

British hunters in colonial India, 1900-1947: The Gentleman Hunter, New Technology, and Growing Conservationist Awareness

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British hunters were growing in number in colonial India. Many of them worked for the British *Raj* as forest administrators, military personnel or the like. Hunters relied on *shikaris*, indigenous Indian hunters. This paper surveys the experiences of British hunters and demarcates the main changes that occurred in the 20th century. Distinct differentiation between tribals/poachers and British sportsmen was also clearly defined in the 20th century. By the 20th century, humanitarian hunters appear who only hunted to protect villagers, new technology becomes intertwined with hunting, a greater sense of nostalgia for the past makes its presence, artificial rearing appears on the subcontinent, and *sahibs* emulated *maharajas*. The aforementioned changes along with a strong sense of restraint and a conservationist awareness were some of the markers that differentiated most, but certainly not all, 20th century hunters from their 19th century counterparts. In essence, the British male hunter was simultaneously a gentleman and an imperialist.

Reliance on shikaris & the creation of the gentlemanly sportsman

As Joseph Sramek has stated, although they claimed to be masculine men, the British heavily relied on Indians. As a result, masculinity could not be tailored to the commonly assumed idea that independence was part and parcel of the prowess; instead, it was coupled with the imperialist idea to have free or low-paid help at one's fingertips. In fact, the imperialist idea of being served by others was a middle-class bourgeois an upper-class mentality indicative of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

The excitement of the hunt remained a constant in both the 19th and 20th centuries. James Best writes of the adrenaline rush that he experienced when out hunting in

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Kashmir, stating: “my heart in my mouth and all my attention [was] fixed [...] Four of them looked huge heads to me; my wrists froze, my heart pumped and I was overwhelmed by all the symptoms of buck fever. Khuzra held back my rifle until I steadied.”¹ The *shikari* played an important role in breaking the British sportsman away from the trance that often accompanied the excitement and sense of adventure that they experienced when out in the jungles. Indian *shikaris* were no less excited with the prospect of game. The author of *Sport on the Nilgiris* writes of the excitement that most Indians felt when they located a tiger. *Shikaris* literally ran back to their *sahibs* to tell them about it. His *shikari* said “*aiyah, aiyah pillee pille*” roughly translating into “Sir, sir a tiger a tiger.”²

The relationship between the British and Indian hunting partners was full of tension and condescension. The reliance on *shikaris* often meant that British resident hunters’ roles in hunting were limited to simply hiking and pulling the trigger. Anglo-Indian men often got very upset when they had to do more than their fair share of the work, showcasing the imperial nature of their role as premier sportsmen. Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Hugh Stockley noted that
there are plenty of frauds among *shikaris*, however, none are worse than the man who knows little about tracking and will never admit he is wrong [...] the greatest fraud of all, as a class, is the Kashmiri. He is often a poor climber and indifferent stalker [...] and consequently a lover of villages, with no desire to penetrate the remoter stalks of game.³

Indian *shikaris* were a dying breed in areas where plenty of game could be located, because many local villagers took up hunting as well and were not as skilled as ancestral *shikaris*. Similar to Lieutenant-Colonel Stockley, Wardrop had a very poor opinion of *shikaris*. Wardrop states that “the shikaries and their myriad [illegible] are usually members of criminal tribes, Bhils or Ramses.”⁴ Nevertheless, the British had to put up with these “criminal tribes” because of their ability to track game. On the whole, many British *sahibs* enjoyed the companionship of their *shikaris*.

Sportsmen also recommended *shikaris* to fellow sportsmen. In Chamba, for example, the author of the *Sportsman’s Book for India* recommended Dhassa, Mullah, and Bhagia. To locate these *shikaris* one had to simply write a letter “c/o

¹ James William Best, *Forest Life in India*, London: J. Murray, 1935, 31.

² F. W. F. Fletcher, *Sport on the Nilgiris and in Wynaad*, London: MacMillan, 1911, 194.

³ Lieut.-Col. Charles Hugh Stockley, *Shikar: Being tales by a sportsman in India*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1928, 191-192.

⁴ A.E. Wardrop, *Modern Pig Sticking*, London: Macmillan, 1914, 285.

Postmaster, Tissa, Chamba to get in touch with any of these men for the purposes of employment.⁵ Recommendations from British sportsmen allowed a *shikari* to receive a steady income. Positive recommendations also meant that a *sahib* would write a good *chit*, or employment record card, for that *shikari*.

Shikaris and hunters worked together in the 20th century, just as much as in the 19th century. For examples, James Best who worked for the Indian Forest Service stated how his *shikari* told him that he “would watch if I slept.”⁶ He was referring to watching out for game during overnight stays up in a *machan*, or platform in the jungles. By rotating night watchman positions, the *shikari* and the British *sahib* worked together as a team to ensure that each one would get their share of rest while making sure that the other person was not in harm’s way. However, *shikaris* often had a reputation to uphold and therefore sought to bag the biggest game. Therefore, they saw eye to eye with Anglo-Indians who also desired the same. They were frequently treated like equals as most received pay or meat for their services by some British sportsmen. Anglo-Indian hunters advised others to take care of their coolies and *shikaris* mainly because the *shikaris*’ survival and health meant a bigger bag for the *sahib*, or British sportsman. For example, an Anglo-Indian hunter who used the pen name of *Ajax* advised Anglo-Indians to “see that your servant’s tent is comfortable and rainproof.”⁷ This sort of camaraderie was often seen in the British-Indian partnership in the jungles.

