

## Hunting in Punjab During the British Rule

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### ABSTRACT

Punjab province was the part of British India. It is known for its geographical location. English officials and elites utilised its raw materials for their own small earnings and to please the ardent desires of their subjects. The vast open spaces surrounding cantonments became the British's preferred relaxation spots once they had entrenched themselves in Punjab. In Punjab, they developed the hunts mainly around the Regiments. Punjabis were not permitted to hunt, despite the fact that for the British, it was a thrilling pastime. The hunting parties were formed, in which some joined it as for the love of the sport and while some for entertainment. It expanded so far throughout the colonial era that many animals were in danger of going extinct.

**Key words:** Vermin, Hunt, Foxhounds, Pig-sticking, Tent Clubs, Shikari

### INTRODUCTION

The British annexed the Punjab in 1849. In many ways, the colonial era marked a turning point in Punjab's environmental history, but the long-term context is necessary to understand the changes that began to emerge in the late nineteenth century. The State had long supported and encouraged the clearing of marsh, jungle, and woodland in order to colonise new areas. However, during the colonial era, there was a significant shift in the scope and types of interventions, most notably with regard to the establishment of state forests, the management of wild animals as game or vermin, and the creation of sizable areas of canal-irrigated land. The objectives of the Study are to understand the hunting in Punjab under the British and to explore the British policy on wildlife which encouraged a tidy division of wild animals into 'vermin' and 'game'. The proposed research work is based on the analysis of the expansion of hunting in the colonial Punjab with a large study of primary and secondary sources.

### BEGINNING OF HUNTING UNDER BRITISH

When the British established themselves in Punjab, the expanses of open land surrounding cantonments became their favorite recreation areas. The British, armed with guns and accompanied by native beaters, or coolies, spread across the length and breadth of the Punjab plains and hills. The early morning and evening saw various sporting activities underway,

including hunting with hounds. In Punjab, there were two important hunts around Peshawar and Lahore, popularly known as the Peshawar Vale Hunt and the Lahore Hunt.

The Hussar Regiment stationed in Peshawar was known to hunt with packs at Peshawar (Hurst 1934). In Peshawar, time was mostly spent on an occasional run with the hounds. Military personnel usually spend their time in inspections, parades, and field days, with the occasional run with the hounds. In the words of Isabel Savory, "the Peshawar Hunt has at the same time many virtues-it shows capital sport, it affords endless fun, and it is without exception the best hunt in India" (Savory 1900). As far back as 1870, the area around Peshawar was generally acknowledged as "the real hunting country in India." It was mainly due to the sport shown by the large number of regimental packs, which had hunted the country continuously since the early sixties (Hurst 1934)

Lahore, like Peshawar, boasted of its hound pack (Western 1922). The Lahore Hunt was started in 1874. At Lahore, Major Willis of the Royal Horse Artillery during the spring of 1874 also decided to raise a pack of hounds to combat the local jackal. He received enthusiastic support from his own regiment and other regiments stationed at the cantonment. In due time, a draft of hounds arrived from England (Crowe 1953). Apart from the Peshawar Vale Hunt and the Lahore Hunt, various regiments also had their packs at Ambala and Jalandhar. Woodyatt writes, "My battalion had a

pack of hounds at Ambala, drawn along a camel with Shagrans (species of the covered wagon), and we hunted regularly on Thursdays and Sundays” (Woodyatt 1922). The British must have transplanted their sporting scenes from home, as fox-hunting was a common and cherished game in Britain.

Peshawar Vale Hunt and Lahore Hunt were two prominent hunts organized by the military in Punjab. They provided “capital sports” to the Peshawar and Lahore garrisons (Anonymous 1925). These hunts were run on the same lines as fox-hunting in England, except that here in India they did not hunt the fox but the jackal. Moreover, they always found that the jackal in India provided a better run and sport than the fox at home (Allen 1976). Thus, of the entire quarry hunted by hounds in India, pride of place was given to the jackal of the frontier. Although the hounds also hunted wolves and blackbuck, this was very rare, and they did not show good sport (Hurst 1934). Fox hounds were imported from England, and they were said to have as enjoyable a hunt as in England.

Participants in this sport showed up on schedule to the meeting place. About two dozen British officers predominated the area, along with a few girls and a few Indian soldiers. There were about ten hound pairs in the pack. There was also a Master of Fox Hounds who went hunting by himself. A huntsman whips, and well-groomed native kennel workers were also present. The search was planned entirely by the foxhound master, who also assumed all liability. The hounds pursued their quarry as they followed the jackal’s smell as it spread throughout the fields and miles away. The soldiers and the Master followed them as closely as they could despite stumbles and stumbling horses.

