

# BRITISH GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

The Story of the Viceroys and Government Houses

By

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*Viceroy and Governor General of India*

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*'Dost thou not know that the greatest part of Asia is subject to our arms and our laws? that our invincible forces extend from one sea to the other? that the potentates of the earth form a line before our gates? and that we have compelled Fortune herself to watch over the prosperity of our Empire?'—Timur [Tamerlane] to Sultan Bajazet.*

GIBBON: *'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,'* cap. lxiv.

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From racing, the so-called "Sport of Kings," it is a natural transition to pass to *shikar*, which in modern times has become the traditional sport of the King's representative in India. It is curious how little notice we find of tiger-hunting or game-killing of any kind in the records of the earlier Governors of Bengal. They would seem rather to have indulged in the doubtful amusement of looking on while wild animals fought each other in captivity. Great entertainments of this sort used to take place. In the Official Records of 1765 I came across an account of fights on 18th December, at the New Fort, between a tiger and a buffalo, between two camels, and between an elephant and a rhinoceros. The rhino having declined to fight, the indignant elephant ran wild, charged the ring of spectators and killed six persons. Two days later a notice was issued by His Lordship (Lord Clive) that he intended to hold an elephant fight on the Maidan; and on this occasion, under such distinguished patronage, there was a fierce encounter.

We are told that Warren Hastings once shot a tiger on the site of what is now the Cathedral, in the South-east corner of the Calcutta Maidan, and the "India Gazette" of 1784 recorded a bag of four of these beasts by the Governor General's party near Chinsura; but in the whole of Hastings' published correspondence I have only found one reference to that form of sport. Barwell had a hunting lodge at Baraset, though this was not for tiger-shooting but for pig-sticking, and we hear more of his boon companions there playing high and drinking deep than of any sporting excursions.

In the whole of the voluminous Correspondence of Lord Cornwallis, during his first term of office in India, lasting for seven years, there is not a single mention of a tiger or deer or buffalo hunt, although these animals abounded within a few score of miles of Calcutta.

As a matter of fact, the Company's servants led a very sedentary life in Bengal, seldom leaving the town (unless on official duty) except to take the air on the river,<sup>1</sup> or on rare occasions to profit by a sea trip to Chittagong; and although the Sunderbunds were then, even more than now, infested with tigers, we read of no expeditions to kill them. Lord Wellesley, who would have loved a Viceregal shoot on the present magnificent scale, does not appear to have been a sportsman.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Philip Francis, during his five years' residence in India, never went more than 100 miles from Calcutta.



But there is a plate in Sir Ch. D'Oyly's "European in India" depicting him and his suite looking on at an elephant fight, if that could be called sport—which it certainly was not—at the breakfast table of the Nabob of Oudh.

It is not till we come to Lord Hastings' time that, in the course of his long and tedious river journeys to the Upper Provinces, we read of the Governor General, who was insufferably bored by the slowness of the progress, turning aside to indulge in *shikar*. The two volumes of his Private Journal record many such attempts in 1815, and again in 1817 and 1818;<sup>1</sup> but compared with modern experiences they seem to have been singularly tame and unsuccessful. Perhaps, as he explained, when out after antelope in Datia, the game was frightened away by his red coat.

Other Governors General did a little mild shooting on their long marches to the North-west. We read for instance of Lord and Lady Amherst on their journey from Allahabad to Cawnpore in November, 1826, "hunting and hawking as they go, to beguile the way."

The mid-century Governors General appear to have similarly indulged in occasional sport. But there was nothing in those days analogous to the organised big shoots of modern times. The change came first with the spread of British rule over distant areas to which the early Governors had no access; secondly, with the extension of the railway, enabling the Viceroy to proceed easily to parts of India where, in the days of marching or river-tracking, he could never penetrate; and thirdly, with the fondness developed by the modern Raja, equipped with up-to-date weapons of precision and possessing a hereditary sporting instinct for preserving wild game in an organised fashion in the jungles of his State, both for his own enjoyment and that of his friends, and most of all for the entertainment of the King's representative. The sporting tours of the modern Viceroy, with their wonderful adventures and often prolific results, are an experience which no one who has enjoyed them would willingly have missed, or can ever forget. But it is not in the neighbourhood of Calcutta that they can be obtained; and therefore they find no place in this Volume.

Among the minor sports, however, in which the Calcutta Englishman, and the Viceroy's Staff in particular, have never failed to indulge, have been the early morning paper-chases and the hunt of the jackal.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. I, pp. 259-263, 269, 272, 301-308; Vol. II, pp. 307-310, 315, 318.