British sportsmen emphasized the need for religious tolerance. The hunting arena was a place where religious tolerance occurred. In Burma, *shikaris* performed a *pooja*, or devotional worship, in order to kill lots of game without doing harm to themselves in the process. The *pooja* required coconuts, plantains, spirits, pickled tea leaves, tobacco, eggs, a spoon of cooked rice, and betel nut leaves. Sydney Christopher does not describe what the *shikaris* did with them but we can assume that they were offered to a deity in return for a wish. They may have been offered in a circular motion to the deity. Christopher writes that “this ceremony pleases them immensely and there are no reasons why the sportsman should deny them this pleasure as it costs him very little or nothing.”⁸ Christian and Western ways were not imposed on Indians because most sportsmen respected Hindus and did

⁵ George Aflalo Frederick, *The sportsman’s book for India*, London: H. Marshall and Son, 1904, 89.

⁶ James W. Best, *Forest Life in India*, London: J. Murray, 1935, 56.

⁷ Ajax, ‘*Good Hunting!*’; or, *What to do on shikar and how to do it*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1913, 25.

⁸ Sydney Albert Christopher, *Big game shooting in Lower Burma*, Rangoon: Burma Pictorial Press, 1916, 69.

not interfere with their prayer customs. This further supports the contention that *sahibs* respected their *shikaris* and believed them to be on an equal plain with them.

Even though there was an aura of equality between the *sahib* and the *shikari*, the law always ruled against the *shikari*. There could be dangers to a *shikari* when hunting, apart from being attacked by wild game. For instance, if a *shikari* directed the European to a *nullah* where shooting is forbidden, the *shikari* would be responsible for this mistake rather than the European. Ajax, a British sportsman, shot an animal in a *nullah* and later found out it was forbidden. Instead of Ajax's sportsmen's license being revoked, the *shikari* was fined four months of wages and his license to accompany sportsmen was cancelled permanently.⁹ The *shikari* would no longer have a way to provide for his family as his career would officially come to an end. The repercussions for the Anglo-Indian hunter was comparatively miniscule. The Indian *shikari* on the other hand had his reputation forever tarnished and his ancestral occupation stripped away. Although it mostly seemed that hunting was a sport where Indians were on equal terrain with British residents, it was not always the case. Indians were therefore ultimately responsible for all the possible pitfalls and dangers associated with the well-being of Anglo-Indians.

Certain *shikaris* had a vested interest in killing game just as much as the British sportsmen did. James Best writes that "Three times in my life I have seen a *shikari* on the verge of tears when luck went really wrong; they were as keen as I was."¹⁰ Actual tears flowing down one's face translated into a lack of manliness, and this was never seen, but the feeling of despair and regret led these men to become teary-eyed and filled with despair. Indians and the British worked in collaboration in the jungles.

Some experienced Anglo-Indian hunters who had been hunting for years were, however, knowledgeable about where to locate game. However, this skill was lacking in many British hunters. Nevertheless, a hunter with the pen name of Ajax noted that "in districts where the buffalo herdsmen having extracted the cream from their milk, throw the buttermilk into a regular place every morning, and bears being very fond of this can be fairly easily shot over a pool [where the cream was dumped] at dusk."¹¹ Milk production was a common activity that

⁹ *Ibid*, 53.

¹⁰ James William Best, *Forest Life in India*, London: J. Murray, 1935, 24.

¹¹ Ajax, 'Good Hunting!', 13.

attracted wild game and it often led to bears terrorizing villages. Wild animals continued to be a disturbance for many Indians and the British in the 20th century. E. D. Miller discusses finding a boar in the sugar cane fields, because it was attracted to sweetness, and was able to arrange for two hundred coolies to kill that single boar. Many preferred to defer to Indian *shikaris* to let them know where these locations were as there are several accounts in which Anglo-Indians applauded their expertise in tracking and their accumulation of local knowledge.

Indian orderlies had an incentive to find game for the *sahib*. Finding game could also supplement a coolie's salary as most reputable sportsmen paid for knowledge about the whereabouts of game, especially if they were unable to find it themselves. Hunting etiquette made the payment of *khabbar*, or news, customary. Frank Nicholls, who worked as an Assam planter, admits to offering a personal reward of two rupees for news of any big game and ten rupees if it was shot by him and twenty rupees for a tiger or leopard.¹² Coolies, when not at work, were presumably out looking for game or keeping their ears open for any sign of game in the area. This made the sportsman's job quite easy as he did not have to be on the lookout himself and news came to him.

