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Hunting Practices In The Hills Of Himachal During The British Period

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***Abstract*:** Forests and wildlife are vital resources that have played a crucial role in human beings' social, economic, and religious life since the beginning. Forests were essential for the livelihoods of forest dwellers who depended on them for food, shelter, fodder, fuelwood, and other daily necessities. Humans hunted animals in forests and obtained meat for food from wild animals; however, over time, they cleared forests for agriculture, which put pressure on soil and water resources. They were unfamiliar with agriculture and relied on animal flesh, but some wild fruits and vegetables grew in abundance in the forests, as well as leaves and fur for clothing. They didn't have fixed houses; they might have made huts from tree leaves. Forests and wildlife play a crucial role in maintaining environmental balance. Every species plays a vital role in maintaining an ecological balance among the Earth's living systems. This research paper highlights the hunting practices in the hills of Himachal during the British period. This papers also highlights the relation between wildlife and Human activities.

Index Terms - Hunting, Wildlife, Forest, Hilly State, and British Period.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian villagers and colonial officers often held irreconcilable views of nature. For locals, forests and wildlife were embedded in a sacred landscape of ancestral rites. Community members might protest strongly if hunters targeted a temple grove or a *devta* (god's) animal; colonial records recount hill guards (and sometimes even Brahmin priests) physically intervening to save animals like peacocks, langurs, or turtles from being hunted. Villagers sometimes appealed to spiritual beliefs to protect animals, with examples of Adivasi guides refusing to kill tabooed species.[i]

British sportsmen, in contrast, typically saw forests as playgrounds or resource reserves. A colonial newspaper from 1901 lamented how villagers would "plead" with officers not to shoot certain birds or deer, labelling this resistance as "superstition" or "fanaticism." Officials often dismissed local reactions as "religious bigotry," while Indian nationalists framed such resistance as an early conservation ethic or patriotic cultural conservation.

This tension was also reflected in legal measures. From the 1880s onward, the Raj introduced game laws into hill administration, limiting village hunts and imposing licensing requirements. By the late 19th century, seasonal restrictions and codified game laws, such as those implemented in Shimla district in 1924, sought to regulate hunting.[ii] However, earlier British accounts unabashedly celebrated *shikar* (hunting) as a gallant sport and a means to assert imperial dominance, symbolised by the planting of the Union Jack after a hunt. However, earlier, the British had regarded hunting traditions as a gallant sport and a means to assert control, viewing the wilderness as tamed only when it was under imperial control.[iii]

Thus, "traditional" ecology, embedded in custom, clashed with the "western scientific forestry" imposed by the colonials, a conflict that local hill communities increasingly perceived as an assault on their way of life.[iv] The broader conflict between "traditional" ecology and colonial extractivism exemplified the encounter between hill communities and state power, with local resistance increasingly framed as an assertion of their cultural identity and way of life.[v]

II. PREDATORS AND POWER: BRITISH COLONIAL HUNTING NARRATIVES

Historically, the relationship with large predators was a multifaceted one. The Valmiki Ramayana, written between the fourth and sixth centuries B.C., depicts King Dasaratha as a "lion among kings" and Rama and Lakshmana as "tigers among men." Lions and tigers were symbols of power and danger; the ability to confront and overcome them often served as a demonstration of martial prowess. This legitimisation persisted into the Mughal period, with Emperor Akbar encountering a man-eating tiger. Farid's bravery in killing a tiger on foot, armed only with a spear, earned him the title Sher Khan (1540-1545).[vi]

During the British period, Indian hunting witnessed both continuity and upheaval. Many old hunting traditions persisted: princely states and aristocrats continued royal shikar, now sometimes involving British guests.[vii] However, colonial authority imposed new hunting laws. After 1875–78, the Raj promulgated the first Indian Game Laws in both princely and British provinces, creating schedules for protected and killable species. One goal was to reserve big game for official "sport" (i.e., to reduce village sport kills and curb poaching).[viii] British officers zealously hunted tigers, leopards, and bears in the 19th century, often in sensitive ecological areas. They also began to restrict hunting of some species (bears, deer) to ensure trophies remained for the elite.[ix]

