

Man and Wildlife in Mughal India : Jahangir and Nilgaw hunt

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Abstract : *The Mughal Emperors were keen observer of nature. It began with Babur's vivid description of natural phenomena particularly of the flora and fauna of Hindustan. The commentary by the Mughal Emperors on nature culminated in the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri. These narratives are characterised by an overtone of admiration for the beauty they found in subjects and they did not hesitate to express their feeling of repulsion for an ugly looking animal. Jahangir's descriptions are precise enough to make possible for us to scientifically identify the objects .*

All the Mughal emperors particularly Jahangir appear to have been extremely fond of hunting nilgaw. Jahangir makes repeated references to the sport in his memoirs. The Jahangirnama (Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri) reveals Jahangir's multi-faceted persona as a sovereign, naturalist, aesthete, patron of the arts and collector. The Mughals hunted nilgaw in the qamarghah. fashion or shot it with a gun and killed with swords, spikes, arrows and muskets. By the end of the year (1617) Jahangir hunted 28532 wild animals and birds were hunted in which 889 nilgaw included.

The places where these wild animals particularly Nilgaw were killed were spread over a large area. It signifies the distribution of these animal in these areas where it is no longer found. The paper analysed Mughal Emperor's keen observation almost scientific and their hunting expedition in different regions.

Key Words : *Babur, Jahangir, Memoirs, Nilgaw, deer, distinction of Nilgaw from cow.*

The Mughal emperors acquired a scientific temper while dealing with nature. Their keen observation of the natural world became a feature of their dynastic personality. It began with Babur's vivid description of natural and physical world particularly, flora and fauna, geography, climate of Hindustan in his memoir, the *Baburnama*. And the temper got culminated in Jahangir, as it emerges from his memoir, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. This comes out from his observations and investigations about nature that he has been described as naturalist.¹ His interest in Zoology emanated from a pervasive aesthetic bent of his mind. Often, his narratives are characterised by overtone of admiration for the beauty, he found in the subject, though he did not hesitate to express his feeling of repulsion for an ugly looking animal. Nevertheless, his descriptions are precise enough that the correct scientific identification of the objects can be made today. He gives local names and geographical distribution of a particular animal as well as physical and structural characteristics including weights, measurements etc. He also provides interesting notes on traits and behaviour of the wild animal.²

Once in the court of Jahangir a discussion started regarding the family of *gao* (cow) and *nilgaw* (blue-bull). It is said that Indians used to eat Nilgaw and therefore, it was surprising that they put Nilgaw in the class of *gao* (cow). In the discussion one Ram Das Kachhwaha who was in the court of Akbar narrated that similar discussion took place in Akbar's court. Raja Man Singh complained that Raja-e-Mulk Patta used to eat Nilgaw that is the kind of cow. Then, Raja Babu son of Raja-e-Mulk Patta, servant of the court, was standing there. He informed the assembly and the Emperor Akbar that it was an illogical statement given by Raja because Nilgaw is the kind of *aahoo* (deer) not the cow (*gao*). He gave the reason that the dung of cow (*sargeen*) and Nilgaw (*pashkal*) is different as Nilgaw's dung (*pashkal*) is like dung of *aahoo* (deer). The Emperor liked his statement and appreciated him. He further explained that cow has horn on her head and female Nilgaw doesn't have horn on her head like female *aahoo* (deer).³ Thus, the arguments established that the Nilgaw was the kind of *aahoo* (deer), not *gao* (cow).

The nilgaw⁴ (Blue-bull) is a commonly found wild animal in India from

the ancient times. B.Nath and J.M.Casal have found the bone remains of the nilgaw among the animal bones remain from Lothal and Amri period III.⁵ In a classic description Babur described nilgaw,⁶ that 'The *nilgaw* (blue-bull) stand as high as horse, but in somewhat lighter in build. The male is bluish-gray, hence, seemingly, people call it *nila-gau*. It has two rather small horns. On its throat is a tuft of hair, nine inches long; it resembles the Yak. Its hoof is cleft (*airi*) like the hoof of cattle. The doe is of the colour of the *bughu-maral*;⁷ She for her part, has no horns and is plumper than the male'.⁸

All the Mughal emperors particularly Jahangir appear to have been extremely fond of hunting nilgaw. Jahangir makes repeated references to the sport in his memoirs.⁹ The *Jahangirnama (Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri)* reveals Jahangir's multi-faceted personality as a sovereign, naturalist, aesthete, patron of the arts and collector.¹⁰ The Mughals hunted nilgaw in the *qamarghah*¹¹ fashion or shot it with a gun and killed with swords, spikes, arrows and muskets.¹² Their flesh was distributed among the poor and nobles (*amirs*).¹³ Sometimes the emperor hunted nilgaw under the guidance of noble or hunting men and as a reward their ranks were increased.¹⁴

