

Shooting a Tiger

Big-Game Hunting and Conservation in Colonial India

Vijaya Ramadas Mandala

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4 *Shikar in the Princely Reserves*

Power, Privilege, and Protocol

An important aspect of hunting in India was shikar in the princely reserves, maintained exclusively by Indian rulers for the highest ranks of the colonial elite. Hunting on such occasions was an extravagant affair involving state elephants and other entourage, in a powerful display of ancient and newer ruling privileges, and underlining critical political alliances between the princes and the Raj. For the British, the royal shikars lent ritual credence to their political authority in a staged show of solidarity with the traditional rulers of the land. For the princes, the expeditions offered critical opportunities for asserting their symbolic authority and negotiating the limits of their relationship with the colonial government.

The role of Indian princes in upholding the political edifice of the British Raj has formed the subject matter of serious historical analysis for some time. Nicholas B. Dirks has pointed out how 'kingship continued to play out a shadow existence throughout the colonial period ... delineating

the sedimentation of the political past even when politics had been decapitated and reconceived.¹ Taking his argument, princely India presented the 'idea of imperial expansion both by symbolising British liberality and by creating a powerful elite fully committed to the British rule rather than nationalist politics.'² Princes also constituted an iconic presence through their courtly trappings. Manu Bhagavan has argued that 'the use of Mughal imagery theoretically validated British authority throughout India; it also wrote native rulers into the colonial narrative and joined modernist imperialist visions with perceived ancient, traditional forms of rule.'³ For example, as we will discuss in subsequent sections, the strong bond between the British and the rulers of Gwalior had its roots in the Company period. In terms of the structure of political authority, as Stern explains, the British administration in India 'did not superimpose its political system' on native Indian rulers, but managed 'to serve its interests [through] ... minimal interference.'⁴ A cascading sphere of authority ensured that the British had a big say in less powerful princely states while maintaining gracious alliances with influential native chiefs. Although most of the native rulers, over the course of time, were driven out of power, for a critical period, they served the purpose of the colonial state by maintaining status quo in substantial and/or unstable regions.

With its excessive focus on political authority, however, the existing scholarship discussed earlier misses out on the power struggles that were playing out in the non-political realm. Divested of their political power, Indian rulers staked their claim to kingship through other visible public displays of tradition and ritual authority—such as elaborate ceremonies, lavish courtly processions, and hunting expeditions—a development that has spawned alternative readings of the power structure. As Fiona Groenhout has argued recently, the study of Indian princely states calls for a serious historical analysis, since they played a far more distinctive

¹ Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethno History of an Indian Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. xxiii.

² Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, pp. xxii–xxv.

³ Manu Bhagavan, *Sovereign Spheres: Princes, Education and Empire in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 17.

⁴ Robert W. Stern, *The Cat and the Lion: Jaipur State in the British Raj* (Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 1988), pp. 23–4.

even as hunting became a 'sport' underlining the existence of critical alliances between the British and Indian royalty, even more importantly, the economic realities and ideological fictions enabling British colonial rule by this time also positioned hunting in relation to several other developments that occurred side by side. The widespread shift to cultivation and the development of natural history as a field of study which could be seen as more 'useful', 'intellectual', and 'improving' are two such related occurrences. For this reason, as stated earlier, apart from being staged displays of power, such hunting activities also pointed to the existence of crucial alliances between the British and select Indian rulers. In fact, these activities were often the medium of making such alliances common knowledge to the public. When Raja Gourman Singh, one of the border chieftains in the Kumaon region, and his father, Lall Singh, were driven out by the Gurkhas of Nepal, both took refuge under the East India Company.⁴⁸ While visiting the royal political refugees, Bishop Heber and his East India Company associate, Mr Boulderson, were warmly received and they joined a tiger hunt at the insistence of the young raja.⁴⁹ The hunting party 'set out ... on elephants, with a servant behind each *howdah* carrying a large *chattah* [an ornamental umbrella], followed by a number of people on foot and on horseback from the camp and the neighbouring villages, which Heber compared to a 'coursing party in England.'⁵⁰ The formation of such friendly alliances between the native chiefs and the British in several parts of India would suggest a scenario wherein shikar was widely constructed and understood as an exclusive staged show by those holding the reins of power.

Ritual, Prerogative, and Power: *Shikar* in the Princely Reserves

Subsidiary alliance was instituted by the British since the Company period to establish British political power over Indian states, a practice that became more systematized under Marquess Wellesley (1760–1842),

⁴⁸ Reginald Heber [Amelia Shipley Heber], ed., *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824–1825* (London: J. Murray, 1829), pp. 163–8.

⁴⁹ Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, pp. 164–5.

⁵⁰ Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, pp. 166–8.

the governor general of Bengal, towards the end of the eighteenth century.⁵¹ A British resident was appointed to each significant Indian principality to act as a channel of communication for the colonial government and to keep a watch on the local ruler.⁵² Deprived of most military and diplomatic powers, and restricted to internal administration and domestic affairs, the subsidiary princes turned to other means of displaying status and maintaining ritual authority. In fact, the British actually encouraged their ornamental roles.

