

THE ROYAL HUNT AND WILDLIFE: A CASE STUDY OF PRINCELY STATE OF HYDERABAD

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Abstract:

India has a rich heritage of wildlife as well as a long history and tradition of conservation. Wildlife history is the study of inter linkages between forests, people, and species i.e. of their exploitation, protection and conservation. It is also about the study of transformation of certain species from royal icons to conservation symbols. The interest about wild life history was a part of the rise and growth of India's environmental history that began with the debates on forest conservation. The colonial period was an ecological watershed, because it disturbed the relationship of communities with the forest, the colonial conservation was motivated by growing deforestation and drought in the colonies. However, the discussion about wildlife was peripheral in these works. The Wild animals during the British rule in India were considered as a curse to be wiped out. During the colonial period, hunting became both utilitarian ideal and a masculine motive. Hunting was one of the sites on which the colonial project tried to construct and affirm ideological marker which affirmed the colonizing white male as super masculine. The Princely states in India were, largely, sites where hunting was pursued for pleasure and hence called 'game'. They became gaming venues for the British officials. Hunting became a site for cementing the bonds between the princely India and the colonial state. In these states the conservation model evolved was often to help the 'Game', i.e. Excessive destruction created new awareness of extinction. In this context, it was surprising that a state like Hyderabad, the largest princely state in India with a large area of forests, diverse species of wild life remains unexplored. Thus, the present research tries to explore the nature of wildlife situation, the idea behind royal hunting and hunting practices of Hyderabad princely state, during 1724 to 1948.

Key Words:

Wildlife, Royal Hunt, Forest, Princely state, Colonial India, Mir Mahaboob Ali Khan, Hyderabad.

Introduction:

The significance of India's wildlife is deeply rooted in its culture and spirituality. Communities within the different parts of the country still protect wildlife species for their religious and cultural significance. During the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the forests of India echoed with the sound of guns that departed in pursuit of animals and birds of varied proportions, as a part of that favoured pastime of the subcontinent's elite-hunting. Taking a closer look at organized hunts practised by ruling elites called *Sikhar*. A prominent theme in hunting literature is the symbolism of hunting as a political activity. Therefore, the indigenous rulers of colonial India and British colonialists utilized hunting as a cultural means to display their power as sovereigns. These rulers were only participating during a tradition that has long been a part of the subcontinent's history. In pre-colonial India, local society considered tiger hunting the symbol of kingship. British sportsmen in hunting became an indirect way of dominating Western

culture on natives, representing the victory of European culture on nature. Hunting thus provided a relentless avenue of collaboration and interaction between the colonized and colonizer.

Methodology and sources:

The study uses Historical method. The sources would be forest, agricultural and revenue proceedings in the departments of *Daftar-I- Diwani*, *Daftar-I-Qanungo*, *Daftar-I-Peskari* etc, Nizam government annual administrative reports, journals, literature, gazetteers. Anthropological works of Haimendorf, Salim Ali's *Memories of Hyderabad Visits*, and memoirs of colonial officials would be consulted along with photographs of Raja Deendayal and paintings.

The ideology behind the royal hunt:

Hunting acquired the element of pageantry because of the precision and planning of war during the Mughal era. The Mughals understood and used the political moreover as the military significance of hunting¹. This includes affirmation of land ownership, surveying of territory, fatherly protection, courage, and status. The Rajput monarchs, many of whom were vassals of the Mughal emperors, likewise pursued hunting with enthusiasm, viewing it as a sacred ritual. Historically, royal hunts were either held on royal game preserves or in open forests. The royal hunt was the simplest method to gain control over nature. As a result, cheetahs and lynx were tamed and dispatched after antelopes, while smaller sports like partridge, fowl, hare, and other species were incorporated into the 'art' of falconry. Cheetahs were trapped within the wild or bred at the emperor's palaces then trained to hunt within the former.

The Mughals hunted both in the open ground and closed, walled hunting preserves. No matter what, the hunting party must remain outdoors for months at a time because the distance covered is vast. The coterie consisted of courtiers, noblemen, the king's harem, many horses and elephants, legions of soldiers, and ordinary peasants who assisted in the hunt. As an example, it is said that Akbar had 400 000 soldiers accompany him on a hunting expedition. Sometimes, permanent hunting lodges were built; men and women participated in the hunts². Emperor Jahangir spoke lyrically in his memoirs about Empress Nur Jahan's proficiency with the pistol³. However, The Nizams considered themselves the last link to the Mughals in India, and that they took pains to uphold the traditions of Indo-Islamic Kingship⁴. For instance, specific sorts of hunt practised in Hyderabad, including the utilization of *Machans* (Tree stands), hunting from the *howdahs* (platforms) on the backs of Elephants, and therefore the use of trained cheetahs as hunting aid were those employed by Mughals.

