in India. But is it the entire picture? Is there a conviction of superiority, owing to his white colour, lurking underneath the façade of admiration of the wildlife, evident in the nuances of definition, or redefinition? It is an established fact that the Western ideas of colonization were imbued with a will to exploit the colonized lands and enrich themselves. Big-game hunting was a favourite with the Sahibs for recreational as well as material purposes, and the so called 'hunter-conservationists' such as Kenneth Anderson and Jim Corbett often organized hunting expeditions for their friends with the British government, thus giving 'hunting' priority over 'conservation'. In *The Maneater of Yemmaydoddi*, for instance, Kenneth Anderson takes his friend Alfie Robertson to Yemmaydoddi to shoot a tiger, where he weighs options—whether to shoot a tiger as a matter of chance, or to shoot a panther, as a certainty. Incidentally, both the animals, his proposed quarry, were not man-eaters or cattle-lifters. Therefore, it is imperative that shooting big-game was a sport for these hunters, and that not always they shot man-eaters to protect the villagers. On another occasion, while hunting a man-eating tiger, he comes across a nice specimen of a panther, and itches to shoot him, as for him it is a nice game. Many a times we find him skinning a tiger, or a panther with utmost precision and eagerness. Also, quite a few number of times, the author appears to be—despite being an ardent nature-lover—valuing human interests more than those of animals. In *Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue*, we find him letting a poacher walk away free instead of handing him over to forest guards, for killing a helpless sambar doe, just because he takes a liking for the man and judging his potential value as a tracker, thereby valuing human interest over that of an animal. In several stories,

he recounts how several times, in order to secure co-operation from the anguished and reluctant villagers, and sometimes to prove his own mettle as a big-game hunter, he had to shoot an odd panther or a tiger which had taken to cattle-lifting, and hence becoming a menace for the villagers. More often than not, he assuaged his conscience, he says, that sooner or later, it would have become bold enough to be a man-eater. On other occasions, he shot those hapless panthers or tigers that interfered with his baits, laid for some other animal. In *The Sulekunta Panther*, collected in *Call of the Man-Eater*, he wants to kill the panther because to him, it was responsible for making him sit all night in heavy rain and contact fever and he feels he has to shoot it, for a misguided sense of personal vendetta. Though an animal lover in the truest sense, he can be accused of mistreating animals, no matter how unintentional that might have been. In *A Night by the Camp Fire*, collected in *Call of the Man-Eater*, he reminisces how one day he fed a panther cub the putrid meat of a sambar, in order to figure out how its digestive system would react to the experience, and the poor creature died of cholera. All these tiny, apparently trivial incidents point out that he, too, had never been above the common human failing, which recognizes human superiority over nature—a fact which justifies ecocriticism's argument that nature, or natural environment sometimes makes a man reach out to his darker recesses of his heart. All these facts go on to prove that his attitude to wildlife is steeped with anthropocentric perceptions, and his status as a representative of the white ruling class accorded him the freedom to consider the large natural bounties of India to be at his disposal.

A closer look at *Creatures of the Jungle*, collected in *The Call of the Man-Eater*, will show how speciesm pervades the narratives of Kenneth Anderson, an environmental racism that privileges man above all other creations, sanctioned by the teachings of Renaissance and Humanism, as well as Christian exegesis. Has it not been said in in *Genesis* I, verse XXVI, as is noted by Hans Anderson, that God has proclaimed that the human beings are the lords of the world and that they will have a special place in his creation? In Creature of the Jungle, Kenneth Anderson mentions how he once shot three wild dogs in pursuit of a deer. Now, this apparent act of kindness, when looked against a greater picture, may appear brutal not only because of the greater number of beasts slain in order to save a single animal, but also because the author purposefully interfered with the course of nature, reflected in the predator-prey relationship. Also, in the same narrative, he mentions how, once in Salem district, he, in order to have some fun, showered some bears with pellets, and how they creatures fought viciously among themselves because they thought each other to be the perpetrator of the crime, while the author sat silently on a tree and took savage pleasure in watching the gory battle. Despite his claims of kindness towards animals, he did not stop his son to pursue his "bloodthirsty" urge to shoot a samber stag. Why did he do that? What was sport for him? He has documented his several exploits in the jungles of India, but what exactly gave him the

right to violate nature under the pretext of sport? It definitely was confidence induced by his guns, a white man's weapon. Somehow the situation echoes George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant*, where the Burmese people throng after him as he proceeds to shoot the rogue elephant, expecting to see the white sahib with the gun in his hands performs a magic trick. The very symbol of civilization made him disregard the laws of the jungle, treating it as his playground.