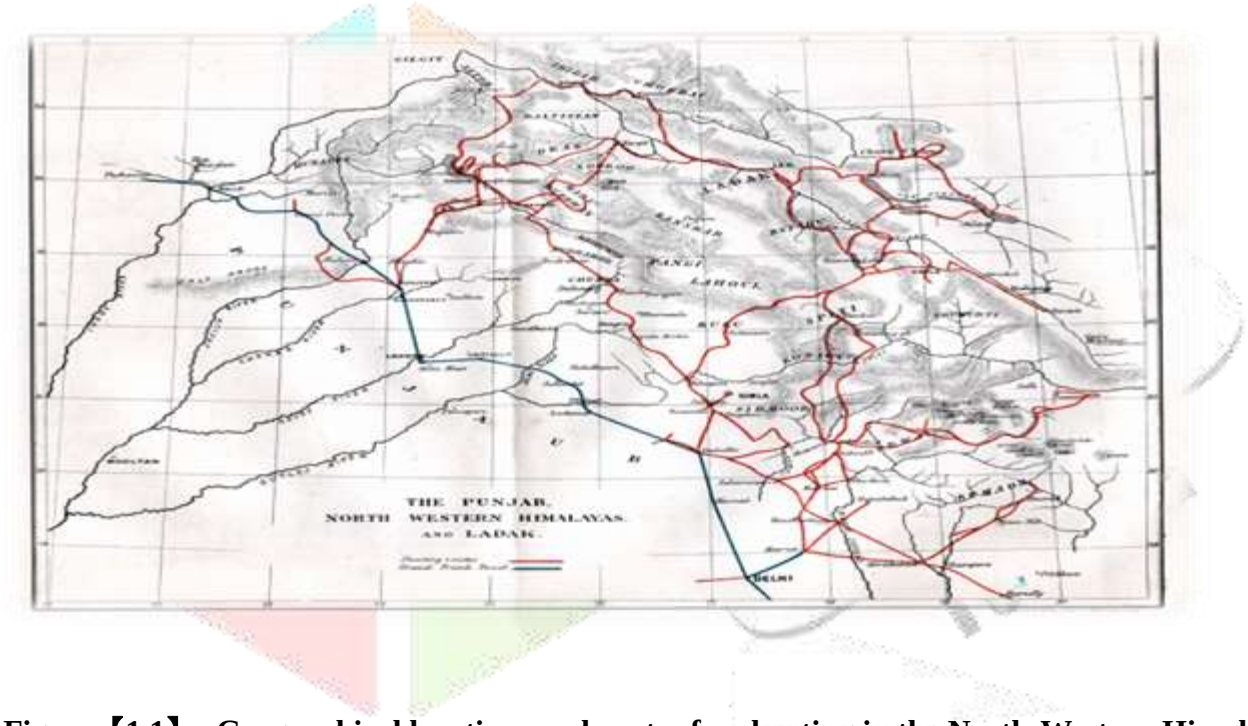
The period between 1820 and 1850 beheld the advent of sporting journals.[x] Colonial accounts (*shooting in Himalaya, Rifle and Romance in the Indian Jungle, sportsman guide to Kashmir and Ladakh Jungle trial in Northan India the sportsman book of India 1904, sports and life in future Himalaya, Rifle and Spear Rajput, Shikara Sketch Indian field sports, How I shot my bear, hunting in Himalaya, Ibex shooting in Himalaya, Wanderings Naturalist in Indian The Western Himalayas, and Cashmere 1864; With Pen and Rifle in Kishtwar, 1918,, Blackwood magazine*), emphasise predators as both sporting targets and symbols of untamed wilderness. By the 1860s, however, the literature on hunting had given rise to a new genre—the hunting memoir, primarily published by men serving in the upper echelons of the colonial administration.[xi] British dispatches mention "den searches" for panthers and bears, as well as chases of wolves in snowdrifts, often portraying them as manifestations of princely foes. Officers wrote of carrying special ammunition (solid-shot bullets) to penetrate leopard skulls, and of contracting local Gurkha or Gaddi tribesmen as "shikars" (beaters and trackers).[xii] The power arc was palpable: when a snowy peak or forbidding pass was reached, the white hunter stood atop, rifle in hand, proclaiming dominion by raising a trophy flag. Accounts often note how imperial hunting parties fenced off areas to trap game, echoing Mughal techniques – one records how beaters created a funnel to trap a panther under an earthen platform.[xiii] Such imagery of man versus beast also served colonial propaganda, emphasising the transformative effect of the empire on "rude" landscapes. In reality, however, these hunts sometimes led to diplomatic incidents – for example, chasing a tiger onto a neighbor's land could spark interstate tension if not arranged with local consent.[xiv]