The royal hunt displays a ruler's ability to marshal and order labour, military workforce, and individuals with exceptional skills. Furthermore, the nature of the hunt, these qualities were vividly shown around the countryside for the subjects' edification. According to, historians find that the hunt also served as an imitation of war, where stronger parties subjugated the weak to maintain their superiority over the less powerful⁵. Pursuing power, prestige and political conquest was at the centre of all hunts. It had been believed that the qualities defining an honest hunter also made the ideal imperialist, courage, masculine virility, a taste for adventure, a flair for strategic planning, and agility with firearms. In keeping with M.S.S. Pandean game hunting was one of the sites where the colonial project attempted to assert the difference between its superior self and the interiorized native other⁶. Hunting has been an ideological marker that

affirmed the white male as super masculine. The imperialist ideals of colonial officials wanted to ascertain military, political and economic superiority over the native people and their land.

Especially the hunt within the late nineteenth century drew together symbolic elements found in ruling ideologies of British raj and Mughal traditions of kingship and a newly emerging international elite culture of travel. The hunt or *shikar* was considered a regal sport within the numerous princely states, as many Maharajas and Nawabs, also as British officers, maintained an entire corps of *shikaris*, who were native professional hunters. The hunt was masterminded by *shikaris*, headed by a *mir shikari* or the head *shikari*. They tracked the beast on foot with the assistance of a vast entourage of beaters while the monarch and other noblemen rode on horseback or elephant back. When the animal was discovered, 'beaters' with drums, sticks, and *lathis* would drive it out of its hiding place. When the monarch and a few noblemen cornered the beast, they would shoot it. Most of the time, monarchy granted the king the right of firing the first round.

Mahesh Rangarajan argued that wild animals during British rule in India were considered a curse to be exhausted. During British rule, eradicating wild animals was unaccustomed to India⁷. Fencing the forest marked a divergent line between people and forest. The concept of the British government was to keep off the Jungle land and increase the world under cultivation to earn more revenue for the British exchequer⁸. The killing fields of the Mughals were not restricted to land alone, barges, bridges, and boats were employed in marshes, lakes, and rivers to execute hunting, fishing, and fowling with the use of decoys, nets, and weapons.

On the other hand, Peasants and commoners were permitted to shoot small animals and birds for meat, even on royal hunting grounds, subject to acceptable limits. Ramchandra Guha argues that imperial forestry was essentially an extension of the empire's financial, beginning, and strategic demands⁹. The colonial period is seen as an ecological watershed because it disturbed the connection of forest-based communities with the land. He also argued that the forest laws restricted small-scale hunting by tribal peoples. Nevertheless, it facilitated a more organized *Shikaars* expedition by the British, which caused a large-scale slaughter of animals. White *Shikhaars*, at all levels from the viceroy right down to the lower echelons of the British Indian army, participated.

Royal Hunt in Hyderabad Princely State:

Hyderabad was the largest princely state under British rule. Nizam al-Mulk had founded it in 1724 under the name of Asaf Jah. The last and seventh ruler was Mir Osman Ali Khan, who ruled until 1948. The state is located within the south-central Indian subcontinent, including Telangana, the Hyderabad-Karnataka region of Karnataka, and therefore the Marathwada region of Karnataka Maharashtra. The forest in Hyderabad state was part of the vast deciduous belt, which covered a considerable amount of peninsular India. Consistent with H.G.Champion and S.K.Seth's classification, the forests of the state came under the group 'South tropical deciduous forests' and 'South tropical Thorn forests'¹⁰. Based on the topography, rainfall, natural object, the forests of Hyderabad state were located within the valleys of the Godavari and, therefore, the Krishna rivers along the northwestern side of the state. Most forests of Hyderabad state were situated within the districts of Warangal, Karimnagar, Adilabad, and Nizamabad. However, considerable 'inferior' forest growth in Medak, Mahaboobnagar, Nalgonda, Aurangabad, Nanded, Parbani, Gulbarga,

and Raichur districts. Tigers, musk deers, wild dogs, leopards, wolves, jackals, forest cat, sloth bear, Sambhar, Nilghai, Chinkara, Chital, and four-horned Antelopes and various bird species were found here.

Hunting for sport became very fashionable in Hyderabad's princely state. Its rich heritage of wildlife and thick forest cover was the generous host of lavish game hunts and desired destination for such hunts. There have been three main camps used for hunting excursions within the Nizams Domains. One at Rozah, now called Kuldabad, the other at Narsempet, and the last at Manukota¹¹. The latter two were located within the vicinity of Lake Pakal. The Nizam and other nobles, including the Paigahs, Rajahs, visitors from Royal families everywhere in the world, and colonial officials, had many hunting lodges and favourite wildlife sport in and around. During the late nineteenth century, the development of transport systems, especially roads and railways in several parts of the world, made shooting estates and camps more accessible. This development led to elaborate hunting parties, and sporting tours became one of the most popular state visits.

