

The Princely Hunt and Kshatriyahood

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M

any cultures have a tendency to anthropomorphise animal behaviour, and zoomorphise human behaviour.

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L is the Lion
Who fights for the Crown
His smile when he's worried
Is changed to a frown¹

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The metaphorical representation of Cooch Behar's 'Coat of Arms' displaying a badge supported by a crowned lion (*Panthera leo*) on the right and an elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) on the left² made a political statement in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century colonial North Bengal. By the mutually supportive gestures of the two animals, the statement was evinced that the Raj now relied more on collaboration than confrontation with the Indian rulers. The colonial structure of power not only made compromises with native traditions but also learnt much from them to sustain its hegemony. The East India Company learnt the usefulness of elephants in warfare, transport, trade, hunting etc., from local traditions and applied the knowledge in its metropolitan culture.³ The Raj assimilated as much indigenous tradition as it disseminated European customs into Indian society.

Colonialism in India did not necessarily mean a sudden breakaway from pre-colonial traditions. The history of colonialism in India shows us that certain pre-colonial traditions were indeed reinforced and reinvigorated through the British Raj, which also evolved around pre-colonial Indian traditions. The pre-colonial Hindu kings of India had been fabricating 'divine kingship' in order to legitimise their ruling authority.⁴ The British Indian prince *maharaja* Nripendra Narayan (1863–1911) of Cooch Behar in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century continued the same pre-colonial notion of kingship based on the divine birth theory despite his ruling authority having already been recognised by the British.⁵

¹ Mary Frances Ames, *An ABC for Baby Patriots* (London: Dean & Son, 1898), p. 23.

² H.N. Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements* (Cooch Behar: State Press, 1903), p. 438.

³ Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Trading Knowledge: The East India Company's Elephants in India and Britain', *The Historical Journal* **48** / 1 (2005): 27–63.

⁴ Rup Kumar Barman, 'State Formation, Legitimization and Cultural Change A Study of Koch Kingdom', *The NEHU Journal* **XII** / 1 (2014): 17–21.

⁵ Nripendra was recognised by the British as a legitimate colonial ruler, i.e., he was conferred the title 'Maharaja' in 1884. See, T. McClenaghan, *Indian Princely Medals: A Record of the Orders, Decorations and Medals of the Indian Princely States* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers & Distributors, 1996), p. 111.

The restoration of Hindu ideals of the pre-colonial *kshatriyahood* or warrior-caste attributes became possible due to the early British administrators' recognition and adaptation of ancient Hindu laws and customs, as found in the *Dharma Shastra*, in the colonial system of governance.⁶ That the restoration of pre-colonial and ancient *kshatriyahood* also benefited and sustained the paternal structures of colonialism was what made the ideological and practical reciprocity between the pre-colonial and colonial ethos of governance more evident and effective.

Courage and fearlessness as inherent qualities of *kshatriyahood* were manifested in the form of violating the bodily integrity of a wild animal to further legitimise kingship. For a pre-colonial Hindu monarch the scope of his legitimacy was based on the divine birth theory. That was why Vishva Simha (1523–1554), from whom the Narayan family always traced their descent,⁷ had to prove his *kshatriya* 'destiny' by killing and eating a monkey (*Macaca fascicularis*) and a snake (*serpentes*) in the woods. At the age of nine, Vishva staged another macabre drama of violence by beheading a *Koch* boy and placing the severed head on his own head before capturing political power.⁸ One of Nripendra's ancestors, Harendra Narayan (1783–1839) was said to have had frequently hunted tigers (*Panthera tigris*), buffaloes (*Bubalus bubalis*) and rhinos (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) as well as other mammals and birds. All those dead mammals and birds were laid aside for display of glory in the palace.⁹ Indeed, 'killing was', argues Rangarajan, 'a rite of passage into adulthood, especially manhood, for a number of dynasties.'¹⁰

⁶ For a detailed history see, J. Duncan and M. Derrett, 'The Administration of Hindu Law by the British', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 / 1 (1961): 10–52.

⁷ McClenaghan, *Indian Princely Medals*, p. 111.

⁸ See, Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, p. 226. Also see Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihas*, vol. 1 (Cooch Behar: Cooch Behar State Press, 1936), p. 85.

⁹ Moonshi Jadunath Ghose, *Rajopakhyan*, Rev. R. Robinson translated, (Calcutta: C.R. Lewis, 1874), p. 164. Also see, Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, pp. 277, 441.

¹⁰ M. Rangarajan, *India's Wildlife History: an Introduction* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 36–37.

Figure 1. Map of the Cooch Behar State, 1900



Source: H.N. Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements* (Cooch Behar: State Press, 1903), p. 1.

The hunting games of Nripendra, on the other hand, took place in the post-mutiny colonial period in which predation was defined by elaborate sportsmanship codes ‘developed to distinguish refined British hunting practices from cruel native practices’ of the ‘low caste’ *shikaris* and poachers.¹¹ While strictly following the codes of sportive hunting, Nripendra sought to restore his kshatriyahood and legitimise his kingship through almost four-decade long participation in shooting games along with the British hunter-narrators. The collaborative nature of princely hunt helps us to understand how imperialism was performed in the form of ‘game’ which paved the way for the restoration of kshatriyahood of a colonial prince.

¹¹ Anand S. Pandian, ‘Predatory Care: The Imperial Hunt in Mughaland British India’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14 / 1 (2001): 83.

A prince's game and militarism

Cooch Behar had become a feudatory princely state of the East India Company through a subsidiary alliance with the British way back in 1773.¹² The feudatory states, as the British called them,¹³ were ruled by the Indian princes who acknowledged their subordination to the British Government through certain treaties or engagements.¹⁴ No matter how subordinate the princely states were under the Raj, the authority of a Hindu king did not necessarily become 'detached from local ritual and social sources', just because colonialism meant 'binding the Indian aristocracy to the patronage of the British crown'.¹⁵

Colonialism did not change the ideology of domination and subordination that the pre-colonial Indian rulers had traditionally derived from the Hindu theological system. With reference to Manu, the ancient Hindu law giver, Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, a renowned pundit with his expertise in the Hindu *shastras*, in 1896, wrote that the ancient Vedic *Rishis* or sages had declared that the

¹² McClenaghan, *Indian Princely Medals*, p. 111.

