



HUNTING: A ROYAL PRIVILEGE IN MUGHAL INDIA

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Abstract:

This research paper is based on the hunting scenes of the Mughal period. A perspective of the Mughal artists. How Mughal artists visualized hunting scenes. The Mughal artists kept in mind the taste of the emperor. In these scenes, the presence of the emperor has been shown in the middle and the courtier follows the guidelines given by the emperor. The artists create the excitement of hunting and show the stress on the faces of the figures depicting the maturity of the artists and easily identifying their style. In these paintings, artists created complex places of 'Shikargaah', dense landscapes, figures in action, and the excitement of hunting have been depicted. The purpose of the presented research is to find out the inclination of Mughal emperors towards hunting, their interests, and the cultural life of the Mughal period.

Keywords: Mughal, Hunting, Shikargaah, Mughal Emperor.

Research methodology

The paper has been prepared after studying many books on Mughal miniatures, journals, manuscripts, translations of emperors' biography, and contemporary chronicles or histories.

Introduction

The foundation of the Mughal Empire was laid by Emperor Zaheeruddin Muhammad in 1526. The Mughal emperors not only earned their name in the world for their glory and victories but were also known for their favorite hobbies. In which poetry, writing, painting, planting gardens, playing hunting, and fighting animals. In all these, hunting has been a favorite hobby of the Mughal emperors. Although karkhana was established during the reign of Humayun. Great artists Khwaja Abdussamad and Mir Sayyid Ali were the great masters in a royal studio but later Hindu artists like Basawan, Lal, Miskin, Kesu Das, Daswant, Govardhan, Mushfiq, Kamal, Fazal, Lal Chand also painted hunting scenes.

Some female artists like Safiha Banu and Nadira Banu also unveiled hunting scenes of Jahangir's period. Mughal painters have depicted hunting scenes with an open heart. In these paintings, the figure of the heroic emperor is shown in the middle. The Mughal emperors Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan were directly associated with hunting. According to **AbulFazl- hunting as a source of knowledge.**¹ Emperor Akbar had a prestigious place in Mughal history. Due to his enthusiasm for literary, historical and philosophical works, Akbar encouraged artists of his court to create manuscripts, through which, he gained the power of communication with a diverse group of people although the factory was established during the time of Humayun, it was fully developed during the reign of Akbar. His karkhana (royal studio) was filled with Iranian master painters Khawaja Abdul Samad and Mie Sayyed Ali guided many artists in indigenous Hindu artists and craftsmen, as well as outstanding architects. Later in his reign, more than a hundred painters had become renowned masters of the art, and many had achieved success. The Mughal emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan all focused on their taste in hunting paintings. Some important paintings were drawn by Akbar, Jahangir and Darashikoh directly. Of their direct association with hunting and keen observation of those particular incidents, they could draw these paintings.

All the paintings of hunting are focused on the personal taste of the emperor.

*During the reign of Akbar, there was a separate department of hunting in which hunters kept inventing new methods of hunting and making new "tools" for hunting. A picture from Khandan-i-Taimuria (which is stored in Patna) shows different methods of hunting and different types of weapons like bows, arrows, spears, guns, iron paths (with iron rings lying on it. An instrument made in the shape of animal horns etc. is also depicted.*² Mughal hunting scenes depict hunting as

more than a pastime. AbulFazl insists that Akbar always regarded hunting as a means of increasing his knowledge.

According to *Ain-i-Akbari*. ***“Akbar also invented a new method of hunting leopards, which astonished even the most experienced hunters. He built each pit with a net, which would prevent the animals from breaking their legs if they fell into the pit.”***³

In most of the paintings emperor is shown standing or riding a horse. Animal's facial expressions as well as depicting hunting and excitement, subtle depiction of nature with snow-capped mountains and vegetation and a smoky atmosphere somewhere in the surrounding green field and different types of animals have been depicted in these paintings.

The researcher notes that Emperor Akbar wanted to gain knowledge by preserving various manuscripts through his hunting skills and this curiosity of his prevailed throughout his reign.