Thus, in order to divert the Nawab's 'mind [from] dwelling [on] what he is and what he might be,' as a contemporary, Henry Addison, observed, the British officer in charge of the province encouraged the prince in 'giving fetes, flying kites, forming hunting parties, and making a great fuss about little affairs.'⁵³ While we may question the veracity of the claim that such ornamental roles were ascribed to Indian rulers, Robert W. Stern points out that, in reality, the interests of patron and client on such occasions were 'complimentary rather than identical',⁵⁴ where political pressures were often deliberately sidelined by both in favour of cordial hunting pursuits. A policy of making the local rulers politically quiescent was thus consciously orchestrated by the British, inaugurating a lavish regime of hunting, ceremonies, and material wealth in the princely states, with little political power buttressing it. But not all Indian princes were totally deprived of political power. Instead, this book argues that they were active collaborators with the British both in times of war as well as on shikar grounds in peace time.

John MacKenzie points out how an 'imperial and largely masculine elite attempted to reserve for itself access to hunting, adopted and transformed the concept of the Hunt as a ritual of prestige and dominance, and set about the separation of the human and animal worlds to promote "preservation" (later "conservation") as a continuing justification of

⁵¹ C.A. Bayly, 'Wellesley, Richard, Marquess Wellesley (1760–1842)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵² Denis Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 47–9.

⁵³ Henry Robert Addison, *Traits and Stories of Anglo-Indian Life* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1858), pp. 144–5.

⁵⁴ Stern, *The Cat and the Lion*, p. ix.

its monopoly.⁵⁵ In India, shikar was exclusively turned into a ruling elite privilege consisting of the Britons and Indian princes after the end of the Company rule.

Prior to the arrival of the British, Indian princes and local chiefs had control over forests, while local communities enjoyed access to the forests and wildlife for multiple uses.⁵⁶ It is worth noting that hunting permits did not exist before the Crown's rule in India. With increasing demand for timber, the British began to identify the potential use of Indian forests as a source of revenue. Particularly, ever since the royalty rights in teak were claimed by the East India Company in 1807, the British extended their control over India's marginal landscapes in an unprecedented manner.⁵⁷ In addition, the Forest Act of 1878 severely restricted the hunting privileges of common people.⁵⁸ Although the Act did not superimpose gun licence restrictions on Indian princely chiefs, considerable British surveillance was put in place in all the princely states for common people. Even agriculturalists were barred from entering forested lands, which until then were widely used by the public for cattle grazing, collecting sticks, and jungle grass and for hunting small game. This was done in the name of converting such groups into committed agriculturists while hunting was transformed into an exclusive colonial prerogative. Ramachandra Guha has discussed how despite objections from local officials the colonial government went ahead with its plans.⁵⁹ The 1878 Forest Act subsequently proclaimed

⁵⁵ John M. MacKenzie, *Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 22.

⁵⁶ Mahesh Rangarajan, *People, Parks and Wild Life* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001), pp. 12–13. See also Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 199. Guha argues that the Indian forest communities, for centuries prior to the colonial rule existed as 'specialists ... [and] exploited plants and animals both for consumption and trade' and integrated well with nature.

⁵⁷ E.P. Stebbing, *The Forests of India*, vol. 2 (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1923), pp. 70, 118–23.

⁵⁸ Ajay Singh Rawat, *Indian Forestry, A Perspective* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1993), p. 75.

⁵⁹ Ramachandra Guha, 'An Early Environmental Debate: The Making of the 1878 Forest Act', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, vol. 27, no. 65 (1990): 82.

that 'forest use by villagers was not a right but a privilege of concession given by the [colonial] government'.⁶⁰ It should be noted that the Forest Act of 1878 did not automatically or immediately apply in the princely states, and was mostly confined to the British-administered territories across India. In spite of such laws, game preserves traditionally maintained by rulers, however, continued to exist in colonial princely India, where Indian princes enjoyed the uninterrupted right to shikar.

The re-articulation of power relations between the British and the Indian princes in the latter half of the nineteenth century necessitated the use of these hunting preserves for political purposes. Large tracts of land previously open to common people were decisively transformed into shikar preserves for imperial guests who came from afar to hunt and gun down the wild animals in the princely regions. The Kashmir maharaja, for instance, maintained a sporting reserve in the Kashmir valley exclusively for visiting viceroys and the upper strata of the British colonial administration.⁶¹ The maharaja of Gwalior had a hunting palace and a tiger preserve, and the Raja of Patiala had a pig-sticking jungle.⁶² The Nizam, the ruler of Hyderabad, was a keen sportsman who maintained a fine polo ground and three hunting preserves containing big game in the vicinity of the Hyderabad province.⁶³

Each princely state was known for its characteristic shikar activity and available game. Thus, the states of Rajputana were known for lion and panther hunting, Kashmir and Bharatpoo for duck shoots, Mysore for elephant capturing, and most parts of India for tiger shoots. The

⁶⁰ *The Indian Forest Act, 1878* (Calcutta: Government of India Legislative Department, 1894), NAI.

⁶¹ William Howard Russell, *My Diary in India* (London: Warne and Routledge, 1860). Russell gives a description of such reserves of the Maharaja of Kashmir in the mid-nineteenth century. The author also refers to a large bungalow belonging to the governor general that was a summer retreat, where viceroys could enjoy the most magnificent views of the snowy range, the finest strawberries, and a complete relaxation from the affairs of the state from Simla.

⁶² Ellison C. Bernard, H.R.C. *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, edited by H. Perry Robinson (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1925), p. 135.