¹³ W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Empire: its People, History, and Products* (London: Trubner & Co., 1886), p. 43.

¹⁴ As a feudatory state, the extent of Cooch Behar's sovereignty remained obscured for a long time under the British suzerainty. The treaty Warren Hastings made with Bhutan was, however, one of peace. See The Directorate of the Chambers' Special Organisation, *The British Crown & the Indian States* (London: P.S. King and Son, 1929), p. 8; B.G. Karlsson, *Contested Belonging: An Indigenous People's Struggle for Forest and Identity in Sub-Himalayan Bengal* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), p. 70. For the colonial state's mentioning of Cooch Behar's feudatory status, see, H.H. Risley et al., *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 10 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 379.

¹⁵ Crispin Bates, *Subalterns and Raj: South Asia since 1600* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 82. The authority of pre-colonial Indian kingship may not be considered 'Oriental despotism' from a Marxian point of view, as argues Nicholas Dirks who has shown in his study of pre-colonial South India that the Indian kings legitimised their authority through the ritual-based cultural construction of power. See, Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

office of the king would be the *kshatriya*'s 'birthright' and that the *kshatriya* would enjoy 'implicit obedience' from all.¹⁶

The first Narayan ruler, Vishva, had used Hinduism to legitimise his kingship.¹⁷ Any assertion of political power had to be recognised by Hindu traditions. Being mutually contributive to each other, neither the institution of Hindu kingship nor the school of *Brahmanism* could have survived without the 'Raja-pundit nexus with the former enjoying monopoly over economic and political power and the latter monopoly over scriptural knowledge and exclusive access to Vedic worship'.¹⁸

In the late-nineteenth century, however, the Cooch Behar king Nripendra became a product of British colonialism, as framed by T. B. Macaulay. Colonialism was expected to produce a class of local subordinate rulers or political allies. They were expected to be westernised Oriental gentlemen who would be Indians only 'in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in morals and intellect'.¹⁹ The Indian princes' relations with the British defined

the ways in which British modernity was used to coerce or co-opt native societies. The transfer of weapons technology, railway and agricultural expertise, and the presence of fancy gifts brought many princes into the British fold. Many willingly assimilated to British concepts of sport, beauty, and organisation, as with Nripendra Narayan, the Maharaja of Koch Behir.²⁰

¹⁶ Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1896), p. 7.

¹⁷ Rup Kumar Barman, 'State Formation, Legitimization and Cultural Change A Study of Koch Kingdom', *The NEHU Journal* **XII** / 1 (2014): 19.

¹⁸ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 49–51.

¹⁹ Colonial rule felt it necessary to mould the princes through English education so that they would provide services to the British in their exploitation of resources for the benefit of the metropole at the expense of the periphery. See, R.N. Sharma and R.K. Sharma, *History of Education in India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2004), p. 80.

²⁰ Joseph De Sapio, *Modernity and Meaning in Victorian London: Tourist Views of the Imperial Capital* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p. 42. Even Nripendra's wife Sunity claimed her husband to be an 'Indian at heart' though he loved European food and lived 'like an Englishman'. See Sunity Devee, *The Autobiography of an Indian Princess* (London: John Murray, 1921), p. 82.

Anglicisation or westernisation proved disastrous to the Narayan family of Cooch Behar as the more the State became Anglicised, the more it lost its influence over the locals. Little wonder that at the end of Nripendra's career, 'any young British official carried more weight with the people of Cooch Behar than did their own Rajas, or his wife, Sumati Dwee'.²¹ But colonialism also expanded the scope of Nripendra's authority for he was an Indian agent of British imperialism. As it was, the maharaja had to prove his martial credibility to his own subjects as much as to the British and his obsession with militarism went up to a new level. Nripendra, therefore, consciously followed the colonial idea of militarism which was intrinsically linked to hunting in the form of elite 'game' or 'sport.' Hunting occasions were carefully used by Nripendra as a platform to further embolden the Narayan dynasty's claim to restore kshatriyahood.

To the Anglo gentlemanly manner, game was the order of the day. Game mania gripped the colonial social order and the Indian princes were swept along. Nripendra's Anglicised behaviour might have alienated him from the people of his State,²² but it did one favour to the maharaja. His royal hunt consolidated the social hierarchy through the development of an 'unusual relationship' between him and the *shikaris* who accompanied him.²³ The native shikaris were treated well as long as they were with the Anglophile prince. They became 'poachers' when they acted on their own.

Swati Shresth argues that the late-nineteenth century colonial elite prejudices against native poachers and their methods were identical to the Victorian aversion to rural hunting methods. In India, Shresth says, it 'was not a simple matter of transplanting class biases but also heavily underscored by an overarching discourse on racial superiority'.²⁴ Due

²¹ A.C. Menzies, *Further Indiscretions by a Woman of No Importance* (London: H. Jenkins, 1918), p. 206.

²² *Ibid*, p. 206.

²³ F. Mani, *Guns and Shikaris: the Rise of the Sahib's Hunting Ethos and the Fall of the Subaltern Poacher in British India* (Ph.D. diss. West Virginia University, 2011), p. 22.

²⁴ S. Shresth, *Sahibs and Sikar: Colonial Hunting and Wildlife in British India, 1800–1935* (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2009), p. 84.

to the 'classicism of Britons' as well as their growing interests in 'caste' in the first half of the nineteenth century, the colonial perception of native shikaris was not friendly at all. They regarded the native shikaris as being 'low-caste or tribal' despite their heavy reliance on the natives in terms of indispensable local assistance and knowledge as well.²⁵ Such racial nuances became very pronounced when the colonial state recorded that the abounding wild pigs were killed and their flesh was eaten by the Rajbansi, Mech, Garo and Nepali villagers.²⁶

In India all subjects of colonisation were not equally deprived of power, nor did the colonised essentially form a monolithic identity. Tanika Sarkar's study of the rise of Hindu militant nationalism in the late-nineteenth century Bengal shows that neither did colonialism 'equally and entirely' disempower all Indians nor did the resistance to colonialism necessarily mean 'equally and entirely' empowering all Indians.²⁷ Hunting for subsistence was looked down upon by the British and their Narayan collaborators. It was an irony that the early colonial game hunters had learnt hunting practices from native shikaris but from the late-nineteenth century, those native shikaris 'were disbarred from owning firearms, and ... were stigmatised as poachers'.²⁸ Sivaramakrishnan shows how 'charges of cruelty and wasteful hunting by Indians were part of the standard vocabulary of colonial rhetoric' made to safeguard the commercial interests of the empire.²⁹

Aligned with martial discipline and masculine discourse was the colonial notion of militarism that every historian has to reckon with. Outnumbered by the Indians, the British still managed to rule their

²⁵ J. Sramek, 'Face him like a Briton: Tiger hunting, Imperialism, and British masculinity in colonial India', *Victorian Studies* 8 / 4 (2006): 671–675.