The Mughal emperors believed that Hunting was a royal duty for them. It was an act to demonstrate the emperor's ability to control threatening behavior, successfully mobilize resources, publicize his administrative skills and oversee his reign. Shikargah is a theater in which social hierarchies and political networking are staged.⁴ Akbar was famous for training his cheetahs. Akbar led the hunt with his trained cheetahs. **He had given ranks to his cheetahs. For this work, he hired an animal trainer.** Hunting was a great hobby of Emperor Akbar and from this training of cheetahs, it can be said that he was more courageous. Cheetahs were trained to hunt only blackbuck.⁵

Akbar caught cheetahs from the jungle and their training usually took about three months.⁶

In the Jahangir period, artists focused on flora & fauna instead of human figures.

For Jahangir, his passion for observing nature influenced his artistic tastes. His interest in animals and plants is reflected in the paintings of his period. Like his predecessors, Jahangir was eager to assert his Timurid. ***According to Jahangirnama, ‘Jahangir was the emperor who took forward the Taimurdynasty. Although the empire was stable during Jahangir's reign, there was a need to establish Mughal legitimacy. Linking his rule to the Timurid tradition underscores his divine kingship and undoubted power.***

According to Ebba Koch, 'Shahjahani manuscripts were not only created for an aesthetic purpose but they were also ordered and hierarchical. In the Shahjahan period hunting paintings became graded as well as got a mature style. The painting of Shahjahan hunting antelope is one of the best examples of

the supreme power of the emperor. *EbaKock* believed that “being an emperor, the emperor himself must observe discipline and control his behavior. A hunting camp is a place where the emperor's behavior is taken as an example.”⁷



Cheetah attack on the royal convoy

Cheetah attack on the royal convoy

Historical Background:

Emperor Akbar was very fond of hunting. He used to go hunting after taking time out from his royal court work. Many times during the hunt bitter and exciting experiences were encountered which he ordered to be depicted in the Akbar Nama.

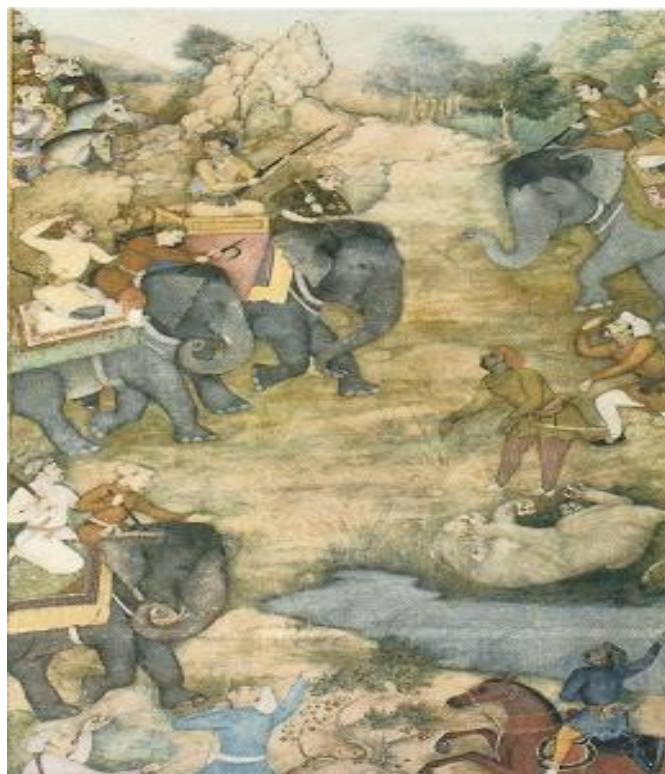
According to Akbar Nama - "The next day the emperor's convoy was slowly moving forward while hunting. As soon as his convoy reached the Marwar fort, a leopard attacked the convoy along with three cubs like some divine power. The emperor shows his strength like a lion. Without any

hesitation, with a single stroke of his sword, he struck the chest of this dangerous animal. The people who were watching this scene were horrified and astonished. His skin was removed and the handle of the dagger and handle of the sword was made for the emperor.⁸