The Nizam's lavishness and exotic Mughal sorts of the hunt practised in Hyderabad helped make the princely state a well-liked stop on these sporting tours. The royal visits formed a part of an emerging international aristocratic culture that began around the 1860s and peaked during the Edwardian period, which ended around 1910. The culture emphasised travel, hunting, and material displays of wealth. During the sixth Nizam's reign, Hyderabad received more royal visitors than any princely state¹². Within the years between 1891 and 1910, additionally, to official tours by the Viceroy, Hyderabad hosted a minimum of 16 foreign visits. Hyderabad hosted two such visits within the first three months of 1891 alone. The primary one is *Czarevitch* of Russia, Nicholas II, then a separate trip, grand duke of Russia. For several visitors participating in the hunt was one of their trip's highlights and first attractions. In 1902, Viceroy Lord Curzon and Lady Curzon arrived Hyderabad on an official visit. As part of the entertainment, the Nizam Government organised a *shikar* trip¹³. The Curzon went on a hunting excursion with Lady Curzon at *Narsampet* and *Mankota* within the *Pakal* jangle.

Theesmar Khan: Meer Mahaboob Ali Khan

Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, Asaf Jah the Sixth or the Sixth Nizam of Hyderabad who was endearingly mentioned by his subjects as Mahboob Ali Pasha or the Beloved¹⁴ and still remembered intrinsically within the stories passed from generation to generation, whose 27-year era was called the "Most Romantic Era of Hyderabad's history". He ascended the throne in 1869 at the age of three, after his father, Afzal ud Dhaula. Among the rulers of all the native states in British India during his times, Mahaboob Ali Pasha is reputed to possess had the lavish superior court. He was an ideal example of a Victorian Prince and an interesting person in many other ways. He had an excellent taste for Western culture and the modern way of life.

Hyderabad became well known for its extravagant entertainment and great hunting expeditions during his period. He was keen on Shikar or hunting as numerous photos with the hunted animals, including tigers and blackbucks show. "He was not a poacher but a systematic hunter who never killed the feminine of the species. He would hunt only males. Whenever he would assail hunting expeditions within the forest of Adilabad and Warangal, it might provide employment opportunities to many people because it would involve a great deal of preparation and arrangements". He killed almost 30 tigers in his lifetime, and he was titled 'Thees Mar Khan'¹⁵. His hunting grounds were located in Narsampet, Mankot, Pakal, Nallamalla and Adilabad forest region. The Nizam appointed Raja Deen Dayal as his court photographer to record his

achievements and, by demonstrating his skills as a hunter, was reaffirming his place within the Indo-Islamic tradition of kingship¹⁶.

Guns continued to be trained on most wild animals during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and birds were all looked for, some as trophies while others for meat. The Guns allow hunters to shoot many animals with ease, successively fostering an increased sense of competition. People gained international repute for their shooting skills. For example, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria visited Hyderabad in 1896. He was renowned in elite circles as a decent shoot. Old documents reveal how a hunting party led by a member of the royalty in May 1935 had killed 35 tigers and several other bears, sambars, and herbivores within just 33 days. Major General Edmond Francis Burton wrote in 1885 that he had seen a herd of untamed elephants, a dozen in number, at a lake near Hyderabad in 1847. Some elephants utilized in wars had escaped and settled down within the wild. By the 1900s, their number dwindled to at least one. Today, there are not any elephants in the wild in Telangana. Colonel Nightingale, a well-known hunter at the period, was responsible for the deaths of around 300 tigers during his term in Hyderabad. When he died in 1868, tigers in the princely realm were on the verge of extinction.

Conclusion:

India held a fascination for all who ruled this country with its abundant wildlife, and the hunting game was popular. With the arrival of the British Raj, hunting for sport gained more popularity. Extensive hunting by British and Indian Rajas, large-scale clearing of forests for agriculture, availability of guns, and poaching have had disastrous effects on India's wildlife. A significant portion of the wildlife heritage of Hyderabad state was exhausted during the Nizam rule under colonial India. The shooting of tigers was a well-liked game for years. Noted birdman and wildlife expert Salim Ali, who toured the city during 1931-32 as a part of Hyderabad ornithological survey, had described the city as an ideal game country. In one of his essays published by the Bombay natural history Society in 1937, Saleem Ali wrote: "Hyderabad state at just the once, not so very way back, provided a number of the finest game shootings, especially tigers, in India". It implies that at the end of the 1930s significant portion of the wildlife of Hyderabad state was wiped out. However, unchecked hunting despite regulations on the wild game contributed to the faster destruction of wildlife in Hyderabad princely state and India.

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