²⁶ J.F. Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri* (Alahabad: Pioneer Press, 1911), p. 13.

²⁷ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 190–209.

²⁸ A.S. Pandian, 'Predatory Care: The Imperial Hunt in Mughaland British India', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14 / 1 (2001): 83.

²⁹ K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (California: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 101.

Indian subjects over a great expanse of territory in South Asia. By the end of the nineteenth century, the size of the empire rose to 1,766,597 square miles.³⁰ It became possible because of the military might of the Raj. Soherwordi argues that ‘the force that kept the British in India was the army’.³¹ The British-Indian ‘military establishment’, also made the projection of power outside South Asia possible.³² Be it during the Opium Wars or the two World Wars, Indians as *sepoys* or soldiers were used by the British for the global imperial power projection. The responses from Indian princes to such a martial ethos have been an important aspect of colonialism’s interaction with the wild and Nripendra hardly remained unresponsive.

Nripendra was placed on the throne by the *maharanis* after one year of his birth in 1862.³³ The Cooch Behar State was under direct official management of a British Commissioner during Nripendra’s childhood unleashing ‘several salutary reforms’ in the State’s governance.³⁴ Very soon the Cooch Behar Police Commissioner Haughton expressed his anxiety over the quality of upbringing for the minor maharaja since Haughton did not want to see Nripendra to become ‘indolent, luxurious and slothful’ and, therefore, seems to have been careful about giving Nripendra a good education so that the State’s business as well as the tenants would not suffer and taxes would not cease to exist.³⁵

Since a supposedly good education could not have been provided locally, Nripendra was sent to a boarding school in Benaras or Varanasi in today’s Uttar Pradesh State. Special emphasis was placed on

³⁰ Report on the Census of India, 1901, p. 12.

³¹ S.H. Shaheed Soherwordi, ‘Punjabisation in the British Indian Army 1857–1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan’, *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies* 24 (2010): 19.

³² Kaushik Roy, *The Army in British India: From Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857–1947* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³³ Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, p. 418.

³⁴ Risley et al., *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, p. 382. Also see, C.E. Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1906), p. 92.

³⁵ Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, pp. 418–419.

his fondness for out-door games like cricket. But the interesting part in all his training in the work of a ruler was his participation in shooting game. Nripendra was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner, Beckett to develop 'a taste for shooting and camp-life' in the hinterlands of western Dooars.³⁶ In order to acquire combat skills Nripendra learnt horse riding and shooting rifles.³⁷ He was 'sometimes taken out on shooting excursions, and took part in bagging tigers, wild buffaloes and deer (*cervidae*)'.³⁸ The Englishman alone could vouch for the prince's level of sporting skills and what he had left to learn. Nripendra had to be recognised by the British as being a capable colonial prince in terms of his acceptability to the Raj. In Beckett's observation of 1872 it appears that Nripendra became very keen on sport and began to shoot well, seldom missing a sitting bird, and sometimes even knocked 'one over flying'.³⁹

Boria Majumdar argues that the maharajas were drawn into big game shooting because it was 'a shortcut to being a gentleman' as manliness was displayed 'in the splendour of men's physiques, the dazzle of equipage, the grim efficacy of their weapons and the magnificence of their fighting animals'.⁴⁰ Nripendra's emulation of the late Victorian ideals of masculine Englishness came through his adaption of the colonial notion of militarism which was rehearsed in the form of shooting game in the wild. Pablo Mukherjee, referring to the Victorian literature on hunting and imperialism, points out that British sportive hunting was meant to invent traditions.⁴¹

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 419–421.

³⁷ Nripendra Narayan's obsession with firearms is reflected in the appendix of his memoir where he gives a detailed account of how he tried almost every type of weapon, 'from a 4-bore double-barrelled rifle firing 15 grams of black powder to the smallest bore modern up-to-date cordite rifle.' See, N.N. Bhup, *Thirty Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars, and Assam* (Bombay: Times Press, 1908), pp. 459–461.

³⁸ Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, p. 421.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ B. Majumdar, *Cricket in Colonial India 1780–1947* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 2.

⁴¹ P. Mukherjee, 'Nimrods: Hunting, Authority, Identity', *Modern Language Review* 100 / 4 (2005): 925–26.

Martial races theory

The hunting memoir, *Thirty Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars and Assam*, published in 1908 by Nripendra Narayan Bhup, remains one primary witness to the wildlife slaughter in the name of 'game' that helped him reinvent the pre-colonial kshatriyahood tradition and legitimise his kingship. The memoir of a Cooch Behar maharaja also stood as a euphemism for imperial domination by the Raj. The colonial hunting memoirs were 'closely aligned with the exploration narrative in terms of the rhetoric of heroism, suffering, harsh landscapes and triumph'.⁴² The typical hunting photographs as visual metaphors display how sportive gesture became an integral part of colonial martial discipline and masculine discourse.

The memoir's publication also appears to have been a significant attempt to project the Cooch Behar maharaja at par with the *Marwar Rajputs* who were considered 'true sportsmen' for their support of and participation in hunting. European hunting skills qualified them to be categorised as the so-called 'martial race'. This was not surprising in a period when 'sportive hunting was often seen as an adequate defence against wild predators'.⁴³ Mackenzie, for example, has pointed out that adventurous hunting was seen in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century as a medium through which the virile identity of an imperial ruler could be constructed.⁴⁴ Hunting with rifles was seen as one test that the 'martial races' like Rajputs and *Gurkhas* could pass and hence be considered capable of taking part in warfare.⁴⁵

⁴² P.K. Nayar, *English Writing and India, 1600–1920: Colonizing Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 136.

⁴³ M. Rangarajan, 'The Raj and the Natural World: The war against "dangerous beasts" in Colonial India', in John Knight (ed.) *Wildlife in Asia: Cultural Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 212.