Painting Description:

In this painting, an exciting hunting scene has been depicted. The leopard with his family attacked the royal convoy. Akbar attacked the leopard with his sword. In a very dramatic way, the emperor severed the head of the leopard from its torso. His tongue has come out and blood is coming out of his body. In the middle part of the painting, the lion's cub has been killed, and another cub is attacking a courtier. In the lower part, a lion cub has been stabbed by a courtier. A Lion cub has attacked another hunter.

The courtiers have been depicted taking guns and arrows behind the elephants. The natural beauty of Malwa has been depicted in the painting. Royal convoys are passing through forests and mountains in lush green grass. Malwa fort and Persian-style hills have been depicted in the background. Even before this, in Babur Nama, many hunting scenes have been depicted but such type of attack was not depicted anywhere else. In this painting, Basawan created expressions of fear and stress that can be seen on the faces of the figures. The figures have been raised by fine contour lines. Dark colors are predominantly used in the painting and the influence of Persian style is visible in the painting.



Jahangir Showing His Hunting Skill to Prince Karan

Jahangir Showing His Hunting Skill to Prince Karan

Historical Background:

In comparison of Emperor Akbar's period, few hunting scenes were painted in Jahangir's period. In Jahangir's period the emphasis was given to human personality, flora & fauna. Jahangir's love of nature influenced his artistic taste. His interest in animals and plants is reflected in the paintings of his period. *During his visit to Kashmir, he described the beauty of the flowers blooming in the Kashmir valley and described the beauty of the beautiful bird Saaj and its colors. He ordered artists to paint this bird.*⁹

Jahangir is considered a connoisseur of art among the Mughal rulers. *Jahangir was a kind-hearted and nature-loving emperor who studied various animals and beautiful birds during his visits to the kingdom and ordered to paint them*¹⁰. No painting was completed in his workshop without the permission of the emperor. Because of that, the personality of the artist was recognized in the painting. Like his predecessors, Jahangir believed in keeping his Timurid heritage alive. Like his forefathers, Jahangir was also fond of hunting. In Jahangir Nama, There are several paintings in which Emperor Jahangir is depicted playing the game of hunting.

Painting Description

This incident took place in 1615 and was made part of the Jahangir Nama by Emperor Jahangir. In this picture, Jahangir shows his skills to the Rajput prince Karan. Jahangir and the Rajput prince Karan heard the news of a lioness near a lake. "Karan asked the emperor if he could shoot an arrow in the eye of the animal?" On hearing this Jahangir shot in the eye of the lioness so that he would not be embarrassed in front of Rajput prince Karan. In The painting the lioness is lying on the ground and one hand is kept on her eye which shows the wound inflicted by Jahangir. Prince Karan shows his respect to the emperor by touching his turban. The painting shows Jahangir and Karan mounted on their elephants that appear restless as they face the ferocious lioness. Thus the painting serves as a message of Jahangir's prowess and valor as an emperor.

Emperor Jahangir and Prince Karan have been depicted in the middle of this painting and on their right and left courtiers have been shown. Information on various aspects like the social and cultural life of the Mughal Empire has been given through these manuscripts and Mughal artists added their signatures to the manuscripts as the new owner of the volumes. Through the imperial Mughal court, Jahangir represented his image as a ruler with divine power in front of the world.



Shahjahan Hunting

Shahjahan Hunting

Historical background:

Like his forefathers, Shahjahan was also very fond of hunting. He has described many hunting scenes in his autobiography PadshahNama. Here is one of the important incidents of his life. According to the Padshah Nama, this hunt was played at Palam (near Delhi) in Najafgarh in 1634, but historians

believed that the realistic depiction of this place suggests that this hunt was probably played around an area called Rupbas.

