

CHANGING PERCEPTION OF ZOOS IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Humans captured wild animals for their pleasure from the ancient period. Western European countries developed the modern system of collection of wild animals which was termed as menagerie and later became more popular form of 'zoological garden' or 'zoo'. The coming of colonial British rule in India and its interest in the faunas of the orient led to the formation of zoological gardens in several urban centres of India from the nineteenth century onwards. Public now get entertained by watching different exotic animals from a safe distance without going to forests. The early zoos were mainly based on iron cages with little scope of space for the wild animals. Later on, especially after the Independence, there has been a rapid upsurge of zoos in several parts of India. The design of these zoos are founded with new ideas of broader open air space, concept of park and safari. This paper wish to locate the rise and transformation of zoos of India in a historical time span.

KEYWORDS: *Menagerie, Zoo, Enclosure, Design, Safari, Zoological Park, Wild Animals*

INTRODUCTION

The anthropocentric bent of history, nowadays, has got its critiques from a tremendous number of historians. The animal historians brought out various unknown hidden past of humans through studying animal or animal spaces. From pre-historical period, human are living with non-human animals. They have domesticated animals for utilitarian perspective, but gradually they invested pastime by capturing and captivating several non-humans animals. In early civilisation of Greece, Egypt, China, the kings collected exotic animals for their pleasure. In India, from ancient time, there was concept of 'pinjarapole' – 'an asylum for animals' of keeping aged or crippled animals by rich and wealthy Jains of the various towns where this sect is prominent. The Indian ancient kings kept deer and peacocks in the gardens of their palaces. In the medieval period, Mughal rulers and other Rajput kings had their own royal hunting gardens and in their royal palaces, wild animals like lions, cheetahs, etc. were kept for the use in hunting.¹ These animals acted as the symbol and prestige of the ruler and it meant the king had the power over wilderness. But during colonial rule in India, the cruel manner of showcasing the caged wild animals for popular entertainment gained well developed form in the name of menagerie and zoological garden or zoo. In India, the rulers of the princely states also has interest in wild animals. The eminent zoo scholar Sally Walker notes down- "*Early captive collections and wildlife (or game) parks in India were for pleasure,*

¹See, Divyabhanush 'At the Court of the Great Mughals', in Mahesh Rangrajan and K.Sivaramkrishnan's 'India's Environmental History', Vol-I, Permanent Black, 2012; Valmik Thapar, 'In the Court of Emperors', in Valmik Thapar and others edited 'Exotic Aliens: The Lion & the Cheetah in India', Aleph, 2013.

aesthetic and humanitarian, as well as for power and the hunt, but certainly not for profit."²Rulers of princely state established zoos for the pleasure of their subjects, British officials for their native subjects and after independent government for the citizens.

Early Years: Iron Caged

British colonial rulers were knowledge seekers of everything- which was common or uncommon to them in India. Initially they held their power in the ports, gradually they expanded to the heart of the country. Then they turned to the remotest parts of India – the jungle or wilderness. The notion of masculinity in the activity of game hunting and for the adventure, they went to jungle for the search of wildlife. These sportsman discovered the natural life of these jungles and wildlife for the civilised society by writing their achievements in the wilderness through hunting literatures and taxidermy. By these hunters' experience, the wildlife of Indian jungles came to the lime light of the both European and Indian urban society.

With the urbanisation process, every urban centre having their own zoo became a fashion and prestige of European culture. In Europe menagerie of Versailles in France and Tower menagerie of London were the toy of pleasure for the rulers. But gradually, according to Michael Graetz the role of zoos in society had transformed from '*a bourgeois intellectual toy to a social amenity for the masses.*'³Following the concept of western zoos, British officials or municipality of the towns built their own zoos, on the other hand the areas outside the direct British control – where Rajas of the princely states enhanced their private animal collection to a functioning zoos.

The Barrack pore menagerie was first established in 1801, a little distance from the colonial Calcutta. This zoo was especially established for the zoological research and several extinct animals were showcased which were painted by the East India company's painters. In another colonial city of Madras, Edward Green Balfour with the help of Nawab of Carnatic established the Madras zoo in the year of 1855. In the colonial capital city of Calcutta, in the year of 1875, Richard Temple granted a large portion of land near the Zeerut of Alipore. An honorary committee was established for the working of this institution where Dr. George King became of the influential character. C. Buckland became its first secretary. King Edward VII inaugurated this zoo and it was opened for the public from the year of 1876. Other important zoos in the nineteenth were Trivandam Zoo (1857/1859), Trichur zoo (1885), Sakkarbaug zoo (1863), Bombay zoo (1873), Jaipur Zoo (1877), Udaipur zoo (1878), Mysore zoo (1892) etc. In the twentieth century, S. S. Flower, director of the Zoological Service of the Egyptian government made a visit and survey to the every zoological gardens of India in the year 1913 and published a report where he claimed about 12 zoos in the Indian subcontinent.⁴ Publics of the urban centre can gain recreation from the cages of the zoos where the exotic and unfamiliar animals which they heard now became in reality. According to zoo scholar Randy Malamud, '*Zoos are valued because they supposedly offer experience of the animal world's natural beauty and wealth to people who have little access to the wild.*'⁵Zoo Guide books were written for the publics, by writing details of the natural habits and zoological description of the exhibiting animals, historical backgrounds of the enclosures with a zoo map. For example, John Anderson, a British officer wrote a guide book, 'Guide

²Vernon N Kisling, Zoo and Aquarium History: Ancient Animal Collections to Zoological Gardens, 2001. CRC Press, London, p- 257.