In 1606, Jahangir was engaged in *Qamargah*-hunt at Girjhak and Nandina where 155 and 110 animals were killed respectively including nine nilgaw.¹⁵ In 1609, in the neighbourhood of Fathpur three nilgaw, one male, two female were killed.¹⁶ In the same year Jahangir mentioned in his memoir that when 'I had got within shot of a nilgaw, suddenly a groom (*jilaudar*) and two *kahar* (bearers) appeared, and the nilgaw escaped.' In a great rage Jahangir ordered to kill the groom on the spot, and to hamstring the *kahars* and mount them on asses and parade them through the camp, so that no one should again have the boldness to do such thing¹⁷. Next day, under the guidance of Iskander Muin, Jahangir shot a large nilgaw, and he promoted Iskander to the rank of 600(*Zat*)/ 500 (*Sawar*).¹⁸

At Bari in 1610, Jahangir killed a nilgaw.¹⁹ In March 1610 the emperor camped at Mandakar Garden near Rupbas, before re-entering Agra. Jahangir ordered the clerks of the hunting department to prepare list of all the animals that were killed since his leaving and re-entry in the city of Agra. During

his stay out of Agra i.e. of 56 days, 1362 animals were killed which included seventy male and female nilgaw.²⁰

On Thursday 10th *Zil-hijja* 1018 A.H (1610 A.D), near Rupbas, the festival of the Qurban (the sacrifice of Ishmael) was being celebrated and Jahangir ordered that on the Friday they should kill the sacrificial animals. Having sacrificed three sheep with his own hand, Jahangir mounted to go for hunting, and returned when six *gharis* of night had passed indicating Jahangir's interest in hunting. Regarding nilgaw hunt, Jahangir mentioned in his memoir that in 1610 "I killed a nilgaw of the weight of 9 mounds and 35 seers (approx, 303.55Kg). The story of this nilgaw is written because it is not devoid of strangeness. In the two past years, during which I had come to this same place to wander about and hunt, I had shot at him each time with a gun. As the wounds were not in a fatal place, the nilgaw had not fallen, but gone off. This time again I saw that nilgaw in the hunting-ground (*shikargah*), and the watch-man recognised that in the previous years he had gone away wounded. In short, I fired at nilgaw to again three times on that day. It was in vain. I pursued him rapidly on foot for three kos, but however much I exerted myself, I could not catch him. At last I made a vow that of this nilgaw fell I would have his flesh cooked, and for the soul of Khawaja Muinuddin would give it to eat to poor people. I also vowed a *muhr* and one rupee to my revered father. Soon after this the nilgaw became worn out with moving, and I ran to his head and ordered them to make it lawful (cut its throat in the name of Allah) on the spot."²¹ He further mentioned that "Two or three days afterwards I saw another nilgaw. However much I exerted myself and wished he would stand still in one place, so that I might fire at him, I could get no chance. With my gun on my shoulder I followed him till near evening until it was sun set, and despaired of killing him. Suddenly it came across my tongue. "Khawaja", this nilgaw also is vowed to you. My speaking and his sitting down were at one and the same movement. I fired at and hit him, and ordered him, like the first nilgaw, to be cooked and give to the poor to eat."²²

In 1611, near Jalor four female nilgaw had been hunted out of which the Emperor hunted three of them and one by prince Khurram.²³ In 1611,

Jahangir stayed at the Garden of 'Abdur Razzaq Mamuri' near Rupbas city. Jahangir issued an order that the duration of the hunt and the number of animals killed should be counted and the list to be put up before him. The time the hunt continued for three months and twenty days and about 1414 animals were killed which included 108 nilgaw.²⁴ In the same year, on the way the Emperor hunted two nilgaw and inform us that one of them was weighed 10 *maund(man)* 10 seer *Jahangiri* (scale of measurement).²⁵

In 1612 Jahangir encamped in Dahra Garden (Near Agra), during this hunting spreading over a period of two months and 20 days 95 nilgaw were killed.²⁶ In 1614 Jahangir hunted nilgaw in the neighbourhood of Ajmir. 10 nilgaw had been killed.²⁷ In November 1616 Jahangir mentioned in his memoir that 'I visited nine times the mausoleum of the revered Khwaja, and fifteen times went to look at the Pushkar Lake... I went out to hunt and killed 53 nilgaw.'²⁸ He further mentioned that when the Emperor encamped at Deo Ray (Deo Rani), he killed 5 nilgaw.²⁹ On 19th December 1616, in the neighbourhood of Ajmir 67 nilgaw were killed by Jahangir.³⁰ At Khairabad a nilgaw was also killed by Jahangir.³¹