Differentiation of Indians

By the 20th century, the British believed they had a duty to instill honor in Indian hunters in order to uphold the worthiness of the title of sportsman. While there was some indifference in the 19th century among British sportsmen on killing female and baby game, most sportsmen did restrain themselves from shooting female and baby game. However, by the 20th century a sportsman's reputation was at stake if he did not follow game laws and the status quo of fixing one's prize of a huge male trophy. Hunting etiquette in the 20th century demanded that only mature male game were killed at the hands of the hunter. E. D. Miller's brother told a *syce*, a horse groomer's son, who had killed a sow that "he was never to kill a sow again if he values his reputation as a sportsman, whereupon he was very sorry."¹³ This exchange shows the remorse of the young Indian man and emphasized the triumph of the British in their teachings that were disseminated to their Indian subordinates. When Indians felt guilt and understood their wrongdoings it represented the success of the imperialist mission.

¹² Frank Nicholls, *Assam shikari; a tea planter's story of hunting and high adventure in the jungles of North East India*, Auckland: Tonson, 1970, 27.

¹³ Lieut. E.D. Miller, *Fifty Years of Sport*. (London: Hurst and Blackett, Ltd., 1925), 107.

It was automatically assumed that tribals did not have a conscience in regards to the killing of game. This was another common tool that the British used to demean tribal *shikaris*. F. W. F. Fletcher states in a letter to Charles Kofoid the requirements for hunting in the Ghat forests. He asserts that in order to legally hunt in the Ghat forests, a license is needed from the collector of the Malabar Coast. Fletcher, who resided in the Nilgiri Hills writes: "I know *shikaris* who are without my scruples, who would jump at the chance of shooting an elephant if you can get the necessary license."¹⁴ The emphasis in this quote is *my* scruples, which helps differentiate Indian *shikaris* from British sportsmen, the latter having reservations regarding some forms of hunting. Indian *shikaris* allegedly did not have second thoughts about killing an animal like an elephant, an animal that did not pose a danger to people, but instead helped with transportation purposes, and was not a "sportful" shot. Hunting elephants was also against the law, unless it was a rogue elephant and permission was granted to shoot it.

In reality, *shikaris* were just like every other human being. *Shikaris* did not just enjoy shooting. They did have a conscience just like everyone else. While that is not expressed in their writings, accounts by British sportsmen relayed the thoughts of some of these *shikaris* and their families. Tribals were often depicted as meat hungry people who had no reservations against killing animals because they were not knowledgeable about religion from the *shastras*, or law books. Christopher writes that "Relatives and friends will try all in their power to dissuade him from taking life" suggesting that they know that it is morally wrong to hurt another living being.¹⁵ Hunting was not a sport to these tribals, for they clearly understood the dangers of what they were doing and what their family members were engaging in.

British sportsmen also differentiated themselves from Indian *shikaris*. British sportsmen emphasized the determination and will that they possessed which made them superior sportsmen because they never gave up on trying to bag an animal (even if they failed to kill the animal the first time). Hunting etiquette did not customarily allow for sportsmen to leave wounded animals because it would ruin another *sahib's* sport. James Best writes of the superior nature of British sportsmen as he states: "I could quote three instances from after years, when by going out myself next day after a wounded beast I succeeded in bagging him,

¹⁴ Letter. FWF Fletcher to Charles Kofoid. 18th May 1916. Charles Atwood Kofoid Correspondence. Banc MSS 82/39cz UC Berkeley Bancroft Library.

¹⁵ Sydney Albert Christopher, *Big game shooting in Lower Burma*, Rangoon: Burma Pictorial Press, 1916, 68.

when all the natives had given up. The reason is that a native's patience is child-like ... It is the will of Allah."¹⁶ Muslim *shikaris* according to Best, believed it was not meant to be if they did not seize the animal as it was their fate. There was no resolve among Muslim *shikaris* who understood that if they did not catch the animal it was because God did not want them to, but there was a great sense of perseverance among British hunters mainly because they assumed that no animal was a match for them.

Poachers, who were mainly Indian, took the wrath for not following hunting etiquette and hunting laws. By the 20th century, hunting associations took up preservation to the best of their abilities without restricting the fun of their members. Poachers were the main target for pigstickers. Wardrop writes: "Now for the poachers; they are the devil [...] kagis, sansis, aherias, ruffians all."¹⁷ Wardrop writes that all these tribal poachers were responsible for the decline of boars and therefore they harm the sport of pigsticking. Wardrop called all members to action. Members and other concerned sportsmen were to lobby the collector of the district and *zamindars*, or landlords, to help catch and reprimand the poachers. Indian elites were for the first time used to support preservation efforts. Pigsticking, or tent clubs as they were called, had a vested interest to preserve pigs for the good of the association. Tent clubs also had the exclusive rights to all pigs in the district in which the tent club was located.

The few villagers that possessed guns for their own defense and that of their agricultural produce and domesticated livestock were often viewed as men who consistently had "bad shots" and only aggravated the game. British hunters commented on how Indians had no sense of etiquette. As Thomas Metcalf states, differentiation was crucial to establishing the ideology of the *Raj* and demarcating the subjects from the imperialists. Hence, by the 20th century, this differentiation was crystallized in the minds of many Anglo-Indian residents. Hunting was part of the identity of Anglo-Indian residents. C. E. M. Russell, a Late Senior Deputy Conservator of Forests in the Mysore service, commented that "Sport, as distinguished from butchery, needs neither apology nor excuse; [as] the former is moderate and [a] humane exercise of an inherent instinct worthy of a cultivated gentleman, the latter the revolting outcome of the undisciplined nature of the savage."¹⁸ The aforementioned statements show how the British constructed

¹⁶ James W. Best, *Forest Life in India*, London: J. Murray, 1935, 27.