⁴⁴ J.M Mackenzie, 'The Imperial Pioneer, and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times', in J.A. Mangan and J. Walvin (eds) *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 179.

⁴⁵ Rangarajan, 'The Raj and the Natural World.'

One needs to take note of the contemporary British perception of Bengalis as 'effeminate' people who could not put up a fight against an attacking wild beast.⁴⁶ As early as 1807, Captain Thomas Williamson with his twenty years' sportive experience in Bengal expressed such an opinion about the virility of Bengalis. In Williamson's words, 'the weak timid Bengallee for the most part flies from the scene of horror'.⁴⁷ Since the battle of Plassey in 1757, on the other hand, the Rajputs had been accompanying the British in their military campaigns against the independent states of South Asia. Their loyal assistance made it possible for the British to rapidly extend the colonial frontier across the subcontinent as one imperial army official, A.H. Bingley, noted in 1899.⁴⁸

It was not for no reason that Nripendra's wife, Sunity, herself a Bengali *kayastha* caste woman by birth could develop so much interest in the Rajput *zenana* or the palace residence where women of the Rajput royalty lived in 'seclusion'⁴⁹ that she wrote a book on the Rajput princesses.⁵⁰ So intense became the desire to be associated with the Rajputs and get the recognition of kshatriya status in Bengal towards the end of the nineteenth century that some educated Bengali kayasthas authored Bengali books and fabricated stories as evidence to establish their kshatriyahood and glorify their caste history; a noted Brahmin pundit of Bengal, Ramanath Vidyaratna in 1889 found this preposterous.⁵¹

The Narayan dynasty ruled over a vast Hinduised/sanskritised

⁴⁶ J. Sramek, 'Face him like a Briton': 669.

⁴⁷ T. Williamson, *Oriental Field Sports*, vol. 1 (London: Edward Orme, 1807), pp. 185–186.

⁴⁸ A.H. Bingley, *Handbook on Rajputs*, 1899 (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1899, reprint 1986), p. 20.

⁴⁹ Virbhadr Singhji, *The Rajputs of Saurashtra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994), pp. 199–207.

⁵⁰ Suniti Devi, *The Rajput Princesses by the Dowager Maharani of Cooch Behar* (London: W. Straker, Not Dated).

⁵¹ Ramanath mentions the titles and contents of the books by Fakir Chand Basu and Shashi Bhushan Nandi. See, Ramanath Vidyaratna, *Hathat Khatriya* (Kolkata: Shankar Press, 1296 BS/1889).

tribal population⁵² in northern Bengal. Srinivas has observed that the low castes and tribes emulated the upper caste Brahmanic rituals and practices to get higher ranking in the caste hierarchy – a phenomenon which Srinivas calls *sanskritisation*.⁵³ While historicising the ‘hypergamy’ between Koli/Bhil tribes and Rajputs, Shah shows how hierarchical Rajputisation led to the rise of petty chiefdoms in Gujarat from the fifteenth century onwards. Such Rajputised tribal chieftains practised hypergamy, giving their daughters in marriage to Rajputs and providing an important mechanism for integration of the lower caste and tribal populations into Hindu society as seen in other parts of India. Together with *sanskritisation*, Rajput hypergamy ‘formed a single complex of continental dimension’.⁵⁴

Hypergamy practices also worked in the formation of Cooch Behar State as it was essentially based on the model of Rajput chieftainship. The view of royal origin of the Narayan family was either based on Rajput descent or was encouraged by a Rajput pattern of descent. Interestingly, as Durga Chandra Sanyal noted in 1908, the royal Narayans felt offended when they were called Koches or Rajbansis, who had been the Hinduised tribal subjects of the State,⁵⁵ and proclaimed themselves as Shivabansis meaning descendants of the Hindu deity Shiva.⁵⁶

In fact, the Narayan dynasty’s progenitor Vishva Simha was born from hypergamous and adulterous miscegenation.⁵⁷ The royal

⁵² Asha Basumatary, ‘Sanskritisation of Bodo Tribes in Assam (from 16th to 18th century)’, *Journal of International Academic Research for Multidisciplinary* 3 / 3 (2015): 187–193; see also, D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom, 1515–1615* (Delhi: K. M. Mittal, 1989), pp. 2–7.

⁵³ See, M.N. Srinivas, ‘A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization’, *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 / 4 (1956): 481–496.

⁵⁴ A.M. Shah, *The Structure of Indian Society: Then and Now* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), pp. 169–171.

⁵⁵ Subhajyoti Ray, *Transformations on the Bengal Frontier: Jalpaiguri 1765–1948* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 118–127.

⁵⁶ Durga Chandra Sanyal, *Banglar Samajik Itihas* (Calcutta: Panchu Gopal Das, 1908), p. 132.

⁵⁷ Vishva’s tribal mother was impregnated by an upper caste man. See, Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, p. 225–227. It has

bloodline of the Narayan family of Cooch Behar was indeed never free of controversy.⁵⁸ It was deemed by India's other princely families to have been 'tainted over centuries of intermarriages with' tribal women of the Himalayan foothills.⁵⁹ Nripendra was desperate to project himself as a Rajput and establish his kshatriyahood in the form of game hunting in order to brush aside the 'tainted' image. He also wanted to be seen as an Anglicised gentleman. Nripendra became the only Narayan ruler who did not have 'nautch girls', at his Court,⁶⁰ and he also abolished *kritadas-pratha* or keeping slaves in Cooch Behar.⁶¹

A member of the 'Imperial Order' since 1887,⁶² Sunity and her Narayan husband Nripendra shared a common majestic platform with Rajput princes from other princely states thanks to the arrangement made during the coronation ceremony of Edward VII in London.⁶³ Such a royal get-together arranged by the colonial state contributed to the formation and consolidation of princely identity based on the kshatriya Rajput descent. With the princes appearing to be the pillars of the imperial power of the Raj, their loyalty was symbolised and reinforced through their efforts to provide access to game to their British overlords.

Game also became a platform for the maharajas to build a bond with the British. At a time when the urban middle class was 'asking uncomfortable questions about the legacy of British rule', the princes on the other hand, could 'mingle with the high officials of the Raj in a racially polarized empire' and with their 'loyalty, per-

been claimed that the intercourse was a result of deceit. See, Rup Kumar Barman, 'State Formation, Legitimization and Cultural Change A Study of Koch Kingdom', *The NEHU Journal* XII / 1 (2014), pp. 19–20.

