



Adapting to Jungle: Film a Re-reading of The Jungle Book

Aishwarya K R
Student
Kerala University

Abstract: This paper addresses the postcolonial re-reading of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* and its film adaptations, *The Jungle Book* (2016) and *Mowgli: The Legend of the Jungle* (2018). Kipling's *The Jungle Book* is an authoritative voice in imprinting imperial ideology of the West. The way the law of the jungle operates in the story has been re-read as a metaphorical functioning of the British imperial officialdom in the sub-continent. Theorizing power and employing it in the narrative of the colonial discourses have been foundational to the territorial as well as textual triumph of the Raj. This paper employs post-colonialism and film adaptation theory for its analytical framework.

Index Terms - Post colonialism, anti-native, anti-nature.

The fiction and theories of post colonialism raise the significant question 'can we ever become post-colonial?' The comparative analysis of the book *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling and its two film adaptations *The Jungle Book* released in the year 2016 and *Mowgli: The Legend of Jungle* (2018) based on post-colonial film theory. In addition, these three primary texts have been comprehended based on the contemporary culture of the British Empire and the way these have been characterised in the film adaptations. The depiction of anti-native and anti-nature within the texts have been comprehended and highlighted explicitly by notions of post colonialism and its reflection in the film adaptations. The first film adaptation in the year 2016 displaces the 1967 hand-made animated adaptation; however, the characterization is based on Kipling's book. The film ensures the existence of certain entrenchment of Mowgli stories where the scenes represent popular culture. The film adaptation in the year 2018 features the protagonist venturing into colonized spaces which is technical aspect of the films and is anti-native. The portrayal of Shere Khan in the film symbolizes power and dominance over other animals in the kingdom. Additionally, the colonial system tries to segregate people based on gender, race and species.

Postcolonial theory is a lot of reflections, for the most part, centred around the political, social, economic life chronicled and social effect of European colonial standard on the planet, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. it is difficult to consider "European way of thinking", "European writing" or "European history" as existing without colonial experiences and the persecution of Europe all through the world (Gandhi 45). Postcolonial theory rises out of the anticolonial considering South Asia and Africa in the main portion of the twentieth century and is profoundly obligated to it. Postcolonial theory has impacted how we read the writings, our comprehension of national and transnational narratives, and how we comprehend the political ramifications of our knowledge as researchers.

The initiation of post-colonial theories in the filmic representation depicts the viability and interpretation of films in an appropriate manner. the literature, filmic representation and the forms can function as an important medium of development and change. They certainly act as tools of cultural exchange that brings out the value system and its modification. Other than that, the motion pictures including television and film are more than just technological constructs. They certainly symbolise power that can be integrated to condition and influence the minds of the viewers. The misrepresentation and anti-native illustration in films,

the socio-historical content of the post-colonial structure of moving image in Eastern world have to be comprehended appropriately.

The film adaptation is the exchange of a composed work to a film. This written work could be a novel, play, and short story, epic, and so on it could likewise be a work of valid, personal history and even different films. Adaptation is ordinarily a translation into the other medium, which communicates by utilizing an alternate gathering of procedures and utilizing innovative harmony pursued by the elements engaged with transferring the work of writing to the screen. Bela Balaz, the main film scholar (*Film Theory*), concentrates on adaptations, analyses the formal standards moulding the language of film and concurs an unprecedented significance to 'structure' and is of the view that 'structure equivalents content'.

Foucault incorporated the panopticon in his talk of capacity to outline the possibility of self-policing that happens when the individuals who need power are made to accept that they are being viewed by the individuals who have it. Kipling applies to the India of *Kim* a political apparatus like that of the Panopticon where the social request of the domain is kept up and controlled not by people in general and direct task of the Law as it is the situation in *The Jungle Book*, yet through the Great Game's discreet surveillance, grouping, and flow of political data. In "*The Jungle Book*," be that as it may, Mowgli's ability to gaze intently at even the most dominant creature in the wilderness, places him on the elite position of the Master whose look directs the accommodation of those upon whom it falls.