¹⁷ A.E. Wardrop, *Modern Pig Sticking*, London: Macmillan, 1914, 214.

¹⁸ Charles Edward Mackintosh Russell, *Bullet and Shot in the Indian forest, plain and hill. With hints to beginners in Indian Shooting.*, London: W. Thacker & Co., 1900, 1.

and displayed themselves as sportsman, while the Indian tribal or village hunter was clearly a poacher. Gentlemen hunt for sport, whereas Indians are constructed as butchers who are not worthy of the title of sportsman. The savage here is implicitly the Indian. Russell states that the poaching native was one that

Generally he possesses a gun – an antiquated, long-barrelled weapon as a rule... With his bare feet he can walk almost as noisily as a cat ; he knows every water-hole, salt-lick, and gale in the jungle near his home...together with his intimate acquaintance with the habits of the game, added to an unlimited store of patience, and a total disregard of the value of time There are many other human poachers, particularly gypsy-like wandering tribes who do not use guns, but who are extremely expert in every conceivable device for capturing game, both large and small...of a tame buck with nooses fastened to his horns ... By this method, bucks only are taken, but another plan for the wholesale capture of the animals, without regard to sex or age, is practiced with only too much success in parts of Mysore. A large number of natives, each with a long cord, to which at intervals nooses of strong gut are attached, proceed together to a place towards which [...] The cords are then firmly pegged down in a long and often double line and the men by making a very wide, circuit, endeavour to get round the herd...should the operation prove successful, several of the animals are often caught by the legs, and promptly butchered by the poachers.¹⁹

These were Indians who, according to Anglo-Indians, did not have any etiquette, moral restraint or display any sportsmanlike character. Furthermore, they did not practice the long, cherished stalking process and the European style of hunting with a gun. Notions of racial difference are quite evident in this passage. The lack of guns, the extreme torture of the animals, and the lack of discrimination of sex were problematic to many Anglo-Indians as the Wild Birds and Animal Protection Act of 1912 stated that female goral, serow, buffalo, bison, deer, antelope and bird could not be killed during some parts of the year.²⁰ Indian poachers on the other hand seemed to ignore this ruling.

The inhumane methods of killing animals broke the unwritten code of etiquette that sportsmen followed. The savage hunter was painted as an Indian tribal or

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 347-348.

²⁰ Augustus Somerville, *Shikar Near Calcutta*, 111.

shikari who tended to “butcher” their game by employing a variety of painful methods: pelting with stones, capturing in snares or nets, using poisoned arrows or bait, and so on. Similarly, excessive shooting of game was seen as a lack of restraint which did not allow the sportsman to hold the title of a “gentle and tender hearted” man.²¹ The gentleman was the new sportsman who was the sportsman that others had to aspire to be. Poachers tended to wound rather than kill the animal. The British did not like to shoot at animals that had been shot at before because it gave the British the upper hand in the hunting arena and fairness was the main motto of the hunter in the 20th century. Poachers had an infinite amount of time to hunt because they had no real job unlike respectable Europeans who did not hunt for a livelihood. Sport did not take up a respectable man’s entire life, however it did take a few hours of his time on specific excursions or several days should he be an enthusiast.

New Technology and Improvements in Hunting

The 20th century was also a time when artificiality was implemented on a wide-scale in the hunting arena to deal with the dwindling stocks of game. The demand as well as the craze for game led to more artificial methods of shooting. In *Fifty Years of Sport* by E. D. Miller, he writes that Moosohurs and Donghurs supply the planters with game birds of all kinds, such as snipe, duck, quail etc., which they capture alive in nets. The duck and quail are put into specially constructed duckerries and quail houses, and are fattened up and till the shooting season is over, so that planters were able to get delicious game practically through all the hot weather.²²

Miller refers to tea estate managers or factory owners living near Motihari, Bihar. Surprisingly, the very people who were providing game to the British were actively undermining the *Raj*. The Moosohurs are described to be low-caste individuals who were active in *dacoity* and petty theft by the Inspector-General of Police Lower Provinces of Bengal.²³ Even though they were *shikaris* in their own right, they also served as beater for pig sticking events arranged by large planters. Moosohurs and Donghurs, therefore, did the hardest work of the shoot by locating game and literally bringing it within arm’s reach for the British. Furthermore, hunting with nets was acceptable provided they were obtaining game for the British and not for themselves. Their “poaching” methods were not denigrated

²¹ Russell, Charles Edward Mackintosh, *Bullet and Shot*, 1.

²² Lieut. E.D. Miller. *Fifty Years of Sport* (London: Hurst and Blackett, Ltd., 1925), 107.

²³ Lt.Col. J.R. Pughe. *Report on the State of Police in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for the Year of 1867 Volume 1* (Calcutta: Thomas Smith Press, 1868), 110.