⁵⁸ Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihas*, pp. 83–86.

⁵⁹ Lucy Moore, *Maharanis: A Family Saga of Four Queens* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), p. 8.

⁶⁰ Sunity, *The Autobiography of an Indian Princess*, p. 40.

⁶¹ http://coochbehar.nic.in/htmlfiles/history_book5.html (accessed 22 April 2015)

⁶² Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 92.

⁶³ J.E.C. Bodley, *The Coronation of Edward the Seventh* (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), p. 252.

sonal bravery and marksmanship qualities' they were seen as 'honorary whites'.⁶⁴ On the other hand, in Bengal, the British with their military discipline and martial attributes were offered an admission 'into the Ksatriya clan under the name of Sakya Seni Rajputs'.⁶⁵

Pre-colonial kshatriyahood was rejuvenated and restored through the colonial invention of 'martial races' theory. The Rajput origin discourse, therefore, needs to be put into a larger perspective. In the British mindset, the majority of Indians had 'neither martial aptitude nor physical courage'.⁶⁶ In fact, colonial restructuring of the Indian army in the second half of the nineteenth century increasingly sought to integrate Indians from the 'martial races' in order to better serve the imperial crown. It led to the increase of cross-cultural mixing with the 'introduction of European-style honors and awards' and thereby bringing 'Indians into the fold of British patronage'.⁶⁷

Gavin Rand points out that the colonial idea of military capacity revolved around the 'martial race' discourse. The colonial 'martial race theory', in Rand's own words, was 'the late Victorian conviction that only certain elements of the Indian population were fit to bear arms'.⁶⁸ Such perception of the Raj was well reflected in the introductory chapter of one high ranking colonial military official's book where it was argued that 'India unlike almost any other country has a vast mass of unwarlike people' who had been dominated by the minority virile races.⁶⁹

With an eye on Russia during the nineteenth century 'Great Game', as Rajit Majumder argues, the British invented the 'martial races theory' simply to recruit warlike tribes, e.g., the Sikhs of Punjab, the Gurkhas of Nepal, from northern India to raise an im-

⁶⁴ Rangarajan, *India's Wildlife History*, pp. 36–37.

⁶⁵ Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 5.

⁶⁶ George F. MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1933), p. 2.

⁶⁷ Capio, *Modernity and Meaning in Victorian London*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ G. Rand, "Martial Races" and "Imperial Subjects": Violence and Governance in Colonial India, 1857–1914', *European Review of History* 13 / 1 (2006): 3.

⁶⁹ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, p. v.

perial army.⁷⁰ Against the backdrop of the 1857 upheaval and its aftermath, opines Metcalf, the colonial invention of ‘martial races’ appeared necessary for the Raj to reproduce Aryan men, capable of fighting the empire’s war.⁷¹

The ‘post-Mutiny’ military recruitment’s focus on India’s ‘martial races’ sought to reconstruct the army regiments ‘along ethnic and provincial lines’, according to Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘as the best defense against rebellion in the future’.⁷² In their search, the British colonists found the Rajputs fit to be considered a ‘martial race’ since not only the Rajputs had the desirable physical attributes but they also had another quality the British were eagerly looking for. They had ‘loyalty’.⁷³ This colonial divide and rule tactic on the basis of ‘martial races’ theory was also used by the British in the late-nineteenth century with the hope that anti-colonial sentiments across India would not get solidarity and threaten the Raj like what had happened back in 1857.⁷⁴

Kshatriya paternalism

‘Sprung from Brahma’s arm’ a kshatriya has ‘the burden of protecting the community from external aggression and internal trouble... [and as king] should treat his subjects as his children.’⁷⁵ Indeed, Nripendra’s kshatriyahood could hardly do away with the pa-

⁷⁰ R.K. Majumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 15–17.

⁷¹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (London: University of California Press), pp. 71–78.

⁷² Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Military Sports and the History of the Martial Body in India’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* **50** / 4 (2007): 493.

⁷³ Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 166.

⁷⁴ S.H. Shaheed Soherwordi, ‘Punjabisation in the British Indian Army 1857–1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan’, *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies* **24** (2010): 18–19.

⁷⁵ R.K. Pruthi, *Indian Caste System* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2004), p. 18.

ternal benevolence that a kshatriya Rajput king had to follow and exercise accordingly. What could have been more metaphorical to display his princely paternal benevolence than the killing of wild predators which threaten the lives and livelihoods of his subjects? With the decisive defeat of Bhutan, a political rival of Cooch Behar, in the Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864–1865, when there was no one left to launch a military attack on the British feudatory state Cooch Behar,⁷⁶ the kshatriya maharaja could only find wild animals as external aggressors to fight against in order to shower benevolence upon his subjects.

In his study of the princely hunting during the colonial period, Rangarajan states that the princes were all 'treaty-bound' to participate only in the Empire's combative campaigns. They hardly had the permission to wage campaigns of their own, and so 'they used their time and the labour of their subjects against the wild animals and birds of the forest, marsh and savannah'.⁷⁷ Hence, an 'extraordinarily light colored Tiger measuring 9 feet 7 inches was shot dead by the kshatriya maharaja protector, pleasing the villagers of Berbera since the tiger had killed seven cows. Similarly, in 'Dal Dalia' Nripendra and his team of sportsmen 'had a good wind-up in the shape of a ten-foot Tiger [which] had killed seven cows, and gave a lot of trouble till' it was gunned down.⁷⁸

Ranjan Chakrabarti has sought to capture the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century European view of Bengal's landscape and its wilderness, particularly of the Sundarbans of deltaic Bengal. He has noticed the usage of the word 'jungle' in the travel accounts standing for 'dense and tangled vegetation.' Those 'thick' and 'impenetrable' jungles not only provided 'big and small game' but also a fear of hidden dan-

⁷⁶ As Bhutan had earlier been Cooch Behar's political rival, the decisive defeat of Bhutan in the hands of the British who provided military security to Cooch Behar finally established peace between Cooch Behar and Bhutan. See Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ Rangarajan, *India's Wildlife History*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ Bhup, *Thirty Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars, and Assam*, pp. 60, 96.

ger.⁷⁹ The Anglo-Narayan colonial crusade against similar dangerous wilderness in the landscape of northern Bengal in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century can be seen in this context apart from colonial paternalism. The empire had to bring 'order' and establish its writ everywhere. There was fear amongst the colonial rulers of direct exposure to the wilderness and suffering from being in direct physical contact with wild animals and even insects of the wild tropics.