Kenneth Anderson's narratives not only mirror the natural prioritization of humans over animals, but also how the white man views those who lives in the fringes of the jungles in India, the native tribal people. Kenneth Anderson has explored the lives of the tribes like Poojaree, Sholaga, Kurumba etc. in his narratives. Even though he had friends from these communities, such as Byra and Ranga, he primarily used them as trackers. He called them "Children of Nature" which, however, guarantees their exploitation. Is not everything 'natural' always associated with the colonized? Culture seems to be the prerogative of the sahibs. Despite apparent sympathy with the natives, Kenneth Anderson used to impose the whiteness of his skin and identity as a sahib, if he wanted a favour to be extracted. In *Creatures of the Jungle*, he cuts a deal with the poachers and lets them walk away, provided they hit their own man and make him carry the carcasses of the dogs he just killed. Many a times—and this is recurrent in Corbett as well—he has insinuated regarding the habitual indifference of the natives towards the scourge of cattle lifting, passive resignation towards the menace of man-eating that is generally attributed to the wrath of some evil spirit, their garrulousness, and never-ending zeal to exaggerate. For example, in *The Evil One of Umbalmeru*, when a cartman named Puttu Reddy vanishes suddenly from a group of seven people, the others hardly pay attention to the fact and assume a nonchalant air regarding his absence. Regarding that, Kenneth Anderson remarks: "His half-dozen companions, with the stoical indifference and patience of the Indian villager, time being of no consequence anyhow, sat down at the roadside to wait for him and smoke some beedi" (*The Call of the Maneater*, 52). According to the author—and here he is in conformity with most of the game-narrators of his own stock—one can hardly extract exact accounts of an event from an Indian villager, who always loves to exaggerate. Almost every tiger is of humongous size for him. In *The Novice of Manchi*, collected in *The Tiger Roars*, the author presents a humorous account of such a situation when he tries to make an enquiry about a confirmed man-eater:

> One described the tiger's head as 'that big', indicating a distance of a yard between outstretched hands. The other, who was a matter-of-fact a very comely young girl, and somewhat of a wit to boot, said it was big enough to eat all four of them and me as well. Her subtle smile after this statement was perhaps a hint that, after it was all over, I would at least be a good company inside the tiger's belly. (*The Tiger Roars*, 10)

The innocent jungle-folks tend to associate the scourge of man-eating to any supernatural event, and even the 'dorai' feels drawn to those apparently illogical assumptions. For instance, in *Tales of the Supernatural*, collected in *Tales from the Indian Jungle*, he narrates one of his experiences when while waiting for a tiger at a desolate temple rumoured to be haunted, he heard many sounds that appeared other-worldly: "I forgot everything but the whistling and the shadow, and fell to conjuring what on earth could have been the cause of what I had seen" (*Tales from the Indian Jungle*, 143). He himself dabbled in occult practices as he himself says in the same narrative, giving an account of summoning 'minispurams' or 'yakshis', evil spirits that can obey the summoner, but in lieu of a terrible price. Is it not intriguing that a white man, born and bred in the Western culture, having a sound mind could fall prey to such mumbo-jumbo? Was it his thirst for the exotic essence that drove him to forgo his identity as a fragment of the Empire? Or was he trying to preserve the same identity since the realization of it requires the approval of others, or the 'Other', that is, the colonized, the oppressed? Is his situation not similar to that of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*? Was his rationalism overcome by alternative rationalisms in those days? Also, from the perspective of the hunter, it is paramount that the hunter must work in close association with the villagers living in the heart of the jungles as they know the jungles like the back of their hands. So, when, as he narrates in *The Bellundur Ogre*, collected in *Tales from the Indian Jungle*, a British official, Johnson insulted the local necromancer, Buddiah, the villagers refused to cooperate with him and even sabotaged his operation. Therefore, when the author took on the responsibility of ridding the jungle of the man-eater, he took care to appease the villagers by adhering to the rites and rituals prescribed by the necromancer. However, not always did he conform to such beliefs. To mention such an instance, in *Novice of Manchi*, he proclaims before Byra in indignation after his failure to slay the beast, "You were sure that we would kill the tiger after the silly pooja. Instead, he has slain one of us" (*The Tiger Roars*, 27), to which Byra replies, "The Sorcerer should have sacrificed a cock. Instead, he slew a hen, for the hen cost him a rupee less. But it has cost his grandson life" (27)! He had to resort to the ways of the jungles, precisely, to that of the villagers as their knowledge was deeper than him. In *The Novice of Manchi*, when he fails to kill the tiger after not heeding Byra's advice, he is subject to ridicule by the latter, "Did the dorai think he was following a rabbit? Perhaps the years have affected his wisdom" (*The Tiger Roars*, 19)! Indeed, there are times when one's modern education does not hold well in the primitive environment of the forest. There are aspects untouched, or glossed over by the modern civilization, basking in its knowledge, discourses, and epistemology. This has been proclaimed by the protagonist in Satyajit Ray's *Agantuk*, where he says that he was once cured by a witch-doctor who, as contrary to urban belief, was not a sham-artist, but a herbalogist who knew the medicinal properties of over five hundred plants and herbs.