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because small-winged game was a delicacy for British tables. As big factory owners or managers of tea estates, there were few instances when *shikar* took them far away from their residences. *Shikaris* also did the duties of gamekeepers as artificial rearing of game such as partridge and pheasants occurred. In addition to sport, this artificially reared game from the duckeries and quail houses served the dual purpose of appeasing the stomach and trigger-happy index finger of British males.

In addition to Indian servants, by the mid-20th century, photography was commonly combined with the hunting experience. A camera became a must, because many wished to capture the looks of a *tahr* (Himalayan wild goat) or *gooral* (another type of goat), the scenery, and also the “strange looking natives.”²⁴ Voyeurism of natives was a common activity and photography helped document it for Europeans in Britain. Bernard Cohn states this documentation and classification of objects in the Indian subcontinent was a form of domination.²⁵ Photography was also commonly used to depict the hunt as a “grand experience”, or one that documented man’s control over nature. The most common hunting pose was one in which the foot was placed over the animal’s carcass prior to the skinning process. As Tina Loo has stated in her deconstruction of the trophy, it is a masculine object as well as a masculine project to obtain it.²⁶

Natural history was intricately connected to the hunting experience. Wardrop commented on how pigs had rather good eyesight.²⁷ Discussions of natural history often included informing the reader about the animal’s Indian name, its Latin name, as well as a little background about its species, including its primary habitat and its character. The description often sought to educate and satisfy the reader’s curiosity. A typical entry is appended here:

Pigmy Hog (*Porcula Salvania*): This tiny animal, which is said by Mr. Hodgson to resemble in size and shape a young one of the preceding species[pig] of about a month old, weighs only from seven to ten pounds. Its habitat is the saul forests of Sikkim, and the Nepaul Terai ... The vernacular names for this animal are *Chota-soor*. According to the same

²⁴ Ajax. ‘Good hunting!’, 29.

²⁵ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton: University Press, 1996, 3.

²⁶ Tina Loo, "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939."

Western Historical Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Autumn 2001): 297-319.

²⁷ Charles Hugh Stockley *Shikar*, 32.

author, the pigmy hog goes in herds, and the males will courageously attack intruders.²⁸

This information would also be published in the gazette of *Bombay Natural History*. The ordering and classification of animals can be regarded as an imperial undertaking that became part of the Anglo-Indian agenda to understand the world that they were living in. This was another way of controlling the classification of animals.²⁹

By the 20th century, there was a large following of men who had strong feelings of nostalgia for a time in the past when it came to viewing tribals whom they often met when hunting in the jungles. The British had made great advances in education and missionaries had worked tirelessly to convert many tribals to Christianity. Therefore, tribals who still retained “elements of savagery” especially those who had not yet converted to Christianity were often sought after simply for their presence and the educational benefits they garnered about their particular tribe. James Best writes of his time in Bilaspur district in 1905, stating: “I consider myself lucky to have seen as much of these people as I did before they too, are spoilt by our civilizing education and turned from truthful and natural savages into imitation Europeans.”³⁰

Furthermore, being a part of the tribal’s life by participating in *shikar* together made more British sportsmen knowledgeable, some becoming expert anthropologists on tribal customs and languages. James Best writes that “here I was working with a party of Gonds and took the opportunity to learn a few words of their language, which amused them intensely.”³¹ Part of the Anglo-Indian project for many sportsmen was to become conversant in vernacular languages for sporting purposes. Therefore, the quest to become more cultured was a dual-edged one.

Paternalism

Paternalism and a sense of masculine responsibility can be discerned from the Anglo-Indian hunting experience. Mrinalini Sinha writes that “the real test of British masculinity was in the ‘chivalric’ protection of white women from native

²⁸ C.E.M. Russell, *Bullet and Shot*, 345.

²⁹ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 3.

³⁰ James William Best, *Forest Life in India*, 82.

³¹ *Ibid*, 86.

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men.”³² The other test of British masculinity was in protecting Indian men and women from dangerous game. Frank Nicholls, an honorary game warden of Assam’s Forest Department, often had villagers come to him to request a shooting of animals which destroyed the rice paddies or to report *khabbar*, or news of tiger sightings.³³ He was someone who took his rifle out to the aid of many villagers. One of the chapters in *Assam shikari* captures the spirit of how British paternalists felt about dangerous game with the title “Sala Bagh.” *Sala* is a crude swear word and is representative of the certitudes that most sportsmen had towards game, for it was a pestilence for those in tea plantations and those in one’s district as well as for those who had to protect their district or their subordinates from the depredations of wild animals. It was an imperial guarantee that the British promised to their subordinates, however it was one that weighed heavily upon their bodies and minds. An active role in the community as a protector was another facet of the British sportsman.

In order to maintain the honor that a *sahib* must uphold, guns had to be carried at all times. This was recommendation of a well-rounded sportsman in British India. *Sahibs* were supposed to walk around with guns in order to protect the natives from dangerous animals like tigers. Killing a tiger or any other large animal was seen as an honorable thing to do. The *sahib* writes that a man without a gun cannot kill a tiger, and then this incident “greatly lowered [lowers] the *izzat* of the *sahib* in native eyes.”³⁴ *Izzat* translates to honor. Therefore, to uphold the honor that is due to the *sahib*, laziness must never prevail and a gun must always be at hand. By the 20th century several Indians had guns in their possession. Nevertheless Indians were still dependent on the British to protect them from dangerous animals.