In 1866, police reports showed that in western Dooars eight persons were killed by wild animals (seven males and one female) while the Deputy Commissioner regretted that no rewards for the destruction of wild animals had been offered and thus, taking the matter of threats posed by wild animals into consideration, licenses to keep lethal weapons including guns and gunpowder were issued.⁸⁰ Soon after the formation of Jalpaiguri District on 21 December 1868, a health related annual report by the colonial health department stated that, towards the hills, the natives suffered from the bites of an insect called *pipsa* (ants/ hymenoptera formicidae) causing small ulcers; the colonial authority was in the dark about the particular species of insect. In addition to this, 'bites and injuries of tigers, pigs, [and] rhinoceros' were very common.⁸¹

In 1868, a total of 48 persons were killed by wild animals including forty men, five women and three boys while number of deaths by snakebite was 24, comprising twelve men, ten women and two boys as reported by the Cooch Behar Police Division.⁸² That 'the British perceived the wild animals mainly as hindrances to coloniza-

⁷⁹ R. Chakrabarti, 'Local People and the Global Tiger: An Environmental History of the Sundarbans', *Global Environment* 3 (2009): 78–79.

⁸⁰ J.C. Haughton, *Annual Report on the Police of the Cooch Behar Division for the year 1866*, No. 515, Jalpaiguri, 29 May (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1867), p. 10.

⁸¹ Public Health Department, *First Annual Report of the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal for 1868* (Calcutta: William Jones, 1869), pp. 206–207.

⁸² J.C. Haughton, *Annual Report on the Police of the Cooch Behar Division for the year 1868*, No. 314, Jalpaiguri, 26 May (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1869), p. 14.

tion of the area⁸³ is evinced in Cooch Behar Police Commissioner Haughton's statement, in that the presence of a large number of tigers and leopards resulted in the deaths of many people and affected tax revenue since agricultural settlers were fleeing the region.⁸⁴

In the Cooch Behar State alone, 37 people were killed by snake-bites and eleven by wild animals in 1879, against eight persons killed by wild animals in the year 1866.⁸⁵ In 1903, the State's Naib observed that apart from tigers and leopards which attack villagers, the wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*), the spotted deer (*Axis axis*), the hog deer (*Hyelaphus porcinus*) and the black deer (*Moschus fuscus*) did harm to the agricultural crops and, therefore, deserved killing. Similarly, as foxes (*Vulpini*) and jackals (*Canis aureus*) were stealing poultry, the tiger-cats (*Leopardus tigrinus*) were eating fruit of the garden and the meat of a hare (*lepus*) tasted good – all these animals, therefore, warranted killing.⁸⁶

Referring to James Inglis' 'imaginative account of a tiger attack', Nayar has pointed out how the colonial sportsman-narrator depicted himself as a saviour who protected the superstitious, ineffectual, vulnerable and brutalised natives from beastly man-eaters.⁸⁷ But when the Indian villagers defended themselves by killing attacking tigers, the British criticised the villagers' methods of hunting, as has been stated by Joseph Sramek, by branding them 'as being inefficient, cowardly, or needlessly dangerous to themselves or others'.⁸⁸ Conquering wildlife became a means to assert absolute dominance with paternal

⁸³ Karlsson, *Contested Belonging*, p. 118.

⁸⁴ J.C. Haughton, *Annual Report on the Police of the Cooch Behar Division for the year 1868*, No. 314, Jalpaiguri, 26 May (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1869), p. 14.

⁸⁵ *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1879–80* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1880), p. 8. For the data for 1866, see J.C. Haughton, *Annual Report on the Police of the Cooch Behar Division for the year 1866*, No. 515, Jalpaiguri, 29 May (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1867), p. 18.

⁸⁶ Chaudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, pp. 99–100.

⁸⁷ Nayar, *English Writing and India, 1600–1920*, pp. 160–162. See also James Inglis, *Tent Life in Tigerland* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1892).

⁸⁸ J. Sramek, 'Face him like a Briton': 669–670.

benevolence over the inferior and disordered wilderness that was a mirror image of the western notion of Oriental despotism.

Vijaya Mandala gives an interesting account of paradoxical attitudes towards elephants during the colonial days when the Raj had to go through many checks and balances.⁸⁹ British colonisers learnt the usefulness of elephants from indigenous knowledge⁹⁰ and formed the Elephant Preservation Act in 1879, offering them state protection. Certainly such policy repeated a pre-colonial tradition of state monopoly over the use of elephants. The usefulness of elephants had been the motivation behind the ancient codification of laws, the *Arthashastra*, giving state protection to the elephants in the third century B.C.⁹¹ The Raj, however, decided not to allow elephants enjoy absolute protection and never hesitated to kill the 'rogues' that posed danger to human habitat.⁹²

Colonial conservation made the number of elephants increase in reserved forests. But the British rulers and Indian princes enjoyed a freer hand in shooting elephants on the pretext of killing specific elephants that posed threats to human lives in the early years of the twentieth century. The killing of the Chuapara tea-garden elephant in 1907⁹³ as it had been found causing damages to human lives and assets was a metaphor conveying a political statement. Colonial rulers had to make villagers believe that their lives were at stake. Since the villagers were perceived as incapable of defending themselves, they were virtually at the mercy of their militarily skilled sahibs who alone could and would take on the wild beasts. That the colonial

⁸⁹ V.R. Mandala, 'The Raj and the Paradoxes of Wildlife Conservation: British Attitudes and Expediencies', *The Historical Journal* 58 / 1 (2015): 79–110.

⁹⁰ Williamson, *Oriental Field Sports*, p. 31. Also see, Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Trading Knowledge: The East India Company's Elephants in India and Britain', *The Historical Journal* 48 / 1 (2005): 27–63.

⁹¹ Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 173. Also see, Thomas R. Trautmann, 'Elephants and the Mauryas', in S.N. Mukherjee (ed.) *India: History and Thought: Essays in Honour of A. L. Basham* (Calcutta, 1982).

⁹² V.R. Mandala, 'The Raj and the Paradoxes of Wildlife Conservation:.'