Like *Kim*, Mowgli is also a peculiar product of the imperialist imagination: a "subject" trained in the ways of the "masters" so that he could serve them better. In Mowgli, especially, Kipling combined the call to a higher service with a fun-loving boyish personality, "designed to produce row after row of bright-eyed, eager and resourceful little middle-class servants of empire", as critic and writer Edward W. Said puts it in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Kim*. It wasn't a coincidence that Lord Baden-Powell, who was instrumental in setting up the Boy Scouts in 1907-08, was profoundly influenced by Kipling's boys, and especially by Mowgli.

Through colonialism, there is domestication, laws, and structures. In comparison, Baloo the bear teaches Mowgli about the structures and the laws of the jungle. Therefore, by domesticating Mowgli and socially integrating him into the jungle, his identity is now that of a citizen of the jungle. On the other hand, this "socializing" is a constant anxiety that stresses imperialism as John McLeod states, "While the youthful protagonists of this genre sought self-aggrandizement in imperial theatres far from home, they also protected sedulously the image of themselves as young English gentlemen, guarding themselves against the possibility of "going native" or otherwise being "contaminated" by the Africans, Asians, Native Americans, or Pacific Islanders with whom they came in contact".

The original theme of Kipling's book has been closely integrated into the film adaptations; however, the ending was slightly different. The book of Kipling only highlights the differences between animals and humans. On the other hand, the film adaptations of 2016 and 2018 celebrated the idea of nature and humans existing together as one. These artistic choices have highlighted modernism and focus on the changes within the society in the last fifty years. The closeness of human with nature has been evidently described in the film adaptations with the appropriate mode of narration considering the status quo of the 21st century. The development of a positive bond of Mowgli with the animal kingdom significantly depicts the acceptance of humans to conserve and protect nature and environment.

The colonial value system that has been highlighted in the film adaptations was based on anti-nature concepts. The use of fire and water has been evident in the film adaptations that reflect anti-nature. In addition, the use of fire to kill Shere Khan in the film adaptations that led to the destruction of forest highlights anti-nature theories. On the other hand, the use of water to set off the fire in the jungle also indicated the anti-nature value system in the story. It has been suggested that manipulating and exploiting the nature has been highlighted in several fairy tales including *the Jungle Book*. In relation to such context, the film adaptations of the *Jungle Book* highlight the value system where nature has been controlled and manipulated by the creatures.

The book reveals that the entire animal kingdom is the world of Indians, where Mowgli is a British boy. Based on the value system, the interaction between colonised and colonisers have been evidently highlighted in the story. The dominant characteristics of human based on the colonial system have been also revealed in the film adaptations. The characterisation of the human involved with fire highlights their dominance over the animal kingdom. The trust of humans towards the animals at one point is critical. On the other hand, the trust gained by Mowgli from the animals also reveals anti-native contradicting the fact that

human and animal cannot live together. This indicates the value system of colonialism (Brunette and Wills 215). The characterisation of Shere Khan in the film adaptations also can be categorised as the 'villain' representing the violent nature of Indian native tribes. The moment he killed the wolf 'Akela', the anti-native representation of the character Shere Khan revealed.

The Indigenous

The creatures in *The Jungle Book* do not perceive the assets that lie underneath and around them. Instead, people are the main ones ready to oversee assets. Animals would then be able to be contrasted with "unmindful locals" who do not have the foggiest idea how to abuse the land for, as far as anyone knows, right employments. Baloo's melody about the necessities of bear life is a genuine case of the British experience of the Indian individuals; in absolute darkness with regards to the money related estimation of what they underestimated, their "sweet home". They are short-sighted when they don't scrutinize the nearness of Mowgli or the political ramifications of tolerating an individual among them, but instead secure an individual from the animal varieties that persecutes them (Noum, 615).

King Louie's clan is the most developed in *The Jungle Book*. *The Jungle Book* shows our nearest predecessors as anxious to know human and unfit to achieve it. A post colonialist story, demonstrates that the savviest creatures understand that they needn't bother with man's innovation and that in actuality they would be in an ideal situation.