III. IMPERIAL HUNTING PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS

The Western Himalayas offered distinct hunting places and spots.[xv] British military hunters entered the western Himalayas from 1815 onward, particularly from the 1860s, when a new generation of guns, significantly more accurate than their predecessors, provided sport hunters with greater firepower.[xvi] *The*

Himalayan Journal (1929) revealed that in the Himalaya, each village possesses its own designated hunting grounds. The native hunters were highly protective of their reserves. The primary targets are gooral, musk deer, and pheasants, all of which were captured using traps; very few were captured using guns. However, not all villages participated in hunting.[xvii] British officers and their royal guests trekked through cold valleys, supported by locals, and reached the habitats of snow leopards, ibex, musk deer, jackals, and pheasants.[xviii] Unlike the hot-terrain shikars of the plains, Himalayan hunts had to accommodate high altitudes and rough terrain.[xix]

The route map **Figure【1.1】** provided by Alexander Kinloch, A., *Large Game Shooting in Tibet and the North West*,illustrates the Punjab hill states, North-Western Himalayas, and Ladakh region, highlighting key routes used by travel or possibly shooting expeditions in the western Himalayas. This route map details accounts of central locations such as Gilgit, Leh, Pangi, and other regions known for their rugged terrain and natural beauty, showcasing the network of paths and rivers integral to navigating this mountainous area.[xx] The map, titled as a guide for shooting and exploration, is a historical document that emphasizes the region's accessibility and the interaction between human activity and the environment.[xxi]



Figure【1.1】: Geographical locations and routes for shooting in the North-Western Himalayas. Red lines mark routes used for travel or a possible shooting expedition.

Source: Alexander Kinloch, A., Large Game Shooting in Tibet and the North West.

The Himalayan hunting scenes had plenty of characteristics. British officers and the Viceroy trekked into high valleys seeking ibex, musk deer, snow leopard, and colourful pheasants as game.[xxii] These hunts required mountaineering skills.[xxiii] A native Shikari (Shikari is a Native name for a hunter) assisted the British in searching for prey during hunting expeditions in the hills. They were highly skilled in mountaineering and hunting, and well-versed in local game and hunting routes. With their help, the Britishers easily caught the game. [xxiv]

The local trekkers guided these hunters, and the British hunters often employed the local skilled trekkers. A typical expedition would establish well-outfitted camps in remote valleys.[xxv] British manuals describe setting up high-altitude camps with lit coal fires and providing wool blankets and diet meals to prevent mountain sickness.[xxvi]

Before venturing into the hills, the Viceroy's party often stayed in Shimla or royal palaces (like Nahan).[xxvii] They relied on local Rajas to provide elephants (for boar hunts), ponies, and pathfinders.[xxviii] The Raj's hunting ethos – encapsulated in The Indian Field-Shikar Book (1900s) stressed blending "romantic.[xxix] British manuals (e.g. the Indian Field Shikar series) stressed blending "romantic wilderness" with military-style discipline.[xxx] Local hill culture influenced the hunts: guides would recite local curses to frighten game into nets, and meals in camp would feature hill dishes and liquor, such as loogri or chang, as well as fresh goat.[xxxi]