⁶³ C.H. Lindsay-Forbes, *India, Past and Present* (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1903), p. 183.

Maharaja of Gaekwar had a deer preserve, where in 1877 the Prince of Wales was invited to shoot blackbuck.⁶⁴ European visitors were offered the chance of participating in spectator sports in the Raja of Baroda's game preserve.⁶⁵

Raja Ranjitsinhji, the ruler of Nawanagar in western India, had natural hunting grounds at Kileshwar, a region of dense forests.⁶⁶ Ranjitsinhji wanted his guests to experience some of the world's best sport in his kingdom, which was famous for panther shoots.⁶⁷ He even organized midnight kills targeting wild panthers. His other interests included partridge shooting. In Rozi Island, a peninsula near Bedi Port, he stocked the spotted deer, quail, and partridge, where these animals and birds were maintained in their untamed state. In effect, this part of the land was developed into a noteworthy natural preserve, providing thrills for shooting and chase.⁶⁸

The Bharatpooor reserve was exclusively built and maintained by the ruler of that region as a habitat for wild, especially migratory, birds.⁶⁹ Alongside the lake, walking paths were created for the access of visiting British guests and sportsmen. Stone inscriptions were put up and inscribed with the list of the visiting dignitaries and their baggage of sport. Viceroy Curzon, the Prince of Wales, the crown prince of Germany, and other Indian maharajas, among others, were entertained in a place where thousands of wild birds could be shot in a single day.⁷⁰ By seeking their sport not just as a source of adventure and recreation but also as a confirmation of political rank and hierarchy, these hunting fraternities formed the fabric of colonial political alliances.

The princes ensured this was also a luxurious experience. Hunting tents were fashioned as semi-permanent structures with brick floors

⁶⁴ Russell, *My Diary in India*, pp. 201–3.

⁶⁵ Charles Frederick Holder, *The Ivory King: A Popular History of the Elephant and Its Allies* (New York: 1902), p. 244.

⁶⁶ Roland Wild, *The Biography of Ranajitsinhji* (London: Rich & Cowan Limited, 1934).

⁶⁷ Wild, *The Biography of Ranajitsinhji*.

⁶⁸ Wild, *The Biography of Ranajitsinhji*, p. 210.

⁶⁹ Martin Ewans, *Bharatpur: Bird Paradise* (London: H.F. & G. Witherby Ltd, 1989), p. 9.

⁷⁰ Ewans, *Bharatpur*, p. 9.

covered with Persian rugs, and fireplaces were set up in a style similar to that of the English country house.⁷¹ Roger Manning believes that 'in England or abroad, royalty and nobility took it for granted that hospitality included opportunities for hunting.'⁷² British traveller, George Parbury, in early nineteenth century observed that in the western provinces of India, some of the native rulers were exceedingly fond of the chase, where forests were strictly preserved for the exclusive use of *ameers* (princes or kings).⁷³ Anyone breaking their game laws was punished with severity.⁷⁴ Each ruler had his private hunting grounds with reservoirs of water fenced on all sides. Whenever a sovereign proposed a shoot, the leading gates were kept closed, and opened only when the ruler was ready to embark on his game pursuit.⁷⁵ Villages at times were depopulated and destroyed if they happened to be too close to the hunting grounds of a ruler. Parbury compared such practices with those by the Norman kings of early English history.⁷⁶ As John MacKenzie points out, 'The elite hunter [had] ceased to protect human settlement and [had] come to protect animals instead.'⁷⁷

Louis Rousselet, a French traveller to India in the late 1860s, vividly depicted the hunts and the ruling cultures of the princes in the Central Provinces.⁷⁸ During his visit to the Mewar province, Rousselet observed the hunting scenes where a number of wild pigs occupied the dense scrubs of the Rajputana jungle: 'Immense herd of these animals infest this jungle, and are protected by royal edicts of the most severe nature. No one, without permission of the king, can even fire a gun in

⁷¹ Bernard, *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, pp. 110–22.

⁷² Roger B. Manning, *Hunters and Poachers—A Social and Cultural History of Unlawful Hunting in England 1485–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 9.

⁷³ George Parbury, *Handbook for India and Egypt: Comprising the Narrative of a Journey from Calcutta to England* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co, 1842), p. 196.

⁷⁴ Parbury, *Handbook for India and Egypt*, p. 196.

⁷⁵ Parbury, *Handbook for India and Egypt*, pp. 196–7.

⁷⁶ Parbury, *Handbook for India and Egypt*, p. 197.

⁷⁷ MacKenzie, *Empire of Nature*, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Louis Rousselet, *India and Its Native Princes: Travels in Central India and in the Presidencies of Bombay and Bengal* (London: 1875, reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2005).

the neighbourhood.⁷⁹ Whenever the Maharana of Mewar went for a shikar, he would choose 'those who were to have the honour of hunting with him' as he had chosen a few British guests along with his French visitor.⁸⁰ His shikar party consisted of a thousand people including beaters and servants. The hunting party procession was re-formed and would return to the camp 'in the same order as it went out.'⁸¹ One of the interesting aspects of the Maharana's shikar was the hunting of wild boars on elephant back as Rousselet describes:

The most interesting part of these expeditions, and that which most displays the extraordinary sagacity of the hunting-elephants, is the pursuit of the wounded animals. The wild boars cross the line of hunters in herds; and, when wounded [through the spear or rifle of a huntsman], they [wild boars] immediately detach themselves from the rest of the herd and bury themselves in the brushwood. As a wounded animal always belongs by right to him by whose ball he was first struck, the hunter has to separate himself from the other sportsmen, and start his pursuit of the game [i.e., wounded wild boar]. The elephant on which the hunter is mounted must now serve him instead of a hound. He follows indefatigably the track of the wild boar from point to point.... A rifle ball puts an end to its suffering.⁸²

Such royal hunting practices in colonial India in front of British/European guests and in the absence of warfare aimed to uphold the political significance of a ruler's prerogative through these displays of power.