The most clearly colonial segment of *The Jungle Book* is that of Colonel Hathi, the elephant, who is an indigenous animal who has disguised his colonial oppressors and has faith in the military establishment that has taught him. Military innovation assumes a conclusive job in colonial governmental issues. In *The Jungle Book*, elephants and Colonel Hathi speak to the sham of British-prepared Aboriginal warriors. They walk and talk like officers. He encapsulates the mix of colonial ethical quality into the subjects of mistreatment. Elephants don't comprehend why they walk. Truth be told, their melody says, "Goodness, the reason for our watch/is a really amusing inquiry/on the grounds that strolling and boring fields and slopes/is a military objective." This scene is a spoof of the military custom, yet additionally a social analysis on the futility of the local armed forces. Rather than battling the adversary, they let him join their positions without acknowledging it for quite a while.

In the book of the colonial jungle, obviously the man has a place in the town. Mowgli does not have any desire to come back to the "men's town" and the creatures demand that he should do as such due to the peril of Shere Khan. Mowgli isn't permitted to reconnect with his creature nature and must be expelled from the jungle. Indeed, the plot is inspired by his profound want to remain in the jungle with his creature companions, Bagheera and Baloo. This detachment among indigenous and edified is a major piece of the colonial motivation and the division is plainly obvious in this film.

Colonialism must be contemplated in its relations with "private enterprise" and "dominion" since it is a fundamental piece of the business experience of Western countries going back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Colonialism and free enterprise share a commonly steady association with each other. Colonialism prospered with the Atlantic slave exchange that prompted the constrained movement of a huge number of Africans to Europe and America as prisoners and provisional work that carried Asians into the Caribbean islands. Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and Helen Tiffin contend in their well-known book *The Empire Writes Back*: "In the Caribbean, the European royal undertaking ensured that the most noticeably terrible parts of colonialism around the globe would all be joined in one district." In colonial and postcolonial writing, it characterizes colonialism as "the colonization of a region, the misuse or advancement of assets and the endeavour to oversee the indigenous occupants of the involved terrains". Obviously, there was a significant contrast between the colonizer and the colonized once the colonization procedure finished. The colonizers were viewed as socialized, while the colonized were viewed as brutes.

Bill Ashcroft et al. cited the most questionable comments of the British government official and scholarly Thomas Macaulay about the English training of the Indians in 1835. Macaulay purportedly stated: "We should now do our best to shape a class that could be a mediator between us. Furthermore, the millions we oversee; a class of individuals, Indian in blood and shading, yet English in taste, in conclusions, in ethics and in astuteness ". It indicates how much colonialism changed the personality of the general population included and how the colonial circumstance manufactured the colonialists just as the colonized.

In the animal world, Mowgli is presented by Kipling as the embodied law, a law that maintains the balance between different species through an incessant struggle that can be read as a regular work aimed at strengthening the foundations of the British Raj. This fight can also be seen as a ruthless war between white men and Indian culture. On the other hand, we can ask ourselves if this war should be condemned as a perversity. More specifically, when it is the only feasible way to control the ungovernable, how can it be condemned? This leads us to the conclusion that, in the almost utilitarian and Darwinian sense, the only viable code for the jungle is based on brute force and intimidation, the intimidation that means fire. Similarly, the law gives a higher social status to those who are in better shape and more ferocious. Animals that hunt like wolves and snakes are admired, while those that pursue like hyenas and jackals are despised. And, finally, those who are prey as deer hardly count, because their presence in history is minimalist. With such a monolithic orientation, the law of the jungle is considered superior to the law of man because it provides immediate and straightforward sanctions.

The dynamics of exchange initiated by the two film versions of *The Jungle Book* made in 2016 and 2018 in the context of Kipling's novel highlights the films as post-colonial readings of the Kipling version. The strong and powerful Shere Khan as the native and the sweetly just and gentle Mowgli as the British have created a significant dichotomy of characters replaying the drama of colonial subjugation and rule.