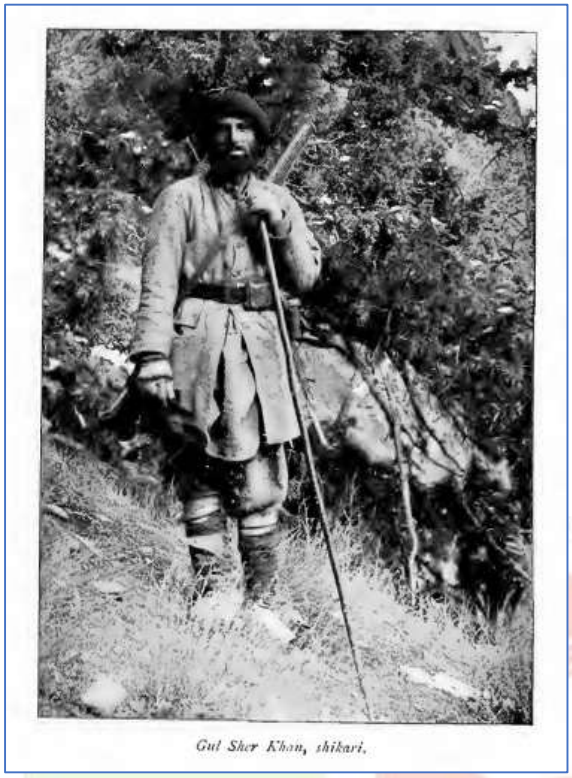


Figure:【1.2】Portrait of a Local Shikri higher by the Shib British Sportsman during their trip on Himalayas.

Source: Sport and Life in the Further Himalaya,1905, Major R. L. Kennion, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1910.

Himalayan hunts targeted a mix of charismatic and utilitarian game. Leopards **[Figure 1.3]** were prized for their speed and danger; killing one was a rare trophy.[xxxii] Himalayan black and brown bears were sought (often at night with lanterns) and considered extremely tough opponents.[xxxiii] Ibex and musk deer were unique high-altitude game: hunters usually spent weeks above the timberline, stalking these species on cliffs.[xxxiv] The Himalayan monal (pheasant) was a colourful bird hunted for sport and its skin.[xxxv] Even jackals and wolves were sometimes hunted to test gun accuracy or reduce livestock predation.[xxxvi] Lower elevations offered chital (spotted deer),[xxxvii] sambar, and wild boar, especially in the Siwalik belt near foothill jungles.[xxxviii] Hunting regulations in 1924 protected many rarer species – including musk deer, goral, serow, Kakar, Sambar, and others – during their mating seasons, implicitly acknowledging their ecological vulnerability.[xxxix]

IV. FROM RIFLES TO RUCKSACKS: EQUIPMENT OF A SHIKARI IN THE HILLS

Figure: [1.3]The snow leopard (Pantherauncia) State Animals of H.P is a species of large cat found in the Himalayan ranges.

Source: Sport and Life in the Further Himalaya,1905, Major R. L. Kennion, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh

Hunting parties in the Himalayas were logistically complex. Lightweight, portable equipment was essential in steep terrain. Porters (coolies) carried most supplies, but ponies, mules, yaks, and even elephants were used where feasible. Camps required sturdy canvas tents (often with wooden floors), folding furniture, and coal braziers; hunters brought fine woolens, oilskin capes, and even whisky or opium to acclimatize. Special gear included double-barrelled rifles (.450–.577 calibres), large cartridges, shotguns, and small-calibre "pea rifles" for birds. Binoculars, knives, powder flasks, and leather cartridge bags completed the arsenal. Guides – often called shikaris – were critical: European officers typically hired local foresters or hill men with intimate knowledge of game habits, sometimes paying extra bonuses ("customary") per kill. Administrative details were meticulous: hunters kept ledgers of expenses and hunts, and some even transported portable gramophones or cameras to document their journey. A British colonial shikari (hunter) in the Himalayas had to be self-sufficient.[xl]

Typical gear included:

Shelter and Accommodation—canvas tents (with floors) or local palkis (covered litters) for mountain camps. A raised wooden platform *(Machan)* might be built to ambush game.

Food and Cooking Arrangements—Portable stoves or coal braziers for cooking; supplies of rice, flour, and canned meat; local provisions, such as buckwheat flour (for dalia) and goat cheese. Hill Sherpas carried dehydrated teas and hard biscuits.

Hunting Gear—Double-barreled rifles (often .450 calibre) and shotguns for birds; ample ammunition; scopes or peep sights for long shots. Knives, haversacks, binoculars, and game bags were standard. Cartridge belts and waterproof cases were carried.