Hunting in these princely game preserves was not allowed to people even in the royal service without authorization. In addition, some rulers had their own administrative apparatus to safeguard the hunting preserves. For instance, the rulers of Rajputana had *shikarkhana men* (the maharaja's gamekeepers) and *shikarkhana* (hunting department).⁸³ Amar Singh, a Rajput nobleman and officer in the Jodhpur Lancers of the British Indian army, recalls encountering the maharaja's gamekeepers

⁷⁹ Rousselet, *India and Its Native Princes*, p. 165.

⁸⁰ Rousselet, *India and Its Native Princes*, p. 165.

⁸¹ Rousselet, *India and Its Native Princes*, p. 165.

⁸² Rousselet, *India and Its Native Princes*, p. 166.

⁸³ *Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh's Diary, A Colonial Subject's Narrative of Imperial India* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2002), pp. 97–8.

on two separate occasions in the Jodhpur state when he had killed wild boars without authorization.⁸⁴ Roger Manning, while referring to Tudor and early Stuart England, points out, 'For those young men ... [who] did not possess hunting privileges, the act of hunting outside the law ... with weapons, and in the face of gamekeepers ... further satisfied their compulsive need to prove their masculinity and martial valour.'⁸⁵ For those like Singh, breaching the onerous rules must have provided as much thrill as the kill itself.

Often, it was apparent that hunting and shooting in these princely preserves were merely staged for the benefit of the visiting European guests without the expectation of any genuine effort on their part. When a hunting drive was decided upon, the gunmen were encouraged to take up suitable positions in certain favourable locations. Elephants were used as key dignitaries. The local ruler made arrangements to ensure his imperial guests were entirely out of danger. Game animals were in fact so infrequently disturbed that they became less untamed than in their natural habitats.⁸⁶ After the shoot, the game was sent down to the hunters by the beaters.

High-profile shikar excursions were carefully managed. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar organized numerous shooting parties for the British viceroys and military officers who were his frequent guests.⁸⁷ The region of Cooch Behar geologically offered a network of watercourses, streams, and quagmires and for the most part was covered by heavy grassland jungles providing a tremendous haven for the chase of big game comprising rhinos, tigers, bears, samburs, leopards, and bison.⁸⁸ As the maharaja advanced in age and consequently gained hunting expertise, he came to be celebrated for organizing and leading shikar expeditions.⁸⁹ The royal

⁸⁴ *Reversing the Gaze*, p. 98.

⁸⁵ Manning, *Hunters and Poachers*, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Manning, *Hunters and Poachers*, pp. 183–4.

⁸⁷ Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985), pp. 386–95.

⁸⁸ Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, pp. 390–5.

⁸⁹ The Maharajah of Cooch Behar, *Thirty-Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, The Duas and Assam* (Bombay: The Times Press, 1906), p. 40. Between 1871 and 1907, around 438 buffaloes were shot in the Maharaja's domains.

shikar trips were generally staffed by numerous servants and officials needed to locate quarry, manage hounds, spread the nets, and perform menial odd jobs at times.⁹⁰ In April 1904, the maharaja prepared a shoot for Lord Curzon at Madarihat.⁹¹ Two tigers and a black leopard were sighted; one tiger got away but the other was killed by the viceroy, who shot two more tigers on the following day. Three years later, Lord Minto and Lady Minto joined the king for a shoot in 1907 when they bagged three tigers on the forenoon and four in the afternoon in a single day.⁹² Minto resided for a full week and Lady Minto had the occasion of shooting a tiger.⁹³

The Prince of Wales's hunting expeditions in India during 1922, when he was the chief guest of the Maharaja of Gwalior, formed the focus of much public attention.⁹⁴ During this state visit, the prince's shikar trip with the Maharaja of Gwalior was presented thus in a thrilling narrative:

The tiger had been marked down in a heavy jungle near the junction of three ravines, where the cliffs were some 50 feet high. The prince was posted on a projecting rock just beyond junction ... nothing happened for sometime ... in the distance the beaters were steadily moving up the ravine, the elephants keeping the pace with them and the troops which we could see lining the cliffs were gradually closing in; the whole scene was admirably staged as only a soldier-shikari like the Maharaja Scindia could stage it. Then suddenly two shots rang out ... and the tiger was dead.⁹⁵

Following the successful shoot, lunch was served at the top of the ravine for the royal shikar party, and the whole hunting party was pleased with the game.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Maharajah of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, pp. 373–83.

⁹¹ The Maharajah of Cooch Behar, *Thirty-Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar*, pp. 374, 376–8.

⁹² Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, pp. 411–13.

⁹³ Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, p. 414.

⁹⁴ Herbert Russell, *With the Prince in the East: A Record of the Royal Visit to India and Japan* (London: Methuen, 1922), pp. 69–70.