It is difficult to say precisely as to which place it is because this type of depiction has been created in many paintings of Padshah Nama. *“The incident is described in the Padshah Nama as follows - On 26 February 1634, our convoy reached Palam (Delhi) for hunting on the left side of Najafgarh. The magnificent building at this place was built for this purpose. We stayed at this place for four days and played hunting.*

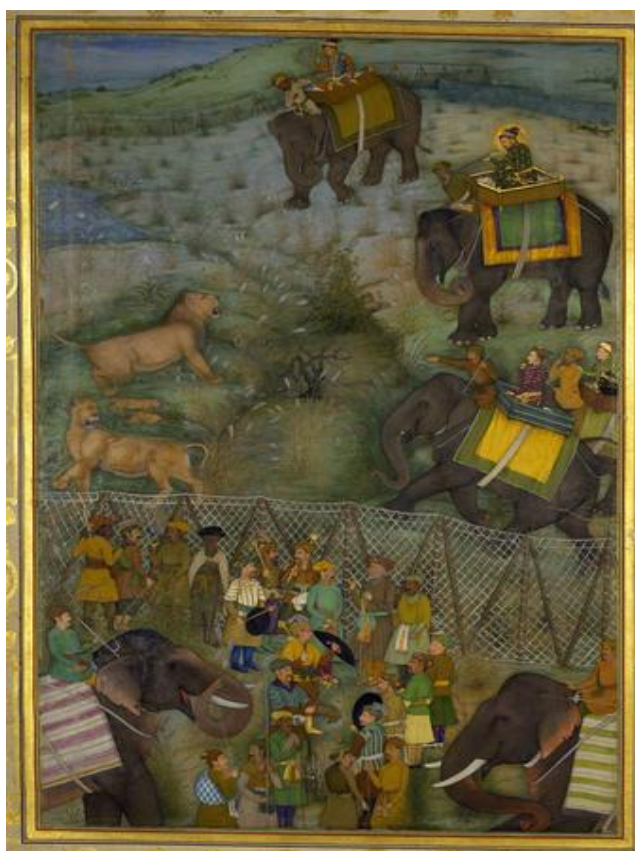
One day, the king hunted forty blackbucks with his gun called Khasban. Then there was no need to go again.” When he told this incident to his father .he said that he hunted 18 deer in one day When Shahjahan got a chance to play hunting at a place called Palampur. He hunted 40 deer’s in a single day with a particular gun called Khasbaan.¹¹

Painting Description:

This painting depicts Shahjahan hunting deer at Palam. This was painted after returning from Kashmir to Agra in 1630. At that time Shahjahan was 43 years old and his son Darashikoh was 20 years old. The growing beard of Shahjahan indicates that this picture was painted around 1640. Also, two of Shahjahan's chief servants, Saadat Khan and Astalat Khan (Mir Bakshi), had joined Shahjahan's court in 1639, which makes it clear that this picture is of the latter because Palam was the center of Shah Jahan's favorite hunting. When he used to travel to Delhi, Palam (Abasiyah) used to come to hunt blackbucks. Shahjahan is kneeling on a carpeted floor with his fingers resting on his special gun Khasban and the barrel of the gun resting on the shoulder of his faithful servant Zafar Khan sitting in front of the emperor. Darashikoh and his three nobles are shown below. The entire attention of the emperor is on the edge of the pier.

The nature’s depiction in the picture is very real and completely Indian style, along with the sky shown in the background and Shahjahan’s entire attention is focused on deer drinking water at the pier. The emperor wearing a halo in which the sun rises and comes out,(a symbol of divinity). The artist created the exciting atmosphere of hunting and the hunting mood of Shahjahan through the brilliant depiction of nature. The reflection of the sunset has been shown with pale pinkish-yellow and bluish-white sparkles on the upper part of the painting. There are small hills on the right side and farmers working in the field, brilliant use of perspective and European influence have been depicted. A herd of deer and some deer are shown drinking water at a distance. The artist used perspective in the