Table [1.1]Rifles Suitable for Hunting in the Hills

Type of Rifle	*Explanation*
Low-Trajectory Rifles	These rifles minimise aiming errors over long distances, making them ideal for precision shooting in hilly terrains where distance estimation is challenging.
Small-Bore Rifles	Lightweight and versatile, these rifles are easy to handle on rugged terrain while providing sufficient firepower for a variety of targets.
Light Pea Rifles	Designed for hunting small game, such as hares and pheasants, they produce minimal noise, reducing the risk of disturbing larger game nearby.
Double-Barreled Rifles	Known for reliability and quick follow-up shots, these rifles are effective for situations requiring rapid response.
Breech-Loading Rifles	Preferred for their ease of use, quick and noiseless reloading, and lower maintenance needs compared to muzzle-loaders, making them practical for extended expeditions.[xli]

Source: Indian Field Shikar Book by W.S. Burke

Clothing and Personal Items—Woollen greatcoats, canvas gaiters, heavy hats, and gloves against snow. Items also included oilskin capes (for rain), woollen socks, and local garments (e.g., embroidered chaukandis given as gifts). Personal items: journals, maps, thermos flasks (often silver), cameras (for some officers).

Camp Infrastructure—Folding tables and chairs (usually teak) for camp mess; lanterns; mosquito nets; utensils. Officers sometimes brought small libraries, musical instruments, or photography equipment for recreation at base camp.

Staff and Guides—Alongside the British hunter were syces (horse handlers), cooks (often from Kashmir or Punjab), and batolis (beater-leaders) from local villages. Gurkha or Pathan gamekeepers carried rifles as guards. The Raja's foresters, or shikaris, often guided expeditions, possessing intimate knowledge of local game.

Recreational Items—Officers liked to bring binocular telescopes for bird-watching, card decks or chess sets for evenings, and even fishing rods for streams crossed.

Transportation—Horses or ponies (sometimes Tibetan ponies in higher passes); palkis (covered litters) for sick or dignitaries; elephants (for larger parties or in thick forests); bullock carts or tonga (horse carriages) on approach roads. Topography meant that much travel was on foot, so pack ponies carried heavy gear.

Table【1.2】 List of the typical Pack Items mentioned by Kinloch 1885 in his documents, shooting in the Himalayas for a one-month Himalayan Hunting Camp, needed for an individual.

Items	Quantity	Uses of Items
Small tent (self)	1	A personal tent for accommodation.
Tent for servants	1	A separate tent was designated for the use of servants.
Bedding (self and servants)	9	Includes sleeping arrangements for both the user and the servants.
Clothes and books	1	Represents a compact collection of necessary clothing and reading materials.
Canteen (cooking gear)	1	Cooking equipment, such as pots, plates, and utensils.
Tea, sugar, and stores	1	Supplies for beverages and other essential consumables.
Brandy and other stores	1	Alcoholic beverages and additional provisions.
Ammunition	1	Includes necessary ammunition for firearms.
Gun and rifle	2	Two firearms for personal defence or hunting.
Sundries	1	Miscellaneous items that do not fit into the above categories.
Total	12	Total number of packed items and supplies.

Source: Large Game Shooting in Tibet and the Northwest. By Alexander A. A. Kinloch.

Each hunt was thus a semi-military expedition: the shikari's equipment list was as detailed as that of a small army unit. Although we lack a single colonial manual that lists every item, the above inventory reflects standard practices described in 19th- and early 20th-century hunting accounts.

V. CONCLUSION

Human always depend upon the wildlife due to their essential needs. This research paper try to correlate the relation of Human and Wildlife. Hunting processes was the importantactivities of Human being since Pre-historic period. Forests were essential for the livelihoods of forest dwellers who depended on them for food, shelter, fodder, fuelwood, and other daily necessities. Humans hunted animals in forests and obtained meat for food from wild animals; however, over time, they cleared forests for agriculture, which put pressure on soil and water resources.

This paper also attempts these hunting practices in the hills of Himachal Pradesh under the British rule as well princely state rule in Himachal Region.

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