⁹⁵ See Bernard, *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, pp. 96–9.

⁹⁶ Bernard, *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, p. 98.

Peacetime shikars, as discussed here, had serious political significance underlining the mutual alliance between the British and the select Indian princes. Thus, the Gwalior rulers, who had entered into a friendly association with the British since the Company days, had unflinchingly stood by the British when the Indian revolt broke out in 1857–8. When the key leaders of the Indian revolt of 1857–8, Tantia Tope and the Rani of Jhansi, tried to overthrow British rule in the northern parts of India by forming an army of thousands of mutineer troops, Javaji Rao Scindhia, the ruler of Gwalior, without directly involving himself in the war, gave valuable assistance to the British.⁹⁷ In June 1858, Javaji Rao was driven out of Gwalior by Tantia Tope and the Rani of Jhansi's armies. But the central India field force under Sir Hugh Rose assisted by half of the troops from Indian units from the Bombay Presidency army successfully defeated the troops of Tantia Tope and the Rani of Jhansi in a fierce battle.⁹⁸ As a mark of gratitude in helping him retain Gwalior, Maharaja Javaji Rao Scindhia transferred certain territories in 1860 to the British in exchange for the possessions of the former ruler situated in the Bombay Presidency.⁹⁹ Such instances exemplify how mutual friendships in the realm of shikar also worked in favour of the Britons in times of political turmoil by successfully drawing upon the vital loyalties of the Indian rulers.

Likewise, in the hunting realm too, royal favours granted by Indian rulers in the form of hosting hunting expeditions were returned via other means by the colonial government. Thus, the colonial government granted 'special permission' to the Maharaj Kumar Sir Vijaya (known as cricketer 'Vizzy' in the 1930s and 1940s), the successor of the Vizianagaram Maharaja, to shoot three tigers in 1938 in a 'rare animal sanctuary' in the Central Provinces at the height of the tiger conservation movement.¹⁰⁰ It is pertinent to note that some Indians, and visiting nobles in particular, had the opportunity of hunting in Britain and

⁹⁷ *Gazetteers: Panchmahals District* (Ahmadabad: Directorate of Government Print, Stationery and Publications, 1972), p. 128.

⁹⁸ *Gazetteers*, p. 128.

⁹⁹ *Gazetteers*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Dr Evelyn Rich, Beecham (20 March 1910) OG/CC/2301D, Isle of Wight Record Office; *Report on Central Provinces and Berar, Forest Department* (Calcutta: Government Press, 1938).

elsewhere in the empire. Sources do throw light on how some maharajas, whose relations with the British were congenial, had bagged big game outside India. For example, the Maharaja of Bikaner, the best shot among the princes, had shot 39 varieties of game that included hippopotamus, rhinoceros, lion, and African buffalo, among others, in Tanganyika and Rhodesia.¹⁰¹ Besides, the maharaja made hunting tours to European countries such as Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, shooting various native species which includes the chamois, the red deer, and roebuck.¹⁰² Shikar thus confirmed the exercise of exclusive rights and privileges as well as mutual sporting values while underscoring critical political alliances vital to the sustenance of the Raj.

While on the one hand hunts confirmed the solidarity of the ruling classes, shikar expeditions also tested the strength of the bonds between the British and Indian rulers. As evidence points out, forms of 'resistance' or 'breakdowns' occurred in the hunting realm that often negated the colonial dynamics of power relations. In the absence of warfare and political turmoil, shikar served as a proxy battlefield between the Indian princes and the colonial government. It was an arena in which many Indian rulers contested the hegemonic influence of the Raj. Maintaining game reserves, exercising the right to use firearms, and organizing hunts could give rise to abrasive instances, when those exercising their exclusive rights as hunters clashed. In 1839, when the British complained against the profusion of tigers and other wild animals maintained by Ishwari Prasad Narayan Singh, the Raja of Benares, in his hunting preserves, the raja promised to cull the animals at the request of the British, but not until after prolonged negotiations.¹⁰³ In another instance, when two Bengal army officers on a hunting expedition were fired upon by the officers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh on the banks of the Sutlej,¹⁰⁴ the Bengal government demanded an apology from the Maharaja.¹⁰⁵ Likewise

¹⁰¹ *Life*, 21 April 1947, p. 127

¹⁰² *Life*, p. 127.

¹⁰³ Ind. Pol., 29 July 1840, Draft 415/1840, IOR/E/4/763, British Library (hereafter BL), pp. 664–5.

¹⁰⁴ Bengal Pol., 24 Jun 1829, Draft 358/1828-29, IOR/E/4/725, BL, pp. 1084–6.

¹⁰⁵ Bengal Pol., 24 Jun 1829, Draft 358/1828-29, IOR/E/4/725, BL, pp. 1084–6.

during the 1840s, Perteembah Singh, the Raja of Awa, protested against British officer Lieutenant Simons for shooting antelopes in his princely domain without the raja's prior permission.¹⁰⁶ However, such explosive relations between these power players were more or less restrained during later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through elaborate protocols representing mutual alliances in the realm of shikar. This was especially true in the case of big princely provinces such as Mysore, Gwalior, Hyderabad, Baroda, and Kashmir, among others, in the later Raj.