depiction of deer and trees by making the surrounding deer and trees bigger and distant deer and trees smaller. It has been proved that by the time of Shahjahan, maturity had come in the Mughal painting and now the artists were well acquainted with the European influence as well. Hunted deer have not shown anywhere. Most of them are female deer than male deer. Landscape painting is according to the Indian style in comparison to the nature paintings of Shahjahani paintings. Blowing wind, rustling of leaves and perspective inspiration has been taken from European paintings. Court poets wrote poems on the theme of hunting. Based on which artists depicted royal hunts. The emperor praised his gun named Khasban and said that - this gun can fire even in the light of a candle. Poets used the candle as a beautiful metaphor. There is a predominance of both light and dark colors in the picture, with trees painted in dark green and the land in yellow and brown. The artist has been successful in depicting the exciting atmosphere of the hunt.



Shahjahan hunting the lions in Burhanpur

Shahjahan hunting the lions in Burhanpur

Historical Background:

In this painting Shahjahan is shown hunting lions in Burhanpur. Court etiquette, which was the main feature of Shahjahan's court, is also clearly visible in the painting. In the foreground of the picture, the emperor and his nobles have arranged hierarchically with three elephants. Shahjahan and his courtiers are shown using a net to hunt ferocious animals. The tightly bound mesh reflects the philosophy of bravery and strength.

The middle ground is separated from the foreground by a netted enclosure where all the principal figures and servants are placed. A halo is depicted on the emperor's head and on both sides of him princes are facing a lioness and her two cubs. The lion is only looking at the emperor and threatening him. As a result of the successful Deccan campaign, the lion hunt was hailed as a majestic omen and was celebrated with a high ceremony.

According to François Bernier "When a king kills a lion it is considered a favorable omen for the kingdom. if the animal survives, it is considered inauspicious."¹² According to Bernier, The dead lion was brought to the emperor, who was seated on a throne surrounded by his important nobles. Here the carcass was measured, and the details of the kill including the size of the lion, and the length of the tusks were recorded in the imperial archives was entered on record.¹³

Painting Descriptions:

Shahjahan depicted hunting lions in Burhanpur. Court etiquette, which was the main feature of Shahjahan's court, is also clearly visible in the painting. The main figure of the emperor is shown surrounded by elephants on all three sides and an exciting hunting atmosphere of hunting is depicted. This painting shows Shahjahan's hunting lions as a symbol of the emperor's power. In the foreground of the picture, the emperor and his nobles have arranged hierarchically with three elephants. Shahjahan and his courtiers are shown using a net to hunt ferocious animals. The tightly bound mesh reflects the philosophy of bravery and strength. In the center, a mace-bearer has wrapped his hand in strong leather. Most probably this man gathered the adults and lion cubs after killing them.

The middle ground is separated from the foreground by a netted enclosure where all the principal figures and servants are placed. A halo is depicted on the emperor's head and on both sides of him princes are facing a lioness and her two cubs. The lion is only looking at the emperor and threatening him. The painter has created a swampy landscape and the perspective has shown with the fade to blue.

As a result of the successful Deccan campaign, the lion hunt was hailed as a majestic omen and was celebrated with high ceremony.

The biggest achievement of Shahjahan's period is that he gave importance to manuscript paintings whose double-page painting is a symbol of his divine character.

Conclusion

This study shows that hunting was one of important hobbies of the Mughal emperors. They hunted in a planned manner and converted the main hunting sites into Shikargah. Akbar established a separate department of hunting in which the experts searched for different techniques and tools of hunting were manufactured. Mughal artists from Emperor Akbar to Shahjahan and Darashikoh's court painted hunting scenes with an open heart. Although the role of the emperor is given prominence in all these paintings, the excitement of hunting, dense forests, green fields and each figure shown in action proved the deep vision of the artists and the maturity of their visualization. Shah Jahajahan's court paintings are stylistically more mature and full of European influence.

Therefore, it may well be concluded that for the study of Mughal painting, the paper of hunter paintings will benefit the art students.

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