In 1617 when Jahangir was crossing the villages of Giri, Bulghari and Qasim Khera, Hinduwal he killed one, two and one nilgaw respectively.³² When the encamped at village of Sangor,³³ the Emperor shot three nilgaw.³⁴ In the same Year the camp proceeded towards to Hasilpur from Sangor in the subah of Malwa, Jahangir on the road killed five nilgaw.³⁵ Jahangir marched from Ajmir, in December 1616 and reached Mandu on 6th March 1617, and in the process he killed 27 nilgaw.³⁶

In 1617 at Mandu Jahangir gave orders to the news-writer, the hunt-accountants and huntsmen and others employed in this service to make enquiries and tell him of all the animals that had been killed in hunting from the commencement of his rule and up to the end of the year (1617) a period of 11 years since his accession, 28532 animals and birds were hunted in which 889 nilgaw included.³⁷ In 1617 at Nalchha Jahangir killed a nilgaw with his gun and at the village of Kaid Hasan he killed two female nilgaw and on the next day he killed three nilgaw by gun and the large one weighed 12 mound³⁸ (approx, 361.2Kg, One Jahangiri mound=30.10kg). In 1617 on

Sunday 4 nilgaw killed, 3 female and one male. In the neighbourhood of Jaitpur in 1617, 3 nilgaw were killed in which 2 female and one male. At the same time the huntsmen represented that there are much game in the pargana of Hasilpur where three small nilgaw and a nilgaw were killed.³⁹ After a few days when the Emperor's camp reached at the village of Kamalpur, Jahangir shot four nilgaw in which a nilgaw was weighed 12 ½ mounds⁴⁰ (approx. 376.25Kg). In the month of Azar (1617) two nilgaw were killed, one male and one female.⁴¹ When the royal standards halted at Chitrasima near the Parganah of Monda, three nilgaw were killed; one was larger than the others and weighed 13 mound and 10 seers⁴² (approx. 400.06 Kg).

In 1618 near Gujarat Jahangir in the hunt expedition shot six nilgaw, two male and four female.⁴³ At Boda where Emperor halted, Jahangir killed two nilgaw, one male and one female.⁴⁴ In 1618 when the emperor camped at the village of Aina, in the neighbourhood of Mahmudabad, Jahangir ordered Rustam and Suhrab Khan (Son of Rustam), to go out hunting and shoot as many nilgaw as they could. The father and son together killed seven heads, male and female.⁴⁵ At that time Jahangir also killed more than two nilgaw.⁴⁶ He ,while enjoying with hawking, ordered Mirza Rustam, Darab Khan, Mir Miran, and other servants to go and shoot as many as nilgaw as they could.⁴⁷

In 1623, Jahangir mentioned in his Memoirs that 'I enjoyed myself for a day with hunting nilgaw. One day during the same hunt I shot a female nilgaw, and two fully formed young ones were found inside. As I heard that the flesh of nilgaw fawns was delicate and delicious, I ordered the royal cooks to prepare a *du-piyaza* (a kind of rich fricassee). Certainly it was not without flavour'.⁴⁸

Jahangir not only observed animals most acutely, but also carefully described his observations in his memoirs. In the 15th year of his accession (1620) Jahangir provided us a list of animals and birds which were not found in Kashmir, which included nilgaw.⁴⁹ The nilgaw depicted in a number of Mughal paintings.⁵⁰ Mansur's painting of birds and animals exist today including the painting of the nilgaw, (Kevorkian Album) painted around

1620 A.D.⁵¹ In one of the paintings dated 1600-1605, Prince Salim (Jahangir) shown hunting a nilgaw. But surprisingly, a female nilgaw has been shown being milked, preserved in the Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta.⁵²

The large number of hunting expeditions of Jahangir and hunting of different kind of animal in different parts of Mughal India suggests the distribution of these animals in these regions. Though nilgaw has been hunted in large numbers, but it gives us distribution of nilgaw as an important indicator for present situation. The wild mammals, notably the deer, and nilgaw, undoubtedly suffered greatly from the hunters' assault mainly for their meat. If nilgaw still widely distributed over the north Indian plains, this was due to their ability to live on the cultivated crops and the protection the agricultural zone offered to their herds from major wild predators.⁵³