Jim Corbett was one of the most renowned gamesmen of the 20th century who was also a paternalistic hunter. Corbett developed a great sense of conservationist feelings and was instrumental in the creation of Corbett National Park in 1935. Although Corbett was a hunter, his views changed radically after witnessing firsthand the depredations caused by tigers on entire villages. Corbett later chose to only hunt man-eating tigers. Corbett, unlike any other British sportsman, was one of the first to attempt to explain why tigers chose to kill and eat humans. This

³² Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester: University Press, 1995, 51.

³³ Frank Nicholls, *Assam Shikari*, 84, 17.

³⁴ Frederick George Aflalo. *The sportsman's book for India*, 19.

approach would later be followed by Indian hunters and Indian conservationists who attempted to give a reasonable explanation that did not brand tigers as bloodthirsty animals, but rather as animals that needed protection. Corbett explains that wounds and old age tended to make tigers man-eaters because they lost their physical strength with the two aforementioned conditions and were forced to rely on easy prey: humans. Other reasons that led tigers to kill men and women are the loss of typical prey like deer because of human encroachments on forest habitat and declines in other fair game. Excessive deaths of humans due to epidemics like cholera also led to man-eating leopards that enjoyed the taste of dead humans and then sought to kill live humans.³⁵ The lack of proper cremation of bodies in times of epidemic led to the piling up of bodies, which attracted other man-eaters like leopards. His reasoning reflects a great sense of moving away from blaming the tiger to understanding the problem by studying the environment as a whole – an approach used by later conservationists. Corbett refers to the tiger as a “large-hearted gentleman” and this phrase is representative of decades of imperial connections to tigers as the rajas of the jungles.

The distress caused by man-eaters is evident in the many stories that Corbett includes in his book, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. The Champawat tigress of Kumaon had killed 200 people in Nepal and 234 in Kumaon.³⁶ Before shooting the tigress, Corbett made it clear that he wanted the government reward for killing the tiger void because he did not want to be “classed as a reward-hunter.” He wanted to be viewed as a hunter who hunted for the good of people, thereby displaying a great sense of hunting etiquette and serving the Empire as a gentlemanly sportsman. The case was so bad that people were scared to go outside into the village. Villagers readily cooperated with Corbett and gave him information about the tiger. He studied the clues the tiger left behind while searching for footprints and other details. Corbett was a godsend to the villagers because of his courage in dealing with dangerous animals and his effectiveness in protecting the people. His presence alone gave villagers the peace of mind to continue their daily farm chores. Wheat was cut by villagers only after Corbett stood among them as a guard.³⁷ The gratitude expressed by Indians for Corbett’s efforts was quite deep and sincere. One woman bent down to touch her hands to Corbett’s feet, a traditional sign of respect and deferment to one’s elders.³⁸

Corbett was not alone in his effort to help kill man-eating tigers. Local elites did

³⁵ Jim Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1946), xix.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

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their best to assist the sportsman in his efforts. In the case of the Champawat man-eaters the *Tahsildar*, or Chief Revenue Officer, provided Corbett accommodation in a bungalow. Corbett initially began his hunt for man-eating tigers after hearing stories of the deaths of humans and also by request of the Government. The killing of the Champawat tigers began on request of the Deputy Commissioner of Naini Tal. While the *sahibs*, or in this case Corbett, took much of the credit for bravely killing the man-eating tigress, the government did display a sense of appreciation for the efforts of Indians in helping exterminate the man-eater. Sir John Hewett, the Lt. Governor of the United Provinces offered the *Tahsildar* of Champawat a gun and a knife to the village man who assisted Corbett at a durbar in Naini Tal.³⁹

As representatives of the empire, British officials were obligated to maintain the general welfare of their particular district and in many cases they were personally motivated to do so because they genuinely wanted to help villagers who were quite helpless and much more unfortunate than themselves. J. E. Carrington Turner not only helped take revenge against man-eaters, but livestock killers as well. At the death of a pair of bullocks, he bicycled for five miles to his home to get a gun and go after the cattle-killer, for he knew the value of bullocks to a villager and knew that he would be at a loss without them.

A strong sense of personal ethics often restrained hunters from unnecessary killings. J. E. Carrington Turner, the Divisional Forest Officer of Naini Tal, part of Kumaon and home to several man-eaters, was one such individual who had a strong sense of resolve and determination that resembled that of Jim Corbett. Turner states that after asking priests in Mahableshwar about whether the tiger lurking in the area was a man-eater that their reply was “no.” He instantly asserted that

in that case I can see no reasoning for killing him. The animal is following the natural pattern of his life, hunting his prey in the forest, and so reducing the damage done to your crops by deer and wild pig. Such an animal must surely be regarded as a protector of your livelihood.⁴⁰

The quick action taken to avenge the killing of a human being was most pronounced by district officials who worked at hasty speeds to catch up with

³⁹ *Ibid*, 32.