Similarly, Kenneth Anderson recognizes this when in *Ghooming at Dawn*, collected in *Tales from the Indian Jungle*, he says, "Truly the jungle is filled with all manners of herbs and plants whose leaves, stems, seeds, flowers and even roots are remedies for most of the maladies from which the human race suffers" (*Tales from the Indian Jungle*, 10).

There is, however, a stark difference between the way a native perceives his natural environment, and the way a white man perceives the natural landscapes of the colonized land. While a tribal man worships and fears nature, does not tamper with it and kills only when he needs to sustain, a white man seeks to tame it as he thinks himself to be perfectly equipped to do that, the rights being granted to him by his position in the colonized land, his education, as well as his vehement greed to exploit the land over which he has established his domination. Be that as it may, he never misses an opportunity to condemn the brutal ways these native people kill animals that prey on their livestock, without realizing most of the times that they do not possess the means to effect a perfect kill. They primarily rely on their livestock for sustenance, and therefore, when their cattle is killed by a marauding tiger or leopard, it is a huge loss to their economy. In *Jungles Long Ago*, Kenneth Kenneth Anderson expresses concern over the fate of Asiatic lions in the Gir forest. The conflict between the Maldhari tribe and the lions who regularly fed on their cattle, resulted in the death of many lions in the Gir in the 1970s. In desperation to save their livestock, Maldharis began poisoning the lions, and Kenneth Anderson says that during his visit to the Gir, he was informed that nine lions were poisoned not so long ago. He opines that since the lions move and hunt in packs, they are poisoned in numbers, as opposed to tigers and panthers as they prey alone. Moreover, when a man-eater terrorizes an area, they can hardly go about their usual businesses, such as working in the fields, gathering wood or honey etc. Therefore, if the author has condemned their brutality towards the animals, he has done that simply because it is not easy for him to appreciate their predicament. They have no way to go and know that they have to remain in the jungles where they can earn their living. Every year, a lot of honey-collectors and fishermen die in tiger's jaws at the Sunderbans. But still they venture into the heart of the deltas for a living. Sometimes they retaliate with animosity, as is related by Amitav Ghosh, albeit fictionally, in *The Hungry Tide*. But the white man seeks to tame nature, as in his lifetime Kenneth Anderson did. He kept pets such as leopard cubs, a hyena, a bear, and a python. He had to make, or recreate the hyena's natural surroundings in the domesticated landscape, by digging an island and surrounding it with trenches. Since hyenas cannot be brought up like domestic curs, despite being from the same family, the author fed it mostly with raw beef, usually decomposed, as hyenas are primarily scavengers. His attempts, however, were not entirely successful, as the hyena, named Jackie, was often attacked by his pet dog, and found it too hard to adjust to an artificial habitat.

It is indeed true that Kenneth Anderson's narratives place him as a messiah for the poor villagers in Southern India, always plagued by the menace of cattle-killing and man-eating tigers and panthers as well as rogue elephants which systematically destroyed lives and crops, but he hardly did kill without any motive of personal gain. Most of the animals he killed, he skinned them to have as trophies. Most of the hunters of European origin did not stay in India after independence in 1947. Corbett left for Kenya in 1950 and lived his remaining life there. Kenneth Anderson lived in Bangaluru and died there in 1973, but by that time he had stopped game-hunting since laws became more stringent, regarding hunting and conservation. Despite his claims that he valued wildlife, it is imperative that his approach to the natural environment was never bio-centric, or earth-centric. In *Alam Baux and the Black Bear*, he mentions how he once killed a black bear that killed Alam Baux's son who was killed by that bear. He killed the beast even though he knew that it was Alam Baux's son stumbled upon it. Nevertheless he killed it to appease Alam Baux who was his friend and a valuable informer of the movements of animals in the adjacent forest. Kenneth Anderson's vocabulary, replete with words like 'fool', 'brute', etc. used both for animals and native tribal people shows his acknowledgement of his own position in the social strata, as in *The Novice of Manchi*, he rebukes Byra for interfering and giving advices unasked: "Idiot, you have not the brains of a flea! Keep out of this and let me try the plan I have in mind, at least for tonight" (The Tiger Roars, 12). He was primarily a European seeking to reap benefits from a position far above the poor native tribal of Southern India, and exploiting the rich natural reserves of India under the garb of humanitarian efforts, a stance common with that taken by his European colleagues, his actions echoing Alexander Selkirk who says:

> I am monarch of all I survey,
> My right there is none to dispute;
> From the centre all round to the sea,
> I am Lord of the fowl and the brute. (*Alexander Selkirk*, 1-4)

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