In the movie, Khan murders the lupine leader Akela because his pack tried to protect Mowgli. But in Kipling's *Jungle Book*, it is customary for the young wolves to kill their alpha when his powers have waned. As the pack senses old Akela's weakness, they begin to turn on Mowgli as well—the man-cub must fend them off with a burning branch and run away to a human encampment. Similarly, Scarlett Johansson's sultry Kaa is a villain in the film, but in the novel he (he!) is a dangerous friend, a hypnotic epicure with a sadistic streak who teams up with Baloo and Bagheera to rescue Mowgli from the monkeys. Favreau softens Kipling's severe 'know thy place' mantra into a child-friendly 'to thine own self be true.' The original *Jungle Book*'s monkeys sprang from an inferior stock: They were foolish and feckless, obsessed with trivial nonsense. "They have no leaders," Baloo tells Mowgli. "They have no remembrance. They boast and chatter and pretend that they are a great people ... but the falling of a nut turns their minds to laughter and all is forgotten." But the Disney apes only offend insofar as they attempt to act like something they're not. Their crime isn't frivolous jabber and airy dreams. It's living in an abandoned human temple and gathering human relics. Behold Favreau's version of poetic justice: King Louie buried in an avalanche of stony ruins, only to re-emerge, hopping mad, in the closing credits. Kipling's justice looks like hundreds of dumb, entranced monkeys sleepwalking helplessly into Kaa's jaws. The Disney philosophy of nature and humankind's place in it is deeply Romantic. The tropical forest spreads over the land like a single varicoloured organism, each animal species, including homo sapiens, playing a vital role. Mowgli's human nature is good and pure; it is civilization that would corrupt him. Like any "noble savage," he holds intuitive knowledge of the Eden through which he moves. When he fashions tools from vines and wood, Bagheera reprimands him not—as in Kipling's text—because such "tricks" are unbestlike but because they are specifically unwolflike. (The boy wishes to fit in with the pack.) At the end of the film, Mowgli finds his station in the animal kingdom without giving up his five-fingered ingenuity. (He even reaches a kind of sacred accord with the elephants, the otherworldly demigods of India, by rigging a pulley system to lift a calf out of a ravine.) He needs not choose between expressing his authentic self and remaining in the jungle.

The mode of narration in the film is based on the book; however, the concept of sins has been established significantly in the films. In addition, the extent of religious thoughts from Christian beliefs has been also identified in the films including sloth, lust, wrath, gluttony, pride, greed and envy. The wrath that has been integrated into the character played by Shere Khan based on anger and fear has been evident in the film adaptations explicitly (Elsaesser and Malte 135). Other than that, gluttony has been also comprehended in the character of Baloo where he was perceived as an animal that eats all the time. Pride has been significantly evident in the characterisation of a group of elephants who were called 'The True Masters of The Jungle'. The respect that has been showed in the films by other animals to the elephant group highlights pride. Furthermore, the concept of lust has been well characterised through the snake 'Kaa' in the film adaptations where it tries to seduce Mowgli while narrating the story highlighting lust. The characterisation of King Louie who strongly desires the red flower highlights greed as he is already the king of the jungle but wants more. Bagheera depicts the concepts of sloth as he is always serious and worried all the time. The essence of the inability to feel joy and happiness is evident in his character. Hence, Mowgli cannot be represented as a sinner but he is rather the victim based on each of the sins highlighted in the jungle within the animal kingdom.

In both Netflix's *Mowgli* and Kipling's book, the Law of the Jungle states two non-related animals must take responsibility for the man-cub, and that's what Baloo and Bagheera do. However, in Disney's *Jungle Book*, only Bagheera accepts and educates Mowgli. While Netflix's movie is obviously centred on Mowgli's story, it takes time to flesh out all the other characters in his life - which is something Disney's *Jungle Book* never does. For instance, Bagheera's story about being raised in a cage in the King's Palace is told in Netflix's *Mowgli* but is completely ignored in Disney and Favreau's *Jungle Book*. For Baloo, sure it's nice to hear him teach Mowgli about the "Bare Necessities" in life, but that's not as important as the Law of the Jungle, as it's responsible for everything that happens in Kipling's *Jungle Book* novel. Plus, Baloo's relationship with Mowgli in Netflix's movie is much more accurate overall, seeing as Baloo takes responsibility for everything that Mowgli goes through. In Kipling's books, as well as the *Jungle Book* movies (including *Mowgli*), Shere Khan is accurately portrayed, for the most part, though Mowgli differs from Disney's movie in that it includes a jackal named Tabaqui, who's Shere Khan's sidekick.

Then there's Kaa (a male snake in the books), who saves Mowgli after he's kidnapped by the monkeys in Netflix's movie, in addition to informing Baloo and Bagheera - who both join her - about the kidnapping, but in Disney's movie, Mowgli is kidnapped by King Louie - a character that doesn't even exist in the source material. Furthermore, a character who actually appears in Netflix's *Mowgli* from Kipling's books but doesn't make an appearance in Disney's *Jungle Book* is the Grey Brother, who's known as Brother Wolf/Bhoot in *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle*. While aspects of the character are different in the film, Bhoot's role in Mowgli's life is practically unchanged - and that's what leads to an emotional blow later on in the movie.