In these hunts, the females were fervent followers. “They rode anything on four legs and fell into every river,” says an eye witness, “and had to be pulled out and generally added an enormous amount of sparkle in our lives” (Allen 1976). Some people were appropriately “baptized in mud and water from head to toe” (Savory 1900). They once more set out for the chase after falls. The hounds pursued the jackal for a long time, dispersing across the nation as they picked up the smell and strained every nerve in their bodies. The cops excitedly leaped off.

## REACTION OF THE PEOPLE OF PUNJAB

According to the reports, whether they were members or not, everyone was asked to the gatherings. Men from the army’s judicial branch and the public works agency joined in as a result (Allen 1976, Hurst 1934). The large landowners and village farmers were also present to see the hunt. The British believed - or at least this is what their recollections suggest - that the neighbourhood landowners took pleasure in the spectacle and the chase. The large landowners arrived on horses. Hurst claims that many sincere bonds developed between British people and landowners (Hurst 1934). Many Punjabis were not pleased with the British occupation of their country. According to studies by Guha and Rangarajan (1989), the local population did not particularly respect the British government’s attitude towards their forest land and animals.

With a few breaks, the Lahore Hunt lasted for 74 years. In reality, it wasn’t until 1948 that it was decided to end the search due to the departure of the British officers (Crowe 1952). The last Master, Colonel Bolton, gave the hounds to the Rajah of Chamba with the idea that he would give them back if hunting at Lahore ever resumed (Crowe 1953). The search continued in Peshawar as well, albeit with a few hiccups and member dissatisfactions. Additionally, they began to favour playing polo to hunting because they could not afford to buy animals for both the games, which increased the cost further because caring for and keeping a pack of hounds was not a cheap endeavour (Hurst 1934, Woodyatt 1922). These hunts had significant symbolic value. The British believed that they were the organisations “representing to the locals the best of the British rule” (Hurst 1934). Colonel Royce was questioned by one of the village chiefs about what would happen to the hunt once India gained her independence. The headman responded, “Colonel Sahib, if the officers who hunt jackals go, the soldiers will go, and with their will go the peace of the village,” when informed that they would likely have to disband. The border tribes in the north are home to a lot of bad guys who want our livestock, grain, and women. They’ll come and murder us as soon as they find out you’re not at the cantonment (Crowe 1952). Many large landowners also credited the continued shooting for

the British reputation in Peshawar (Hurst 1934).

What, in essence, was the Hunt about? A pack of cute dogs pursued a helpless little beast who was only too pleased to flee if he could with a musical yow-yow. The pursuit and galloping, jumps and tumbles, ladies, and the subsequent toasting provided the only thrills. Even so, the hunters gushed about it as the “glorious sport.” It was basically non-competitive and can be described as sport in competition with nature. It was only a sport of custom, ritual, and etiquette rather than rules.

### **Pig-sticking**

Pig-sticking, or hog-hunting as it was also known, was a well-liked British pastime in Punjab (Crowe 1953). It was only recognised as a sport in its modern version at the beginning of the 19th century as a replacement for bear sticking, which was until then thought to be Bengal’s most well-liked sport (Baden-Powell 1889). The most traditional version of this activity, known as tent-pegging, had already been practised by the Punjabis. The British actually believed that tent-pegging was the state sport of Punjab (Wilson 1911). The British were frequently entertained at tent-pegging meets.

### **Tent Clubs**

Sport became more highly institutionalised and regularised during the post-mutiny period i.e. 1857 (Mackenzie 1988). During this time, it was believed that a strong organisation was necessary for engaging in high-level athletics. As a result, numerous named tent clubs appeared in cities such as Allahabad, Calcutta, Cawnpore, Meerut, Muttra, and others. Ahmadabad’s tent club was the first of the tent societies (Baden-Powell 1889). The Lahore tent club was the name of the tent society in Punjab. The groups’ organised events provided the pig-sticker with the chance to demonstrate his skills if he so desired. The Khadir Cup, named after the Khadir or river-bed region in which it was competed for, was the most prestigious cup awarded by the Meerut Tent Club (Baden-Powell 1889).

A hunting party was typically formed in the cantonment where pigs could be found; some joined for the love of the sport or to ride for the spear of honour—the first spear—that thrilling sound, which once heard no man ever forgets who has a soul for

hog hunting” (Shakespeare 1860); while others joined for entertainment, for the fun of the thing, to eat, drink, and pass the time. It was possible that these two factors gave this game a unique flavour.