It is doubtful though that flashpoints such as those discussed earlier were entirely eliminated as sources do suggest that such affrays continued well into the early twentieth century. Julie Hughes's insightful study on the Rajputana princely realms in north-west and central India regarding 'shooting affrays' and occasional breakdowns between the British and Indian rulers needs mention in this context. Such clashes elucidate the fact that the symbolic regime of the Raj, in fact, was not as smooth as it appeared to be. Often princes and British officers came to clash over the issue of hunting privileges and colonial development projects. For example, Maharaja Pratap Singh, who ruled the Orchha state in the Bundelkhand region of the Central Provinces between 1874 and 1930, had had 'affrays' with the British on many occasions.¹⁰⁷ Hughes refers to well recorded archival documentation centred on three controversies that played out between Orchha and British colonial government representatives beginning in 1904 and until Maharaja Pratap Singh's death in 1930.¹⁰⁸ The first controversy related to Karkigarh Island in the state of Orchha, which encompassed the maharaja's shikargah as it contained tigers and other game.¹⁰⁹ In 1905, the United Provinces government's public works department (PWD) requested the maharaja to give permission to submerge Karkigarh Island in favour of the irrigation canal project.¹¹⁰ Seeing his shooting privileges at stake, Pratap Singh argued in favour of the island's worth as a shikargah to keep his princely privileges of hunting big game intact.¹¹¹ As Hughes points out, in colonial

¹⁰⁶ IOR/E/4/796, BL, p. 733 (1846–9).

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 39–44, 50–1.

¹⁰⁸ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 39–45.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 39–41.

¹¹⁰ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, p. 40.

¹¹¹ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 41–3.

India the princely pedigree to possess land and the free will to hunt as they chose were among the most cherished rights and privileges remaining with Indian princes under the British paramountcy. Challenges to either constituted major attacks. However, the colonial government's PWD went ahead with completing the project in exchange for the promise of finding a suitable shikar ground for Maharaja Pratap Singh. However, the turmoil and negotiations continued for well over a decade. The other row was about an illegal hunting acquisition deal in British India by the maharaja himself on the assertion of his Rajputana princely privileges, disregarding the Forest Department rules and regulations.¹¹² The local officials vehemently objected the maharaja's use of British territory as a staging ground for his big-game exploits. Other sources reveal the instance of British army officers illegally shooting in the state of Orchha.¹¹³ In retaliation, the maharaja restricted British officers to hunt only small game in his state, even as he continued to shoot the tigers in the domain of British India forest territories.¹¹⁴ Such instances would underline the competing political realities that ensured hegemonic contest surrounding shikar in central India, which pitted princes against the British or vice versa, as each party tried to secure their own desired shooting experiences, often disregarding the prevalent norms.¹¹⁵

Likewise, steeped in the heritage of the Sisodia lineage and Mewar's history, Maharaja Fateh Singh (r. 1884–1930) of the Mewar princely state 'shunned activities and situations that he believed might compromise Mewar's reputation or his personal dignity'.¹¹⁶ In order to keep outside (that is, British) influences at bay, Fateh Singh's policies considerably delayed the colonial government's introduction of railways and progressive work in the Mewar state.¹¹⁷ In addition, the Mewar ruler did not attend the 1903 and 1911 Delhi durbars, then well-known 'displays of

¹¹² Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 72–4.

¹¹³ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 58–9.

¹¹⁴ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 58–9, 76–7.

¹¹⁵ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 78–81.

¹¹⁶ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 26–7. G.N. Sharma, 'Life and Achievements of H. H. Maharana Fateh Singhji (1884–1930 AD)', in *Haqiqat Bahida: H. H. Maharana Fateh Singhji, 24 Dec., 1884 to 24 May, 1930*, edited by G.N. Sharma (Udaipur: Maharana Mewar Research Institute, 1992–7), pp. 20–1.

¹¹⁷ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, p. 28.

British imperial power held to celebrate the coronations of Edward VII and George V, because he was disappointed at the place given to him below the rulers of Hyderabad, Mysore, Kashmir, and Baroda in the planned processions and imperial rankings during the visits of British royals.¹¹⁸ In terms of the Rajputana environmental history, the Mewar state had significant game animals such as wild boars, tigers, and leopards. Maharaja Fateh Singh had built 'better shooting towers, promoted thicker forests, and fostered game to create opportunities for hunting in a manner consistent with and constitutive of Rajput sovereignty and legitimacy'.¹¹⁹ The raja's engagement with Mewar's environment and hunting landscapes was marked by authoritarian ways, and unlike many of the princely rulers his hunting trips always characterized hardship and danger.¹²⁰

On the other hand, hunting privately, Indian rulers attempted to regain their lost princely prestige, as evident in their daring exploits, which sometimes even involved risk to their lives. While princely shikars in the public realm were maintained as a customary colonial protocol, many Indian princes were ardent hunters in their own right notwithstanding their imperial counterparts. Thus Colonel Kesri Singh, a game warden under the Madho Rao Scindhia, recounted how the Gwalior ruler, despite being a great shot, 'preferred to hunt big game under all sorts of different conditions'.¹²¹ In his private realm, the Maharaja always preferred to hunt on foot rather than firing from a machan or raised hide, unaided by servants, and outside the fanfare in dangerous locations, chasing as well as shooting tigers in this manner.¹²² Even as the Maharaja maintained an attitude of indifference to big-game books and publicized records of his contemporaries, he claimed to have shot 800 tigers during the early 1900s.¹²³ Conversely, with imperial guests, he always followed the strict code of a native sovereign arranging shikar

¹¹⁸ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, p. 86.

