

# Mughal paintings of hunt with their aristocracy

## Abstract

Mughal emperor from Babur to Dara Shikoh there was a long period of animal hunting. The founder of Mughal dynasty emperor Babur (1526-1530) killed one-horned rhinoceros and wild ass. Then Akbar (1556-1605) in his period, he hunted wild ass and tiger. He trained not less than 1000 Cheetah for other animal hunting especially bovid animals. Emperor Jahangir (1606-1627) killed total 17167 animals in his period. He killed 1672 Antelope-Deer-Mountain Goats, 889 Bluebulls, 86 Lions, 64 Rhinos, 10348 Pigeons, 3473 Crows, and 10 Crocodiles. Shahjahan (1627-1658) who lived 74 years and Dara Shikoh (1657-1658) only killed Bluebull and Nur Jahan killed a tiger only. After study, the Mughal paintings there were Butterfly, Fish, Bird, and Mammal. Out of 34 animal paintings, birds and mammals were each 16. In Mughal pastime there were some renowned artists who involved with these paintings. Abdus Samad, Mir Sayid Ali, Basawan, Lal, Miskin, Kesu Das, Daswanth, Govardhan, Mushfiq, Kamal, Fazl, Dalchand, Hindu community and some Mughal females all were habituated to draw paintings. In observed animals, 12 were found in hunting section (Rhino, Wild Ass, Tiger, Cheetah, Antelope, Spotted Deer, Mountain Goat, Bluebull, Lion, Pigeon, Crow, Crocodile), 35 in paintings (Butterfly, Fish, Falcon, Pigeon, Crane, Peacock, Fowl, Dodo, Duck, Bustard, Turkey, Parrot, Kingfisher, Finch, Oriole, Hornbill, Partridge, Vulture, Elephant, Lion, Cow, Horse, Squirrel, Jackal, Cheetah, Spotted Deer, Zebra, Buffalo, Bengal Tiger, Camel, Goat, Sheep, Antelope, Rabbit, Oryx) and 6 in aristocracy (Elephant, Horse, Cheetah, Falcon, Peacock, Parrot. Mainly for meat purpose (83%), they hunted animals then ornamentation (skin, horn, feather) and very few killed by them for their own safety.

**Keywords:** mughal painting, mughal hunting, shikarnama, mughal emperor

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## Introduction

In Asian region from Babur to Aurangzeb this period was known as actual Mughal period. The hunting of Akbar and Jahangir were well known. In Mughal period, the horse section was developed. Hunting was a great hobby and useful for aiming in war field. After that there was another good hobby in Mughal time is painting. Many artists depicted their emotions or incidents by those paintings. Animal concerning paintings with other paintings were widespread in Mughal pastime. In 1526, Babur established Mughal Empire in India. Six great Mughal rulers were famous for their extraordinary personalities and achievements.<sup>1</sup> They were habituated to maintain all administrative and other activities of Mughal reign. During the war and peace time they exhibited their huge paintings. In addition, they were expert on poetry, architecture, and gardening. For these activities, people have come to know lots of dignified activities of Mughals especially on their hunting which is playing a great role in Zoology. Mughal emperor Akbar, Jahangir, and Shahjahan were directly involved with hunting. All paintings focused their personal taste. Adventurous hunting activities were embedded in their huge paintings.<sup>2</sup> Some important paintings were drawn by Akbar, Jahangir, and Dara Shikoh directly. For their direct association in hunting and keen observation on those particular incidents they could draw these paintings. Though, before the Mughals the history on hunting is ancient in India. Moreover, not only in India but also in some areas of the world were famous on hunting. Abul Fazl described these hunting as a source of knowledge. On the other hand, he was a famous poet in emperor Akbar court. He had a dignified position in the Mughal history. For understanding wildlife during the time of Mughal dynasty this article is very important.

