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WILDLIFE AND HUNTING: REFLECTION FROM THE MUGHAL LITERATURE (AD 1526-1658)

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Abstract

Humans have been interacting with wildlife since ancient times. Wildlife and hunting have been focused in contemporary Mughal literature. The Mughal rulers gave a detailed description of the animals and birds of that time. Jahangir was a naturalist and he also gave details (*Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*) about the animals of India. Elephants, tigers, lions, deer, and nilgaw were hunted during this time. Different techniques were used for hunting and dogs, hawks, and cheetahs were trained to hunt. The Mughals did not hunt arbitrarily; they followed the principle of non-violence. Akbar and Jahangir forbade all animal slaughter on certain days in the week.

Keywords: Wildlife, Animal, Technique, Hunt, Mughal, Trained, Literature, Non-Violence.

Introduction

Man has been dependent on nature since the beginning of civilization. To survive, he had to collect food, shelter, and clothes from nature in various ways. Human civilization has developed through hard struggle against natural disasters, epidemics, and wild beasts. Gradually man has used his intellect to make various tools that have enabled him to defend himself. From ancient times the people have been hunting animals for self-defence and food. The main topic of this article is to find out the details of what is reflected in Mughal literature about hunting and wildlife. Biodiversity is declining in today's world, with deforestation and a looming wildlife crisis. That is why we need to find out what our ancestors thought about forests and wildlife. We need proper environmental awareness otherwise we will face a crisis in the future. The forest must be protected; otherwise, our existence will be endangered.

Altamira cave in France has the oldest animal hunting scene. Hunting is man's natural calling. Man, first hunted wild animals for self-defense, but later it was adopted as a livelihood. Hunting is older than agriculture, we have to understand that animal hunting was not only used to satisfy hunger, sometimes it was a sport. It gradually became a favourite pastime for influential people like the royals and nobility. The Harappan seals depict various wildlife, such as; elephants, tigers, rhinos, and birds. Various hunting scenes are reflected in the cave paintings of Bhimbetka. Epics like Ramayana and the Mahabharata have extensive descriptions of wildlife and hunting. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* mentions the rulers' policy on wild animals. We find the mention of the 'Protector of forests' who was in charge of forest conservation. The Fifth Pillar Inscription of Ashoka has mentioned as it 'prohibited forest-burning for no reason or for killing living beings. Elephants were considered to be the most valuable forest resource; the elephant forest was known as 'hastivana' or 'nagavana' (*Arthashastra*) where apparently elephants were found in large numbersⁱ.

Depiction of wildlife and hunting in Mughal literature

Wildlife and hunting scenes have been widely focussed in medieval literature. The contemporary Persian sources such as *Tuzuki-i-Baburi*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Tuzuki-i-Jahangiri*, *Nuskha-i-dilkusha* and various Travellers' account, etc, portray vividly the days' scenario. The Mughal rulers were also interested in learning the characteristics of wildlife and felt the beauty of animals. Various animals such as elephant, tiger, cheetah, deer, lion, nilgai, mule, buffalo, and various birds of the like of falcon, hawks, waterfowl, and *sāras* are known from contemporary Mughal texts. In addition to these; reptiles, fish and various insects are also referred. Moreover, the habitat of these wild animals finds importance in these texts. Babur has described in his memoirs many wild animals and birds of Hindustan. He has penned down his observation about 'Fauna of Hindustan: Mammals' in his autobiography. The Elephant which Hindustani call *hāti* has been depicted as a peculiar animal of India, it is a giant and very sagacious animal. Elephants were found in Bengal & Bihar, central India, and Gujarat. According to his observation, this animal has the intelligence understand the language of human beings easily. It has some useful qualities; it crosses big rivers with no difficulty carrying a mass of luggage. It has two large teeth which are called 'gajadanta' and are highly valued by Hindustanis. Elephants would die if their trunks were cut off in the battlefieldⁱⁱ. Abul Fazl has written about different methods of elephant hunting in his book. Generally, elephants were hunted for taming. He wrote about four types of elephant hunting, *kheda*, *chor kheda*, *gad*, and *bar*. He wrote about 'Gad' modes which meant a deep pit was constructed in a place frequented by elephants and covered up with grass. As soon as the elephants came near it, the hunters from their ambush made a great noise. Then wild elephants got confused and lost their habitual cautiousness. They fall rapidly into the trap. They were starved for several days and soon got tamedⁱⁱⁱ. Elephants served the purpose of carrying heavy cannons in the battlefield. Numerous wild elephants were found in Subah Malwa and Audh.