⁴⁰ J.E. Carrington Turner, *Man-Eaters and Memories* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1959), 14.

the man-eater and deliver justice on the spot with a gun at hand. Turner describes how he walked seven miles with two other Indian helpers at an extremely fast pace. Turner did not foresee coming back until the man-eater was gone. After hearing news of a kill, he wrote of how he would “Hastily [pack] some sandwiches and a generous supply of biscuits in my haversack”⁴¹ and proceed with no delay. Upon arriving at the scene, questions were asked to obtain information about the man-eater. Then a general search commenced in the forests to track the tiger.

The presence of a British official in any village led to a bombardment of requests to that said official by local villagers, usually for taking revenge on a man-eater, administering medical care or acquiring meat for them. For example, Turner describes how Maratha villagers who lived adjacent to forests near Mahabaleshwar asked him to shoot a pig for them, so that they could eat it and use its fat for medicinal purposes. Upon its death there was great joy and the task of the British official was to ensure that everyone received their fair share, thereby demanding an equitable distribution of meat. Similarly, if a British man was simply standing in the presence of an animal attack or intrusion, local people expected that he would compensate them for losses incurred by that animal. A bear that had eaten grain in a man named Guman Singh’s house led to great pandemonium; the pandemonium was instantly silenced after Turner offered compensation for the grain that had been eaten by the bear.

As Jim Corbett has often relayed in his man-eating tiger stories, work remained at a standstill when news of man-eating tigers abounded. It was therefore the duty of forest service officials to ensure that felling of trees occurred and construction efforts continued, and that usually meant that the man-eater needed to be killed, so that large cities like Bombay could have their supply of timber and development of new bungalows could continue unobstructed. British officials had an equal interest in stopping the man-eater or cattle killer for the general welfare of one’s district. Just as villagers demanded compensation or revenge and took their loss personally as the rightful owners of livestock or relatives of a person who had been killed, so too did British officials whose sense of ethics and paternal qualities were seriously challenged when nature decided to interfere with a British man’s district. Turner writes that he “was outraged by the sudden loss of this young

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 21.

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thing and determined to shoot the killer.”⁴² Turner was referring to a baby camel that had been killed, and, as camels were indispensable for transportation, the loss was particularly moving. British men also gave their word that they would find the man-eating animal. Turner gave his word that he would locate and kill a man-eating leopard to Narbat Singh, and upon the death of the said leopard of Chowkooree, was sure that the man’s spirit would rejoice after he killed the leopard.

Sportsmen in the 20th century, similar to the 19th century continued their roles of serving as medical doctors to Indians when on *shikar*. “Kildeer” writes in his *Timely hints to Shikaris* that castor oil, Epsom salts, quinine, permanganate of potash and lime juice are extremely important to keep on hand as medications.⁴³ They should be given to Indian servants if they are sick with such illnesses as bowel disorders or fever. Taking care of Indians was part of the imperial duty that sportsmen encountered and many diligently saved countless lives. Indians typically did not go to the hospital when sick and often died. The British paternalist sportsman made sure Indians were treated and their survival rate rose exponentially.

Paternalism also meant to take care of the Indians and act as a responsible imperial model for one’s subsidiaries. Sydney Christopher writes “you are not expected to regale them with spirits, nor is it a practice I would recommend as a sportsman [...] Shans are particularly fond of strong drinks [...] and will drink themselves to stupefaction if given the opportunity.”⁴⁴ The British needed alert *shikaris* and alcohol would prevent *shikaris* from being alert. The British also believed that they had the responsibility to emphasize righteous behavior among the tribals. Even though tribals in Burma, such as the Shans, drank alcohol, the British had an imperial responsibility to protect the Indians from dangerous behavior and avoid instances where a drunk Indian man might not appear subservient to the British.

Credit for the killing of wild animals was customarily given to the British though Indian *shikaris* and coolies did most of the work that goes into bagging an animal. In *The Asian*, a newspaper that was circulated in Rangoon, Burma, the following was written: “Mr. Christopher Barrister at law has killed another tiger 7th November 1903 Two sportsman went out to shoot bison last Sunday, a few miles

⁴² *Ibid*, 127.

⁴³ Kildeer, *Timely hints to amateur shikaries*, Madras: Higginbotham & Col, 1909, 11.

⁴⁴ Sydney Albert Christopher, *Big game shooting in Lower Burma*, Rangoon: Burma Pictorial Press, 1916, 65.

out of Rangoon, and one of them had the good fortune to kill a fine young male tiger measuring 8 feet.”⁴⁵ *Shikaris* are not mentioned whatsoever in the account even though we know Barrister always used *shikaris*. The shot fired at the tiger takes precedence over tracking the tiger, setting up of a *machan*, and finding the tiger---all activities necessary of an Indian. The British were clearly represented as men who protected the lands and got rid of dangerous animals.