Each tent club had a master and a council to manage the club’s business. The club had its own mess tent, kitchen equipment, staff, and chief *Shikari*. The master chose a location for the meeting after consulting with the *Shikari*. Beaters started to fight as the mess was put up there. On the evening before the search, the participants set up their own rendezvous, sent their own tents, and built their own homes. A few songs with “the bear” as the subject kept the gathering in the evening before the hunt lively.

There was a lot of hustling between man and animal on the day of the search, specifically in the morning. Horses were saddled with extreme care, spears were sharpened at the last minute, and elephants’ howdahs were tied securely. The bands of spearmen were spread out in front, followed by a long line of beaters being led by syce, a vast crescent of swaying elephants bearing spectators, and then the bands of spearmen. The pig was to be pursued by one or more groups of three riders each. The beaters spent their time beating the jungle and chasing for the riders and the horses, it was a crazy race. The pig could lead on level ground for at least half a mile, and if obstacles got in the way, it made up ground quickly. “The long grass hides where you are going, so you can’t see the country you are riding over, and you have to gallop to keep the grip” (Allen 1976). “It is quite impossible in pig-sticking to watch the ground over which one rides; the sole aim and object must be to keep an eye on the pig, and with the childlike faith to place all else in the hands of the horse,” further describes the terrain as an English sportswoman in Punjab (Savory 1900).

The riders had to, however, make every effort to maintain the pig in view. In order to earn “first spear,” these riders started to overhaul the pig when he slowed down a little. However, they had to ride carefully and keep a bit in hand for the finishing work. When they started to approach and prepare to use their spears that was the moment. When writing about the boar, Baden-Powell advises, “At him you go as hard as time and space will allow, and if your horse knows his business, he will leap the boar while

you, on your part, drive your spear deep through his back or shoulder and roll him over...you will thus know the pleasure of first spear" (Baden-Powell 1920). The culmination of this sport was the worst portion (Williams 1912). According to him, "the boar is generally extremely tough and does not give up easily." My inclination as a sportsman was pained at the sight of the wretched tenacious animal with three spears in its quivering hide coming to a slow, valiant end. And yet the run after the quarry and the first thrust-Well that is sport!" (Williams 1912).

Thus, pig-sticking was considered the most "dangerous" of all sports because it required participants to ride full-pelt over some of the most hazardous terrain while still carrying 8 to 9 feet while pursuing a tough, courageous opponent who might turn and try to rip horse and rider apart with his fearsome tusks (Benett 1984).

The morning was when sports were played on a normal day. The powerful carcass was carried by six beaters back to the camp, where the flesh was split among them and the tusks went to the person who speared him first. The elephant carrying the precious "drink-box" on his pad was summoned in the meantime, quenching the "pig stickers thirst," which was greater than all other thirsts (Peek and Aflalo 1989).

A dinner was then served in the camp, and then everyone had some downtime. The day's sports and activities were discussed in the evening. Since "tuck was made to sing the Hog hunter's song, an unprintable ditty of decided merit, and drink his boot full of whisky," spirits would also be high (Crowe 1953).

Even when they achieved absolutely nothing in their sport, there was still the serious business of sopping up joy and toasting victory, perhaps in hopes of improved luck the following morning (Crowe 1953). Things were frequently contrasted to what had occurred at home. In fact, it was this social component that set this shikar apart from the others and gave it a unique place in the hearts of the British people. Consequently, for these sports enthusiasts, the enjoyment of the ritual, the health benefits of being outside, the aspects of the pursuit, and the generally positive aspects of a hunting episode were crucial.

Pigsticking, which was only slightly more advanced than polo, became popular among both the

locals and the English (Baden-Powell 1915). Former settlement officials, who took part in pig-sticking at Gujranwala indicated that weekend gatherings were planned (O'Dwyer 1925) and to play this game, tent sticks were not required. In actuality, this game was played even in places where tent-clubs weren't present. The first lady in Punjab to partake in pig-sticking at Kapurthala was Isabel Savory (Savory 1900). Pig-sticking was observed more from the perspective of equestrian than it was from the perspective of shikar (Williams 1912).

## CONCLUSION

There was the confluence of economy and ecology in British India. During the nineteenth century, British wildlife policy promoted a neat categorization of wild animals into "vermin" and "game." The emergence of colonial hunting in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Punjab is a reflection of the evolving character of the colonial state and a fresh imperial ideology of superiority. The "colonial hunt" also came to symbolize a paternal, benevolent British control, even though hunting had originally represented dominance of nature and native people. The hunting was considered an adventure sport for the British, but Punjabis were not allowed to hunt. Additionally, I contend that the domain of hunting was where racial distinctions between colonialists and colonised were articulated. To supply the demand for meat and other animal products, they promoted hunting and the killing of animals. Other animal products, such as skin, bones, and other body parts, were also sold in Britain at very high prices.

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