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A problem arises in contemporary Persian texts to distinguish between lion and tiger. Both animals were named as *ser*. However, the tiger was more common in the Gangetic basin and Peninsula, whereas the lion was common in the Indus basin and Gujarat. Jahangir in his autobiography has described various places for tiger hunting. "On the 20th I killed with a gun a tigress and a nilgai. There were two cubs with the tigress but they disappeared from view in consequence of the thickness of the jungle and the number of trees".^{iv} The cubs were found two days later. There were various traps for hunting tigers, for this reason, goats were kept inside the cage as a bait. Sometimes buffalos were used as a trap. During Akbar's time, one thousand cheetahs were tamed for hunting purposes. As the cheetahs were kept in captivity they could not breed and that led to a sharp decline in their population.

Rhino, buffalo, and wild ass are mentioned as wild animals in Mughal literature. The rhino was seen by Ibn Battuta in 1330 on crossing the Indus near Multan and near Bahraich in east Uttar Pradesh.^v Babur wrote in his autobiography about the rhinoceros. He observed it to be a very powerful animal that can lift an elephant with its horns. This animal according to him had a very thick skin that cannot be pierced with arrows; besides, it cannot be tamed like an elephant. In 1519, Babur wrote in his memoirs "After starting off the camp for the river, I went to hunt rhino on the Sawati side which places people call also karg-khana(rhino-home)".^{vi} There are many detailed discussions about wild buffalo in Mughal literature and numerous wild buffaloes were hunted during this time. According to Babur, it is larger than a domestic buffalo and its horn does not turn back, in the same way, It is a powerful, destructive and ferocious animal.^{vii} Abul Fazl wrote that numerous wild buffaloes could be seen in the Subah Oudh. He wrote about these wild animals that during the daytime they can be seen in the water, and at night they breathe freely on the dry ground.^{viii} Near the town of *Hansot* (subah of Gujarat) there was a game preserve where many deer and other animals lived and it was 4 *kos* in length and 4 *kos* in breadth. Leopards were found in the valleys of the Narmada, Tapti, and Saraswati rivers.

Abul Fazal detailed in *Ain--I-Akbari* that like animals, birds of different varieties were also tamed for various purposes. Great Mughal Akbar trained the falcons, eagles, shahins, and dogs, and made them perform the wonderful deed. These were trained for tracing wild animals during hunting. At that time two popular methods of hunting were the *Mongal-Style*, *Qamargha*, and the *Shakhabandh*. The *qamargha* style required the game to be surrounded and encircled before being hunted. Jahangir wrote in his memoirs that in 1616, he hunted 53 nilgaw in the Puskar Lake.^{ix} Jahangir wrote in his memoirs that three months and six days passed in hunting and lastly 581 animals were captured by his gun. There were two *qamarghah*, *Girjhak* and *Nandina*, where were used for hunting leopards. The details of the animals killed are as follows; wild ass, 10, mountain goats, 29; sheep, 180; Nilgaw, 9 and antelope, 340.^x Another hunting style was a variation of *qamargha* where a stockade was used in place of the circle of men. This technique was only suitable for hunting herbivores and lesser carnivores; and not ferocious animals like lions. They used different hunting equipments like nets, drums, ropes, *naqqaras* and chains. Sword, spears, guns, and bows & arrows were used as hunting weapons. The hunting grounds were mainly located at different places, i.e., Sunnam, Hisar, Bhatinda, Nagaur, Palam, Lahore, Dipalpur, etc. Mughals were keen observers of animals and noted down their characteristics. Abul Fazal noting the behavior of leopards wrote that these animals selected three different places for the purpose of hunting, amusement and rest. They mostly slept on the top of a hill or under a shady tree.^{xi}