## Materials and methods

### Akbar (1556-1606)

Akbar was led the hunt with his trained Cheetahs. He gave rank of his Cheetahs and they were showed plays by drum beat for their special honor.<sup>2</sup> Akbar was famous for his Cheetahs' training. He hired animal trainer for this act. Hunting was great hobby of emperor Akbar and by this Cheetahs' training it can be mentioned that he was more courageous. Cheetahs were trained to hunt only Black-colored Buck.<sup>2</sup> Akbar caught Cheetah from the jungle and their trainings usually took around three months. Akbar kept thousand plus Cheetahs which never mated.<sup>3</sup> He was gifted his first Cheetah in 1555 soon after his arrival to Hindustan. He divided them into eight classes for providing the amount of meat. This classification was very important depending on hunting criteria of the bucks. Akbar used belt around the Cheetahs' neck. Imperial Akbarnama which is available in Victoria and Albert Museum describes all about of the trained Cheetah with their salient characteristics. When Cheetahs were used in hunting session the ground was ten miles (Qamargah hunt near Lahore in 1567). This particular incident occurred when Akbar was returning to Agra from Malwa in the year 1561. Abul Fazl recorded that in front of Akbar's cavalcade when he was attacked by a tigress with five sub-adult cubs at Narwar near Gwalior. His majesty killed them by one stroke by his sword.<sup>4</sup> Persian hills are typical feature of Akbar paintings.<sup>5</sup>

### Jahangir (1606-1627)

From a report of Indian Museum Calcutta mentioned an incident which was happened in 1615, when Jahangir was with Prince Karan. He took Karan with him hearing the news of a Lioness near Anasagar

Lake. Karan asked him to shoot in the eye of the Lion. Jahangir shot her in the eye lying on the ground. Zebra (*Equus grevyi*) was brought into India at Jahangir’s court in 1621.<sup>6</sup>

**Shahjahan (1627-1658)**

Emperor Shahjahan killed two Nilgais, while his Cheetah was hunting down another Nilgai. After the death of Akbar then in Jahangir period, use of Cheetah was still continuing (Shikarnama 1600-1604).