Notes and References

1. Ebba Koch, 'Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Idea of the King as an observer and Investigator of Nature', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, vol., 19, issue, 03, July, 2009, p. 294; See Mohibul Hasan, *Babur—Founder of the Mughal Empire in India*, Chapter 9, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1985.
2. M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Jahangir The Naturalist*, Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi, 1989, p.05; See Mahesh Rangarajan (ed.), *Environmental Issues in India A Reader*, Pearson, New Delhi, 2011, p. 58.
3. Abd al Sattar ibn-i- Qasim Lahori, *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, ed., and Annotated by Arif Naushahi & Moeen Nizami, Miras-i- Maktab, Tehran, 2006, p. 64; See Babur, *Baburnama*, ed., Annette S. Beveridge, E.J.W Memorial Series, Messr Luzac and Co. Ltd, London, 1970, p. 276.
4. S. H. Prater mentioned in his work *Nilgaw* for male and *Nilgai* for female, See S.H. Prater, *The Book of Indian Animals*, The Bombay Natural History Society, 1948, p. 233.
5. The bone remains of the *nilgai* found at ancient site, Lothal, Amri, Balakot, Bharatpur (eastern Neolithic), Nagarjunakonda (Southern Neolithic), Navdatoli (Central & western India), Dhatra and Inamgaon. See B. P. Sahu, *From Hunters to Breeders* (Faunal Background of Early India), Anamika Prakashan, Delhi, 1988, p.139, 144,145,146,158,183,212,219 and 232; See Asok Kumar Das, *Wonders of Nature—Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, Marg

- Publication, Mumbai, 2012, p. 27.
6. Babur notices nilgao in the mountains of *Nijr-au*, the *Lamghanat* and *Swad* of Kabul. See *Baburnama*, p. 141.
 7. The doe is brown. See William Thomas Blanford, *The Fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma*, Taylor & Francis, London, 1888 p. 518. The word *bughu* (stag) is used alone just below and seems likely to represent the bull of the Asiatic wapits.
 8. *Baburnama*, p.276; Enayatullah khan, 'Wild Mammals in Mughal Sources', *Proceeding of the Indian History Congress*, 72nd Session, Ptiala, 2011, p. 553.
 9. Salim A. Ali, 'The Moghul Emperors of India as Naturalists and Sportsmen', *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society (JBNHS)*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1, 1926, pp. 37-38.
 10. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, vol., 19, issue,03, July, 2009, p. 297.
 11. They formed a kind of hunting circle round the *shikargah* (hunting ground). Men on horseback or on foot surrounded a particular spot in the jungle where the game abounded. They then contracted it, till the sport where the animals were spotted was completely surrounded on all sides by men. The animals thus hunted encountered hunters on all sides. Little space was left for them to escape.
 12. Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-1668 A.D.*, Oxford University Press, Constable, 1916, p.377; See Mohd Azher Ansari, 'The Hunt of the Great Mughals', *Islamic Culture*, vol., xxxiv, No.1, January 1960, p. 250.
 13. Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (ed.), Syed Ahmad, Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 2007, p.80 ; See *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p.64; See *Baburnama*, p. 168, 192; Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, Oxford University Press, Constable, 1916, p.377; *Islamic Culture*, vol. xxxiv, No.1, January 1960, p. 251.
 14. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, p.79.
 15. *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.
 16. *Ibid*, p. 78.
 17. *Ibid*, p. 79.
 18. *Ibid*, p. 79.
 19. *Ibid*, p. 80.
 20. *Ibid*, p. 80; In *Majalis-i-Jahangiri* eighty nilgai were recorded in which seventy

- killed by the emperor himself and ten by Prince. See *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p.169; See Mahesh Rangarajan ed., *Environmental Issues in India A Reader*, Pearson, New Delhi, 2011, p.58; *Proceeding of the Indian History Congress*, 72nd Session, Patiala, 2011, p. 553-54.
21. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* , p. 91.
 22. *Ibid*, p. 91-92.
 23. *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p.140.
 24. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, p. 92.
 25. *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p. 153.
 26. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, p. 114.
 27. *Ibid*, p. 125.
 28. *Ibid*, p. 168.
 29. *Ibid*, p. 168.
 30. *Ibid*, p. 170.
 31. *Ibid*, p. 170.
 32. *Ibid*, p. 172, 173 and 174.
 33. The village given to Kamal Khan, the Huntsmen, in place of Kesu Das Maru and an order was passed that the village should hereafter call as Kamal pur.
 34. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, p. 179.
 35. *Ibid*, p. 179-80.
 36. *Ibid*, p. 182.
 37. *Ibid*, p. 199.
 38. *Ibid*, pp. 199-200.
 39. *Ibid*, p. 200.
 40. *Ibid*, pp. 200-201.
 41. *Ibid*, pp. 202-3.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 221
 44. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* , p.245.
 45. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
 47. *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
 49. Irfan Habib, *Man and Environment The Ecological History Of India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi,2010, p.108; Amina Okada, *Imperial Mughal Painters*, Flammarion Paris, 1992, Fig. 259; See Hamid Suleiman, *Miniatures of Babur*

- Nama*, Tashkent, 1970, Plate, 42,43; Stuart Cary Welch, *Imperial Mughal Painting*, George Braziller, New York, 1978, Plate, 38.
50. Amina Okada, *Imperial Mughal Painters*, Flammarion Paris, 1992, p. 222, Fig. 259.
51. Divyabhanusinh, *The End of a Trail: The Cheetah in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Third edition, 2006, p. 60.
52. *Man and Environment The Ecological History Of India*, p. 138.