In *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle*'s final act, Mowgli calls upon the elephants to trap Shere Khan and practically destroy the entire man village. That actually happens in Kipling's book, though only to an extent. Mowgli's relationship with the elephants are an integral part of Kipling's books, and it's an aspect that truly plays out well in Netflix's film; even towards the end when the Elephants get their revenge by killing John Lockwood. All in all, Netflix's *Mowgli* adapts specific short stories and poems from Kipling's books without much deviation, while Disney's *Jungle Book* movie (though more family friendly) cherry-pick parts of the source material in order to better suit the story they want to tell. Netflix's *Mowgli*, on the other hand, is a drama that dives into its fantastical roots, in the beginning, thanks to Bhoot, Tabaqui, and even Mowgli himself, in just the way that everyone acts. Even though Mowgli is on the verge of being exiled from the jungle, he still spends a long time playfully training for the biggest event of his life, no matter how much Baloo tries to keep him on track. In one moment, he may take what he's doing seriously, but in the next moment, it's as if he's care-free. Perhaps that's the crux of who he is, but it feeds into the (emotional) unevenness of the whole movie.

One chief criticism against *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle* is its lack of realism. It's a live-action *Jungle Book* movie yet its animals act in such a way that perhaps aren't as refined as Disney's live-action version, but it's possible it wasn't meant to be that way. What Serkis has done in his previous movies (ones that he's starred in) that used motion capture was to construct around the person's face, so that their emotions and facial complexities could translate onto the big screen, even though their faces were covered by CGI. And that's precisely what Serkis did with *Mowgli*; this is something viewers can see especially in Bagheera, who's played by Christian Bale. Shere Khan appears to be the most "realistic" animal of the group, but the rest of animals are almost too cartoonish, despite some of them looking visually striking.

Overall, Netflix's *Mowgli* builds itself from the mindset of Kipling himself, and especially what Kipling had known about the Indian jungle at the time he wrote his *Jungle Book* stories all those years ago, but Serkis' film doesn't take the necessary steps in rooting itself in reality, save for a few sequences, most of which take place in the man village towards the end of the film. Everything in the man village is top-notch, and that includes the horrifying scene in which Mowgli finds out about Bhoot's fate as well as the true nature of man's world, which, unfortunately, includes John Lockwood's hunting escapades. However, taking everything into account, Netflix's *Mowgli* doesn't lend itself to realism in the way that Disney's *Jungle Book* movie from 2016 attempted to do from the very beginning. That's not necessarily a bad thing, nor is it something that filmmakers should strive to do. But perhaps the best thing about *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle* is that it is a much more accurate adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* novel.

Bibliography

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Routledge, 2013.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and narration*. Routledge, 2013. Libgen, <https://libgen.is/book/index.php?md5=5CAC5DD41A93D78FD7EA7736AEF62C2C>.
- Elsaesser, Thomas, and Malte Hagener. *Film theory: An introduction through the senses*. Routledge, 2015.
- Favreau, Jon. *The Jungle Book*. Walt Disney Pictures, 15 April 2016. Amazon, www.amazon.com/thejunglebook.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Columbia UP, 2019, Google, https://www.academia.edu/4125662/Postcolonial_Theory_A_Critical_Introduction_by_Leela_Gandhi.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Theory of Adaptation*. Taylor and Francis, 2014.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Book*. Parragon, 2011.
- McLeod, John. *Beginning postcolonialism*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Naum, Magdalena. "Re-emerging Frontiers: Postcolonial Theory and Historical Archaeology of the Borderlands." *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 17, No.2, 2010, pp. 101-131. Libgen, <https://libgen.is/req=Journal+of+Archaeological+Method+and+Theory+&open=0&res=25&view=simple&phrase=1&column=author>.
- Serkis, Andy. *Mowgli: The Legend of the Jungle*. Warner Bros Pictures, 7 Dec. 2018. Netflix, www.netflix.com/mowgli.