⁹³ Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers*, p. 13.

control of wilderness was actually for ‘modernizing and taming nature for the benefit of the Indian population’ was what projected the image of a benevolent Raj⁹⁴ along the lines of pre-colonial kshatriyahood tradition.

Game and the aftermath

The game shooting of an Anglicised maharaja, who was also an *aide-de-camp* to King Edward II and George V,⁹⁵ is a useful case study to understand the how the pre-colonial notion of kshatriyahood was reinvented in the form of late Victorian and early Edwardian ‘royal’ hunting ‘spectacle’ which ‘depicted the staging of the successful conquest of Indian nature by the ‘virile imperialists’.⁹⁶ Of all the princely states, Cooch Behar perhaps, Rangarajan argues, had ‘an unrivalled record of big game shoots in all of eastern India’.⁹⁷

Nayar has rightly suggested that the battles against the wild exotic prepared the British and their Indian subordinates for battles against entities outside the imperial space.⁹⁸ Such military readiness was devised in the colonial language of sporting. The Cooch Behar prince Nripendra must have felt it necessary to exert his claims of kshatriyahood in terms of hereditary military ability and preparedness. Shooting rifles in the dangerous wild turned out to be the most convenient means of such articulation for Nripendra.

The shooting games of Nripendra and his Deputy Commissioners killed a great number of rhinos and tigers.⁹⁹ Of all the wild ani-

⁹⁴ Kevin Hannam, ‘Shooting Tigers as Leisure in Colonial India’, in Brent Lovelock (ed.) *Tourism and the Consumption of Wildlife: Hunting, Shooting and Sport Fishing* (New York: Routledge, 2008) p. 102.

⁹⁵ Nripendra attended both the coronations in England. See McClenaghan, *Indian Princely Medals*, p. 111.

⁹⁶ J. Sramek, ‘Face him like a Briton’: 659. Also see, J.M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 47.

⁹⁷ Rangarajan, *India’s Wildlife History*, p. 37.

⁹⁸ Nayar, *English Writing and India, 1600–1920*, p. 138.

⁹⁹ Chaudhry, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, p. 98.

Table 1. A Royal record of a number of wild animals shot (1871–1907)

Wild animals	Numbers
Tiger	365
Leopard	311
Rhino	207
Bison (<i>Bos gaurus</i>)	48
Buffalo	438
Bear (<i>Ursus tibetanus</i>)	133
Sambhur (<i>Cervus unicolor</i>)	259
Barasingh (<i>Rucervus duvaucelii</i>)	318
Total	2079

Source: Bhup, *Thirty Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars, and Assam*, p. 449.

mals (2,075 in total according to his own record) Nripendra shot in the years between 1871 and 1907, mention may be made of a huge number of wildcats including tigers and leopards (*Panthera pardus*) as well as herbivores such as rhinos and buffaloes. All these were essential targets of the royal big game shooting.

British Brigadier-General R. G. Burton recollected Nripendra Narayan's hunting of a 'great tiger' in the Ambari jungle of Dooars. According to Burton, the longest tiger that was shot by Nripendra was 'measured in a straight line from nose to tip 10 feet 5 inches, the tail being 3 feet 6 inches' while the largest tiger was '11 feet round

the curves of the body' exceeding 600 pounds in weight.¹⁰⁰ That Nripendra and his team of European sportsmen making a record of killing five tigers in twelve minutes while shooting in the Jorai Nullah Reserve¹⁰¹ gives us an idea of the magnitude of killing wild animals. Nripendra's dedication to the game needed appreciation from British visitors and many 'important British guests were always invited on his annual hunts'.¹⁰²

Lord Curzon is said to have attended a game party arranged by Nripendra, and to have shot several tigers on the eastern bank of the Jaldhaka River in 1904.¹⁰³ This shows how crucial the shooting ground of north Bengal became to the colonial ruling class. The presence of a large number of rhinos in the 'swampy grounds and dense jungles' of Dooars,¹⁰⁴ made it an attractive hunting destination for high-ranking colonial officials. It is no wonder that Mary Frances Ames could think of portraying India, in introducing the alphabet to children, with the following rhyme:

I is for India
Our land in the East
Where everyone goes
To shoot tigers, and feast.¹⁰⁵

The degree of obsession with hunting game is noticeable in another British account. Esmond B. Martin tells us that the dining room walls of the Cooch Behar royal palace used to be decorated with rhino heads, a practice that continued till the early 1970s.¹⁰⁶ Excessive hunt-

¹⁰⁰ R.G. Burton, *The Tiger Hunters* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1936), pp. 189–190.

¹⁰¹ Bhup, *Thirty Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, the Duars, and Assam*, p. 354.

¹⁰² Karlsson, *Contested Belonging*, p. 120.

¹⁰³ Gruning, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁴ C.E.M. Russell, *Bullet and Shot in Indian Forest, Plain and Hill* (London: W. Thacker & Co., 1900), p. 339.

¹⁰⁵ Ames, *An ABC for Baby Patriots*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ E.B. Martin, 'Smuggling Routes for West Bengal's Rhino Horn and Recent Successes in Curbing Poaching', *Pachyderm* 21 (1996): 33.

ing of rhinos left only 240 rhinos alive in northern Bengal by the end of 1920s.¹⁰⁷ The British with the help of their subordinate Indian princes turned the wild landscape of Dooars into a mere sporting ground during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the period Rangarajan identifies as ‘the heyday of princely hunt’.¹⁰⁸

Nothing spoke louder of the imperial ambition of the Raj than sportive hunting in order to tame the wilderness of India. In 1872, the first census reported that the total population of India was 241 million, among which Europeans and mixed race Eurasians numbered only 121,000.¹⁰⁹ The population of British India recorded in 1901 was 294,361,056 persons.¹¹⁰ As per the 1911 census report there were only 123,000 Britons in India ruling 314 million Indians.¹¹¹ Being such a tiny minority, the British hardly integrated well with ‘the dirty and filthy villages’ in the hinterlands of India and success in their hunting games solely relied on the support and services of local rulers.¹¹² ‘Over years of colonial rule’, argues Roshni Johar, game ‘grew into an institution, acquiring a cult of high status for the British assured of the native’s servility. It meant an exclusive sport, a face-to-face encounter with the world’s exotic wildlife – all coupled together in reality – a *tamasha* [or amusement] of glorified, organised animal slaughter’ with

¹⁰⁷ S.S. Bist, ‘Population History of Rhinoceros in North Bengal’, *Zoos’ Print* 9 / 2 (1994): 75.