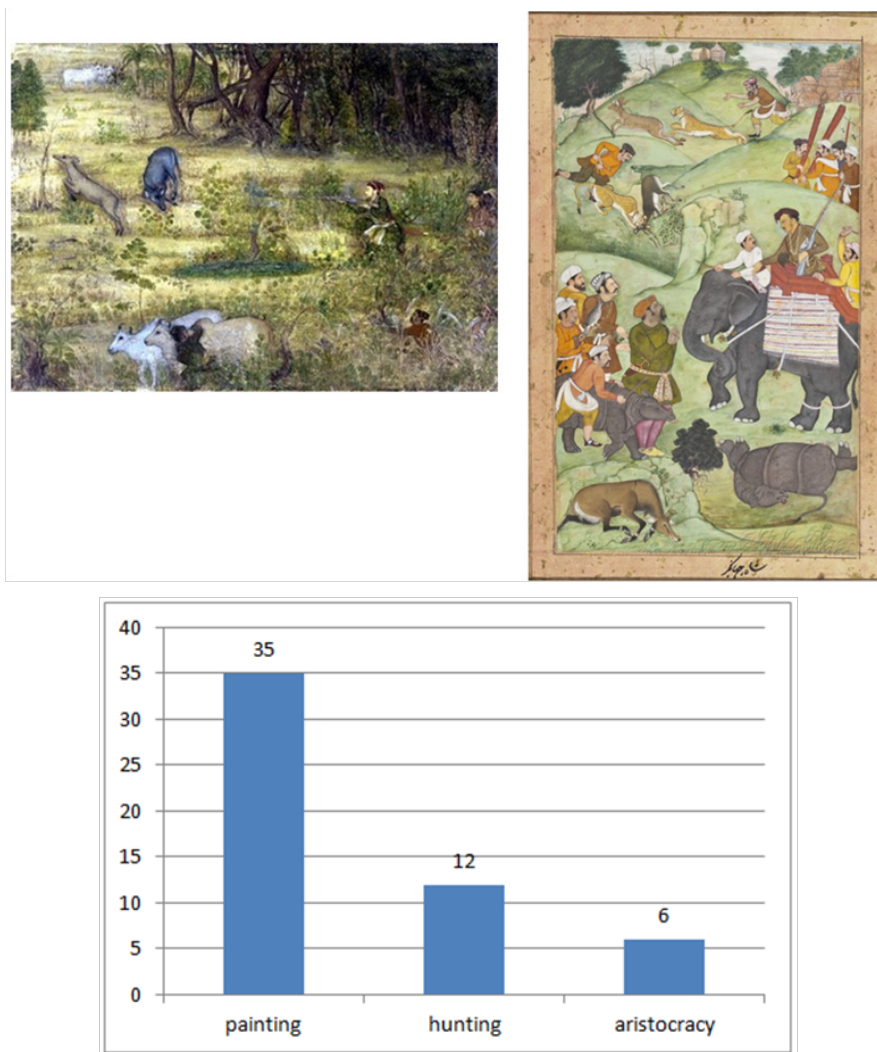
**Dara Shikoh (1657-1658)**

It is well known that Mughals used to wear green clothes during

hunting for effective camouflage. Paintings help us to comprehend the evolution of hunting techniques. Paintings revealed the divine kingship of the personnel of the Mughal dynasty where he is depicted as the dispenser of justice (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC).

**Results**

Emperor Jahangir (1606-1627) hunted 17167 animals in total. That time most animals were killed for their ornamental or colorful skin. Some artists in Mughal pastime drew 35 animals as well (Figure 1) (Tables 1 & 2).



**Figure 1** Counted animals in painting-hunting-aristocracy.

**Table 1** Following table shows the hunting record in Mughal period

Mughal personnel	Acting period	Killed animal	Total animal
Babur	1526-1530	One-horned Rhino, Wild Ass	-
Akbar	1556-1606	Wild Ass, Tiger, Cheetah	-
Jahangir	1606-1627	1672 Antelope, Deer, Mountain Goat, 889 Bluebull, 86 Lion, 64 Rhino, 10348 Pigeon, 3473 Crow, 10 Crocodile	17167
Shahjahan	1627-1658	Bluebull	-
Nurjahan	with Jahangir	Tiger	-
Dara Shikoh	1657-1658	Bluebull	-

**Table 2** Showing the purpose of animal hunt

Animals	Purpose of hunt
One-horned Rhino	skin, horn
Wild Ass	skin
Tiger	skin
Cheetah	for hunting
Antelope	meat, skin, horn
Deer	meat, skin, horn
Mountain Goat	meat, skin, horn
Bluebull	meat, skin
Lion	skin
Pigeon	meat
Crow	feed by other animals
Crocodile	skin

## Discussion

In Mughal period, they hunted fish by using insect larvae and frog (Late Prof. Mannan, pers commu.). Iran, India, Rajasthan, Turkey were Mughal business area where animals were available. Babur hunted Indian One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) and Wild Ass (*Equus hemionus*) with other animals from while he was on horse (Autobiography of Babur). Jahangir writes his own experiences about hunting. When the age of emperor Jahangir was 47-48, he mentioned his animal hunting experience when he was only 12. The total number was 28532 of which 17167 had been shot by Jahangir himself where 3203 were quadrupeds (1672 Antelopes, Deer and Mountain Goats; 889 Nilgais; 86 Lions; 64 Rhinos) 13964 were birds (10348 pigeons; 3473 crows), and 10 crocodiles. Jahangir built a hunting palace called Hiran Minar which is located at Shaikhupura near Lahore. In fact,

he built this palace for commemorating of his favorite Antelope 'Hansraj'. Among other hunting palaces which Shahjahan built, one is located near Palam at Delhi which had a hunting tower and this is resemble with Qutb Mina.<sup>2</sup>

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflicts of interest.

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