¹²⁰ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 86–7.

¹²¹ Kesri Singh, *One Man and a Thousand Tigers* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1959), p. x.

¹²² Singh, *One Man and a Thousand Tigers*, p. x.

¹²³ Singh, *One Man and a Thousand Tigers*. Also see Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, 'State Forestry and Social Conflict in British India', *Past and Present*, vol. 123, no. 1 (1989): 141–177, 150.

'processions', both to ensure safety to the imperial visitors as well as to uphold colonial protocol.¹²⁴ Divyabhanusinh refers to Surguja Maharaja, Saran Singh Deo (1917–1947), who was believed to have shot nearly a thousand tigers.¹²⁵ Fateh Singh as the Maharana of Mewar, through his selective hunting habits, had also controlled most of the large and dangerous game including tigers, leopards, and wild boars.¹²⁶ His sportsmanship code emphasized sparing females, immature animals, and other ordinary animals. During his reign, Fateh Singh claimed to have bagged 375 tigers, 991 leopards, and 990 wild boars, as well as having speared another 275 from horseback.¹²⁷ Thus, his shikar record suggests his preferred method of bagging the predatory and dangerous kind of fauna as the maharana had chosen his hunted species, which were considered among the best in India, in commensuration with his princely status.¹²⁸ This dual game plan of the princes suggests that for many of them shikar allowed the smooth functioning of princely politics without losing their individual credibility in sportsmanship. For them, hunting remained an avenue of testing a ruler's ability for virile engagement and martial prowess within his territories. It was also a measure of their self-worth.

Respecting mutual codes of honour and privilege in connection with hosting shikar parties could also prove to be prickly on occasion. Thus, it was a custom that the European visitors to the Nizam's province be invited to take part in a battue, where the beaters made the game move in the direction of the hunting party, even though not all guests welcomed the idea.¹²⁹ Viceroy Lord Hardinge records an uncomfortable situation during his official visit to Kashmir in 1912 when the Maharaja of Kashmir employed a large number of beaters for the viceroy's sport without notifying him, even though Hardinge had wished to hunt unaided.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Singh, *One Man and a Thousand Tigers*, pp. 94, 110.

¹²⁵ Divyabhanusinh, 'Junagadh State and Its Lions: Conservation in Princely India, 1879–1947', *Conservation and Society*, vol. 4, no. 4 (December 2006): 523.

¹²⁶ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, pp. 114–15.

¹²⁷ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, p. 115.

¹²⁸ Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms*, p. 115.

¹²⁹ Lindsay-Forbes, *India, Past and Present*, p. 183.

¹³⁰ Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *On Hill and Plain* (London: John Murray, 1933), pp. 24–6.

The viceroy could say nothing lest he displease the maharaja.¹³¹ Protocols of hospitality were thus carefully and ritually maintained on either side, a point which will be elaborated later on in this chapter. Mahesh Rangarajan refers to the extraordinary political upheaval that took place in the neighbouring Rajputana princely states during the 1930s, when the Raja of Gondal utterly refused to 'surrender his rights of shooting lions in his territory', despite the state of neighbouring Junagadh raising concern about the conservation of lions in the Gir forest.¹³² It was thus possible for politically deprived rulers to organize their own shoots disregarding prevalent norms and practices, although admittedly such instances took place for the sake of the princely ruler's political expediency in order to tussle with the colonial power.¹³³

Shikar in colonial India was not just a leisure sport for the political elite, but also signified rank, military prowess, and distinction involving exhibits of dead game. The success of a hunt was determined by the size and the number of animals killed in a shoot (see Figure 4.4). The slaughtered animals or birds were routinely picked up by the beaters and given



Figure 4.4 A hunting party posing with five dead tigers and one rhinoceros, possibly in the late 1930s (Indo-Nepal region)

Source: Photographer unknown, State Central Library, Hyderabad, India.

¹³¹ Lord Hardinge, *On Hill and Plain*, p. 25.

¹³² Mahesh Rangarajan, 'From Princely Symbol to Conservation Icon: A Political History of the Lion in India', in *The Unfinished Agenda: Nation Building in South Asia*, edited by Mushirul Hasan and Nariaki Nakazato (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), p. 410.

¹³³ Rangarajan, 'From Princely Symbol to Conservation Icon', p. 410.

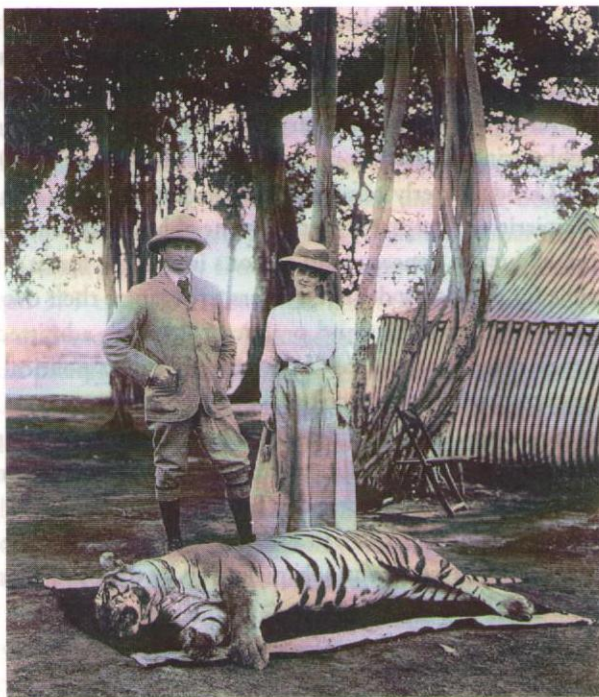


Figure 4.5 Lord and Lady Curzon at a tiger hunt organized by the Nizam of Hyderabad in Warangal, India, in 1902