Perfect descriptions of fauna can be found in contemporary Mughal literature. Great Jahangir was a keen observer of animals. About wild ass, he has elaborated its features it as an extremely strange animal, stripped exactly like the black and yellow tiger, the only difference being that this is black and white. From the tip of the nose to the end of the tail and from the lobe of the ear to the top of the hooves, black stripes, large or small according to as suited to various parts bedecked its body.^{xii} Jahangir shared his experience many times about nilgaw and deer hunting. From his memoirs we learn about an incident where he shot a female pregnant Nilgaw having two fully formed calves inside her body. He knew from the locals that the flesh of nilgaw fawns was delicate and delicious, so as per his order, the royal cooks made a *du-piyaza*.^{xiii} Besides, everyone knows about Jahangir's stork observation. It is known from *Padshahnama* that Shah Jahan and his son Dara-Shiko hunted antelopes around 1640.

Wild animals and their location in the Indian Sub-continent in Mughal era:

Provinces	Descript of wild animals	Source
Punjab	Tibetan sheep, Camel, Tiger, Wild Elephant, Wild Ram	Ain-I-Akbari/ An Atlas of Mughal empire.
Bengal	Tiger, Buffalo, Elephant, Deer,	Ain-I-Akbari, Atlas
Assam	Tiger, Elephant, cheetah,	Ain-I-Akbari
Kashmir	Deer, Mountain sheep, goat, mule	Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri
Gujrat	Lion, wild ass, mule, Leopard	Ain-I-Akbari, Tuzuk-I-Jahagiri
Audh	Wild buffalo, Nilgaw	Ain-I-Akbari



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Orissa	Wild Elephant, Wild buffalo	Ain-I-Akbari, An Atlas of Mughal empire.
Malwa	Wild elephant,	Ain-I-Akbari
Bihar	Wild buffalo, Nilgaw	Ain-I-Akbari

Few examples of animal conservation

Wild animals were not hunted arbitrarily during the Mughal period. Akbar and Jahangir forbade the killing of animals on certain days in the week, as well as for certain periods in the year. It was restricted to Thursdays and Saturdays. The main reason for this was that the Mughals were influenced by the Indian tradition of *ahimsa*, notably the principle of non-violence of Jains towards all animals. To establish this principle an incident can be mentioned here. In 1578, Akbar organized a huge encirclement hunt in the Salt Range, where thousands of soldiers had been employed to drive all the wild animals to a center where he posted himself for hunt, but in the last moment he released the helpless animals and named the place 'Little Macca'.^{xiv} He released the animals because he was influenced by the principle of *āhimsa*. Ralph Fitch (1583-91) wrote about the animal love of the kings of *Kochbihar* in Bengal that they were all gentiles and would not kill anything. They had hospitals for sheep, goats, dogs, cats, birds, and all other living creatures.^{xv} When these animals became old or lame, they were given utmost care until their death. Sufism in Islam has a tradition where the avoidance of all meat and fish is prescribed. The *Taam-i-Sufiyanahas* has advised us to be vegetarian. Akbar and Jahangir banned cow slaughter in many areas in their dominions.^{xvi} Abul Fazal writes about this beneficial animal "Throughout the happy regions of Hindustan, the cow is considered auspicious and held in great veneration for by means of this animal, tillage is carried on, the sustenance of life is rendered possible and the table of the inhabitant is filled with milk, butter-milk"^{xvii}

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the practice of animal hunting continued during the Mughal period. Evidence of animal hunting is found in contemporary Mughal literature and paintings. Great Mughal emperors of the like of Akbar, Jahangir and their nobles went for hunting at certain occasions. They trained cheetahs and falcons to hunt, due to this the breeding of cheetahs decreased. Contemporary literature reveal cruelty during hunting. However, Jahangir and Akbar followed the Indian policy of non-violence. To stop arbitrary hunting of animals, Mughal emperors put a ban on it twice a week. But we must remember that at that time there was no proper forest policy and wildlife conservation policy. Due to this, the number of wild animals was reduced to a great extent. Also, the use of advanced guns in the British era led to further crisis. As a result, the balance of the environment was disturbed. Later, when the Indian government adopted a forest and wildlife policy, then normal condition resumed to a certain extent. Currently, the number of wild animals has started to increase, as per the animal census. Basically, all living beings on this earth have the right to survive which human society must realize today.^{xviii}

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