Regal Hunts

Regal hunts flourished during the 20th century, however they can hardly be categorized as masculine, even though they are clearly imperial and ceremonial in nature. One particular royal shoot in the princely state of Bikaner, hosted by none other than the Maharaja of Bikaner, included Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Prince of Wales, as well as Sir Philip Grey Egerton. These important grandees and dignitaries were given royal treatment at hunting camps such as the Nepalese Terai with servants galore.

Because of the large number of servants and the goal of big bags to commemorate a royal shoot, these shoots were often more artificial than regular shoots. For example, during a hunting shoot at Kodamdesar on December 3, 1921, an artificial tank and fake cranes were placed at the shooting site. Real cranes were then attracted to the artificial water source. Servants also informed the shooters when cranes were close enough for shooting so all the shooter had to do was point his gun at the crane and shoot. Men did not have to engage in actual hunting, for when the crane was close enough they could easily shoot as this type of hunting was akin to target practice. For the elites, in the early 20th century, there develops a more civilized or gentlemanly masculinity, which is showcased in the regal shoots. In this manner, shooting commenced in the mornings when birds frequented a pond or stream to drink water. Similarly, when Lord Hardinge shot, an Indian man was placed in his charge “whose task it was to count the birds [he] shot.” There were also some “fine young Indians, almost naked” whose job was to collect all the ducks he shot and give them to the viceroy.⁴⁶ Large bags were obtained during royal shoots, more so than in regular shoots of small game. The Prince of Wales’ party shot 1,006 imperial sand grouse, six duck, and two

⁴⁵ Ibid, 148.

⁴⁶ Baron Charles of Penhurst Hardinge, *On hill and plain*. London: Murray, 1933, 39.

hundred and sixty-two sand grouse.⁴⁷ This was much more than the hundreds which were generally bagged at regular shoots. Shooting was not simply for one day but continued typically for a week. On December 5th 1921 more modest large game bags in Gujner and also in Bikaner were obtained. For example, Lord Louis Mountbatten shot only four *chinkara*, or gazelle, and the Prince of Wales shot two black buck and *chinkara* on December 6, 1921 in Gujner.⁴⁸

In the 20th century, there were changing definitions of masculinity and the ruthless killing of animals was increasingly frowned upon. Therefore, it is difficult to categorize the hunting that they participated in as a masculine activity in a traditional sense. This was generally the case for upper-class hunters, and not so much for hunters who organized their own hunting expeditions. For example, Baron Charles Hardinge noted how he “pursued chinkara [gazelle] in a motor car”⁴⁹ in the princely state of Bikaner in the North. Shooting by motor car became common for the elite in the 20th century. The amount of masculine prowess, muscle, and energy required for the hunt was clearly minimal as humans had an unfair advantage over wildlife. This grand hunt however encapsulated the paternalistic, imperialist trait that was evident in the Anglo-Indian hunting experience. Anglo-Indians, even of the upper-class, tended to detest this organized form of hunting as it took some of the effort and adventure out of the hunt. However, it nevertheless had its own form of excitement as many were amazed by how many animals they could kill in a short time and also the ease with which they were able to get good shots. Ruthless killing was now frowned upon. It was also detested because it was a non-traditional form of hunting. The hunt becomes more staged and orchestrated. However, the royal and elite British accept this because it is viewed as a “civilized way” to hunt in “style.”

Anglo-Indians of the upper class believed that they were skilled in hunting because they knew the methods, procedures and traditions of hunting. It was commonly assumed that Indian servants were not aware of the intricacies related to the hunting experience. For example, a British aristocratic hunter stated that he resorted to having his servant simply carry his rifle because the servant did not

⁴⁷ Cuthbert Ellison Bernard, *H.R.H. the Prince of Wales's sport in India*, London: W. Heinemann, Ltd., 1925), 149.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 143.

⁴⁹ Hardinge, Charles of Penhurst Baron, *On hill and plain*, 8.

understand the “importance of the direction of the wind when stalking.”⁵⁰ The servant’s lack of communication in English and knowledge about stalking procedures helped place Anglo-Indian hunters on a higher pedestal than Indian servants and *shikaris*. Hardinge also had experience hunting in Scotland. This does not contradict the view of Indians as skilled and knowledgeable hunters because one man’s view does not change the majority of sportsmen who understood the knowledge that Indians possessed.

British recreation revolved around *shikar* as a sport as it was an integral part of the identity of British residents in India. While the British, as imperialists, sought to control the Indian animals present in the forests and in other domains for paternalistic and personal reasons, they were nevertheless dependent on the native *shikaris*, servants or *maharajas*. While some British sportsmen praised their native partners and appreciated their expertise, many others did not. In the case of British elites, regal hunts solidified alliances between Indian royalty and privileged British officials. This shows the ambiguity of British attitudes: on the one hand derogatory and distrustful, and on the other praising and appreciative of local knowledge. There appears to be a rise in gentlemanly masculinity that is dependent on Indians so that a British sportsman would simply have to have great marksmanship skills and pull a trigger, albeit outside in the hot weather. British hunters also differentiated themselves from Indian *shikaris*, especially the tribals who were distinguished from British sportsmen. The British sportsman in the 20th century differed from the British sportsman in the 19th century in that there was more restraint as female game were not killed and traditional methods of hunting (with a gun) were customarily used.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 25.