³Michael Graetz, The Role of Architectural Design in Promoting the Social Objectives of Zoo:A Study of Zoo Exhibit Design with Reference to Selected Exhibits in Singapore Zoological Gardens. <http://designforlife.com.sg/thesis/12history.html>

⁴Capt. S. S. Flower, Report on a Zoological Mission to India in 1913, Cairo Government Press, 1914.

⁵Randy Malamud, Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals and Captivity, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1998, p. 1

to the Calcutta Zoological Gardens' about the zoological garden of Calcutta for public in the year of 1883. Many years later, zoo authority tried to establish 'map' as a design for the public to guide them properly.

However, the zoos were established not only for the public; the zoos played a key role in the scientific study of zoology and various experiment of interbreeding and for the keeping of wild animals in an artificial enclosure. Not only colonial officials, but Indians also now engaged with the scientific study of wild animals under the captivity. Ram Bramha Sanyal, the superintendent of Calcutta Zoological Garden wrote a book 'A Handbook of the Management of Animals in Captivity' which was famous for the zoo keepers.⁶ This book elaborates how to treat and manage the different wild animals in the cages of the zoo. He described how to care for the health of these captivated animals. How to build a proper cage design for the animals. But whatever may, the problem of the early zoos were that these zoo showcased animals inside iron bars. The early design was not suitable for the wild animals as they deprived their natural landscape. Actually these types of enclosures were built in the mind set for the benefit of better visual to the human public. In the early zoos of India the architectural design of the enclosures for the big carnivores like tigers, elephants are rarely given an appropriate space for their natural habit. Actually animals are exhibited in the zoos like the paintings in art gallery. Animal historian Linda Kalof described, "With the cage acting as a frame around the animal, visitors proceed from cages to cages observing and gazing upon the animal inside, much like visitors in an art gallery who stop in front at a painting and then move on to see the next piece of exhibit."⁷ She imposed the Panopticon thesis of the philosopher Michael Foucault on conception of the design of zoos. Animals are kept in a series of small cages and even in circular or hexagonal design and for that reason according to her, "visibility is a trap....Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions."⁸ Thus according to the theory, animals were exploited in these zoos just for the use of them as a mere 'show piece' for the entertainment of the public.

New Zoos: Shifting Design

In Europe during the first half of the 20th century, the display method or the enclosure design of the zoo witnessed a rapid change by the hand of Carl Hagenbeck. As an animal lover and businessman he knew what the people want and motivated by profit he changed 'the display methods which had not changed effectively in millennia, and successfully packaged and marketed them to the Hamburg public through the zoo which he opened at Stellingen in 1907.'⁹ In the introduction of Carl Hagenbeck's famous book-"Beasts and Men: Being Carl Hagenbeck's Experience for Half a Century among Wild Animals", P. Chalmers Mitchell wrote "The specimens were ranged in narrow and small cages so that they might be easily seen and compared. Iron bars and wire-work were everywhere in evidence, and so far as possible all draught and fresh air were excluded, and elaborate heating-systems were provided. In Hagenbeck's Park, which is the result of his long experience, these old ideas are discarded."¹⁰ He invented 'the naturalistic exhibit' of animals where within natural landscape, animals were showcased with greater freedom. Instead of iron bar and small cages, he emphasized on moat,

⁶ Ram Bramha Sanyal, *A Hand-Book of the Management of Animals in Captivity in Lower Bengal*, The Bengal Secretariat Press, 1892.

⁷ Linda Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History*, Reaktion Books London, 2007, p-153.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Michael Graetz, *The Role of Architectural Design*, p- 8

¹⁰ Hugh S. R. Elliot and A. G. Thacker (Translated) *Beasts and Men: Being Carl Hagenbeck's Experience for Half a Century Among Wild Animals*, Longman Green and Co., London, 1912, p-viii