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Curzon_with_his_wife_posing_with_a_hunted_Bengal_tiger,_1903.jpg.

to the successful huntsman. When bigger game—a tiger, a leopard, or a wild pig, for instance—were shot, a label was immediately put on the animal's carcass, coinciding with a note made by the hunter on his game cards.¹³⁴ The cards were collected at the end of the hunt for the purpose of reference and statistics.¹³⁵ The more dangerous a beast and the bigger its size, the more it elevated the status of a sportsman (see Figure 4.5).¹³⁶

We know that the craniums of tigers, leopards, rhinos, and wild pigs were displayed in the living rooms of many Indian princes and the British

¹³⁴ Bernard, *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, p. 126.

¹³⁵ Bernard, *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, pp. 126–7.

¹³⁶ Bernard, *The Prince of Wales' Sport in India*, pp. 109, 126–7.

administrators as testimonials to their hunting skills.¹³⁷ The Nizam of Hyderabad's son, the prince of Berar, maintained a collection of hunting trophies for public display at the Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad.¹³⁸ In 1937 the prince shot 35 tigers in 33 days of hunting, and subsequently presented 33 tiger skins to his father, the Nizam, on the occasion of the Nizam's jubilee celebrations.¹³⁹ Motilal Setalvad, a lawyer who worked under the Maharaja of Vizianagaram (Vizzy, as mentioned earlier), recounted that the Maharaja's house was full of hunting trophies with numerous tiger's heads being proudly shown to the visitors.¹⁴⁰

Thus, hunting triumphs became an index of a sportsman's personal worth. Between the later nineteenth and the early twentieth century, this was developed into an intense contest between the hunters.¹⁴¹ The statistics used from hunting were counted, measured, and assessed to establish a hunter's prowess—be it a maharaja, viceroy, or an imperial guest. Where the number of animals killed in a day of hunting was substantial, the native shikaris were rewarded with gifts or money.¹⁴² Such generosity on the part of the ruling class was popular among local audiences and received positive reactions from them, which attests to the fact that loyalties played a significant part in the realm of shikar.

Tallies of royal hunting kills were maintained in registers as shikar triumphs.¹⁴³ During the decade 1870–80, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar's claimed hunting tally consisted of 15 tigers, besides a large number of other wild animals.¹⁴⁴ In the span of 37 years, the maharaja killed an estimated 365 tigers, 311 leopards, 207 rhinos, 133 bears, and a significant number of other wild animals.¹⁴⁵ In 1905 alone he bagged

¹³⁷ *The Indian Forester*, vol. 26, 1900.

¹³⁸ *Life*, vol. 25, no. 13 (27 September 1948): 108.

¹³⁹ *Life*, vol. 25, no. 13, p. 109.

¹⁴⁰ Motilal Setalvad, *My Life: Law and Other Things* (Lucknow: N.M. Tripathi, 1970), p. 164.

¹⁴¹ Hardinge, *On Hill and Plain*, p. 38.

¹⁴² Hardinge, *On Hill and Plain*, p. 38.

¹⁴³ Kirtyanand Sinha, *Purnea—A Shikar Land* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1916).

¹⁴⁴ Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, pp. 411–29.

¹⁴⁵ Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, pp. 449–57.

18 tigers.¹⁴⁶ The thirst for wild game went hand in hand with the pleasure of blood sports. The Maharaja of Bikaner was said to have destroyed 143 tigers up to the year 1930.¹⁴⁷ But the cruel and senseless taste for blood sports claimed many more game animals when the maharaja went for shikar in a 40-member hunting party, accompanied by Viceroy Lord Irwin, wherein within the span of three hours the maharaja himself had shot 917 imperial sand grouse.¹⁴⁸ In addition to that, tiger shooting was considered as the Indian national sport among the ruling classes. The Maharaja of Datia claimed to have bagged as many as 780 tigers.¹⁴⁹ Thus, hunting was not just an elite activity, but also seen as material proof of status and martial prowess in non-combat situations, principally among the princely and zamindari classes (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6 Viceroy Lord Irwin and the Maharaja of Alwar during a tiger shoot in 1926; 300 people were involved in the hunt
 Source: India (General) 1926–1946, Corfield Collection, Centre for South Asian Studies Library, University of Cambridge.

¹⁴⁶ Maharaja of Cooch Behar, *Big Game Shooting in Eastern and North Eastern India*, pp. 374–85.

¹⁴⁷ Edgar N. Barclay, *Big Game Shooting Records* (London: H.F. and G. Witherby, 1932), p. 116.

¹⁴⁸ *Life*, 21 April 1947, p. 127.

¹⁴⁹ *Life*, 21 April 1947, p. 127.