¹⁰⁸ Rangarajan, *India’s Wildlife History*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Lionel Knight, *Britain in India, 1858–1947* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), p. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Report on the Census of India, 1901*, p. 13.

¹¹¹ Out of the 314 million Indians, over 244 million lived in the directly administered British territories and 70 million lived in the princely states and agencies. See, John M. Mackenzie, ‘Empire Travel Guides and the Imperial Mindset from the Mid-Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Centuries’, Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan (eds), *The British Abroad Since the Eighteenth Century: Experiencing Imperialism*, vol. 2 (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 124.

¹¹² Shafqat Hussain has observed similar phenomenon in the Princely Mountain State of Kashmir, after the region was ‘pacified’, its boundaries with Russia were fixed and stabilised in 1895. See, S. Hussain, ‘Sports-hunting, Fairness and Colonial Identity: Collaboration and Subversion in the Northwestern Frontier Region of the British Empire’, *Conservation and Society* 8 / 2, (2010): 112–126.

Indian royalty organising game to please their British masters.¹¹³

While pleasing their British overlords, sometimes the trigger-happy Indian princes went overboard and breached the rules of sportsmanship. In this context, Hughes questions the view that, unlike the British, Indian princes could not follow the 'rules' of western sportsmanship which 'triumphed over princely norms' and became the 'true sportsmanship'. The princes, who breached the rules, argues Hughes, 'were simply operating under different set of rules commensurate with their Rajput identity, political situation and social standing'.¹¹⁴

Nripendra's sportive hunting showed less concern for the growing risk of wildlife extinction that British foresters and naturalists in India had already started paying attention to. The advent of zoology with the intention 'of understanding of wildlife beyond the parameters of game' as well as the 'science of conservation' in the mid-nineteenth century became popular among the colonial naturalists in the later decades but remained exclusively in the hands of the Europeans till the mid-twentieth century.¹¹⁵

Grove states that early colonial concerns with wildlife extinction 'very rarely' influenced government policy towards wildlife.¹¹⁶ Though in the beginning the study of wildlife had been confined to the circle of a handful of Europeans, with the passage of time, as Saikia argues, Forest Department officials started showing 'keen interest in the lives of the animals.'¹¹⁷ The Wild Birds and Animal Protection Act of 1912 ushered in a new 'era of conservation', with 'game' becoming wildlife and 'preservation' becoming 'conservation'.¹¹⁸ In

¹¹³ <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030406/spectrum/main3.htm> (accessed 6 March 2015).

¹¹⁴ J.E. Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms: Princely Power, the Environment, and the Hunt in Colonial India* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 2009), pp. 61–62.

¹¹⁵ Arupiyoti Saikia, *Forests and Ecological History of Assam, 1826–2000* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 264–266.

¹¹⁶ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 465.

¹¹⁷ Saikia, *Forests and Ecological History of Assam, 1826–2000*, p. 266.

¹¹⁸ V.R. Mandala, 'The Raj and the Paradoxes of Wildlife Conservation': 110.

Bengal 'rules were framed in 1915 to regulate hunting, shooting, trapping or fishing in forests meant to be wild life sanctuaries'.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

That imperialism was performed through the colonial game in the wild and meant to subjugate and domesticate all life-forms within the colonial landscape to assert masculine Englishness has been discussed at length by J.M. Mackenzie, J.A. Mangan, J. Emel and P. McDevitt. For both the princes and the British, as stated by Barbara Ramusack, hunting was properly 'masculine' in an era 'when gender roles and behaviours were being intensely questioned'.¹²⁰ As Crenshaw's 'intersectionality' suggests that all forms of domination and oppression are always interconnected and mutually reinforcing,¹²¹ the ideology behind all forms of oppression 'based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature'.¹²²

While 'sporting practices such as the hunt', as has been observed by Anand S. Pandian, 'were crucial constituents of colonial rule',¹²³ the Indian princes as imperial agents of the Raj were supposed to acquire military skills to sustain the colonial rule as well as their kingship legitimacy. Since pre-colonial times, argues Ramusack, hunting had widely been considered as a 'preparation for battle' and a 'substitute for warfare'.¹²⁴ Mackenzie argues the renditions of both hunting and

¹¹⁹ Abani Mohan Kusari et al., *West Bengal District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri* (Calcutta: West Bengal District Gazetteers State Editor, 1981), p. 35.

¹²⁰ B.N. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 161.

¹²¹ Kimberley Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, (1989): 139–167.

¹²² Greta Gaard, 'Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature', in Greta Gaard (ed.) *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 1.

¹²³ Anand S. Pandian, 'Predatory Care: The Imperial Hunt in Mughaland British India', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14 / 1 (2001): 83.

¹²⁴ Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States*, pp. 157–161.

war often intersected across time and space.¹²⁵ The princes also had to actively support the idea of British military presence in India. This explains why Nripendra was promoted to the post of Honorary Major in 1885,¹²⁶ and then Lt. Colonel of the 6th Bengal Cavalry in 1887.¹²⁷

Shooting in the wild landscape of northern Bengal was, therefore, no less than war. Hunting was seen as an integral part of the process of building up the martial character that a colonial Hindu prince was expected to possess. Little wonder that Bengal Army Captain Henry Shakespeare in his memoirs had already urged parents to encourage their children to go for game to avoid bad habits.¹²⁸ The dead body of an animal in the wilderness of northern Bengal became a site where the exercise of princely power and the restoration of kshatriya Rajput identity took place. Westernisation of the pre-colonial royal ethos of hunting, which became a prerequisite for being a colonial prince, restored pre-colonial notions of despotism and violence. While colonial predation sustained the authoritarianism and paternalistic attitude of a kshatriya maharaja, the metaphorical use of the dead body of a wild animal continued to be old wine in a new bottle.

¹²⁵ Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, pp. 194–95.

¹²⁶ R. Lethbridge, *The Golden Book of India: A Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles and Other Personages, Titled or Decorated of the Indian Empire* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1893), p. 269.

¹²⁷ Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 92.

¹²⁸ H. Shakespeare, *The Wild Sports of India* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), p. x.