artificial rockwork, and large open air exhibit. Thus he emphasised on the display of groups of animals in their social formation. From that time, twentieth century zoos have been using these new designs with galvanized steel, glass, fibreglass, stainless steel or plastic coated chain link wire mesh have been extensively used as barriers. In India, after the independence, modern design of this enclosure are incorporated within various zoos and new zoos arose by the influence of this design.¹¹ Between 1900 and 1950 five zoos were founded. In the latter half of the twentieth century, more than 300 zoos were established throughout India. In the 50 years after Indian independence in 1947, *'there was a quantum leap in the founding of zoos, which proliferated without control until 1991 when the Zoo Act was passed.'*¹² Delhi National Zoological Park was established by the planning of Carl Hagenbeck. In the year of 1952, the Indian Board of Wildlife wanted to establish a new formed zoo in the capital city of the country for the recreation to the people at large. For this reason the service of Mr. Carl Hagenbeck was hired who suggested for the idea of open moat enclosures. He submitted an initial report in March 1956 where he made a general layout plan of waterways, roads & paths, animal enclosures and sewage system. Several other zoos like Nehru Zoological Park of Hyderabad (1959), Nandankanan Biological Park (1960) of Bhubanshwar, Kanpur Zoo (1971), Indira Gandhi Zoological Park of Vishakahapatnam (1970) etc. followed these new open enclosures design.¹³ Now emphasis was given to natural environment of within an atmosphere of wilderness. This helped two side on one hand animals now got some liberty to behave in natural habitat rather than in small caged, on the other hand publics got some picturesque of wilderness scene in a zoo. This new design gave a notion of park and that is why zoos were now termed as Biological Park: *"Zoos are returning to the integrated, environmental animal parks of ancient Mesopotamia, but in a more sophisticated manner. And at the same time, wild nature itself is becoming a mega zoo — just a different kind of captivity."*¹⁴

Gradually after independence of India, the new entertainment with the notion of adventure with the wild animals, 'safari' was introduced *'in order to provide near natural habitat to the zoo animals, safaris were thought of, where animals moved freely over several hectares of open land, fenced all around and visitors moved within the safaris in closed vehicles.'*¹⁵ The first safari in India was established in Long leat in the year 1966. Later time being, Hyderabad zoo, Nandankanan, Chhatbir (1977) etc. followed this process. After the rise of national parks, common people now went to the wilderness by elephant riding as an activity of adventure. The amusement for the public was now turned into the wilderness in National park, safari parks etc.

By the Indian Zoo Act (1991), the autonomous Central Zoo Authority got the power to specify the minimum standards for housing, upkeep, and veterinary care of the zoo animals; to examine zoos according to these standards and recognise or de-recognize them. By this law, 350 zoo were enlisted.¹⁶ Gradually, by the activity of the wild lovers, Central Zoo authority made various steps on minimum dimension of enclosures for housing animals of different species in zoos. A Guideline was created through amendment of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and notification of Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009. The Central Zoo authority with the help of zoo professionals, engineers, architects and artists published a project report- 'Designing of Enclosures for Indian Zoos – 2014' for providing required designs for display of wild animals

¹¹S.K.Patnaik and others : *Designing of Enclosures for Indian Zoos 2014*. Central Zoo Authority, 2014., p-2

¹²Vernon N Kisling, *Zoo and Aquarium History*, p-284

¹³S.K.Patnaik and others : *Designing of Enclosures for Indian Zoos 2014*. Central Zoo Authority, 2014.,p-2

¹⁴Vernon N Kisling, *Zoo and Aquarium History*, p-ix

¹⁵S.K.Patnaik and others : *Designing of Enclosures for Indian Zoos 2014*. Central Zoo Authority, 2014., p-19

¹⁶Vernon N Kisling: *Zoo and Aquarium History*, p-288

in captivity which will ensure their well-being, while providing excellent visitors experience and natural education.¹⁷ The writers of the report highlight the main transition of the zoos as follows: “*In a span of almost two hundred years of zoo movement in India, zoos have evolved from early ‘menageries’ with dingy small barred cages with heavy structural elements, iron bars and stone or cemented floors where the animals did not have any freedom or to exhibit any of their natural behaviour, to the present ‘biological parks’*”¹⁸

CONCLUSIONS

In the colonial period, there were several organisation and laws for the prevention of cruelty to animals. The ‘Society for the prevention of cruelty to Animals’ (SPCA) were established in different colonial cities like Calcutta, Bombay etc. for the prevention of cruelty towards animals. However these societies especially spoke for the cruelty to working animals like horses, bullocks, buffaloes etc. Their spokespersons did not protest for the cruelty to accommodation of wild animals in the zoos. It was generally after the Independence of India, after several years, the government was conscious for the accommodation of wild animals in the zoos. Though some organisations have been speaking for animal right and against the conception of zoos. In the year of 2005, the organisation- PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) made investigation to nearly 30 zoos throughout India where they found negligence of zoo authority for the caring about the wild captivated animals. The wild animals are suffering from lack of proper accommodation, deficient in terms of hygienic condition.¹⁹ However, the problem is that the old zoos of the urban areas which were running from several years are actually bounded within the crowded building and they rarely got opportunity to increase their space of area for the better accommodation of wild animals. Most of these urban zoos of India are now facing this critical problem of lack of space. However, the life of the animals in captivating is a never ending story, though measures are taken for their better natural habit but this animal centred institution is not eschewed, instead of it, in winter season people rush to the zoos to get entertainment.

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¹⁷ S.K.Patnaik and others : *Designing of Enclosures for Indian Zoos 2014*, Central Zoo Authority, 2014., p-iii

¹⁸ Ibid., P-1,

¹⁹ <https://www.petaindia.com/issues/animals-in-entertainment/indias-zoos/> , accessed on 23.08.20

