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Abstract: The information contained in this chapter is primarily based on documents written towards the end of the cheetah's existence in India. They are the last repositories of the accounts of interactions between humans and cheetahs for the purpose of sport.

*Chapter 7*

# ON TRAPPING, TRAINING, TREATMENT OF AND HUNTING WITH CHEETAHS



From the mighty elephant, to the African grey parrots trained to fire ceremonial golden and silver cannons at Baroda, Indians have tamed and trained an amazing variety of animals and birds through the ages. Two members of the family *Felidae* were the subject of considerable attention, namely the cheetah and the caracal, both of which were used for hunting in India. The elephant and the horse were tamed for warfare, the red and grey junglefowl for food, and the cow and the buffalo for food production and allied uses. What was the need to train

the cheetah? It can be palpably argued that in Arabia the cheetah, falcons and hawks fulfilled a necessity to obtain food from the inhospitable desert sands. This certainly could not have been the case in the Punjab, the Indo-Gangetic plain and the Deccan plateau. Hunting with cheetahs appears to have been developed in India primarily as a sport of royalty and the nobility.

In ancient India, dappled cats took part in royal processions and Indians brought them as gifts to their kings as has been noted earlier. While these cats were probably cheetahs, handling them had become a specialised technique by the 12th century and the *Mānasollāsa* passage details this royal activity at some length. However, through the ages the techniques were refined further and cheetahs found mention in several court histories and compendia of animals prepared for hunting. The most celebrated of them were the accounts of the *Ā'in-i-Akbarī*. Before examining the knowledge on the subject of hunting with cheetahs as was extant in the last phase of the animal's existence in India, it would be appropriate to take a close look at some of the sources, their nature, and content, as they are either unpublished or are extremely rare.

The *Bāznāma* of Muḥibb 'Alī Khān Khaṣṣ Moḥallī is a treatise on falconry as the name suggests and consists of 61 chapters. The last chapter is devoted to cheetahs and is a source of very valuable information. Dr A.H. Morton writes:

Muḥibb 'Alī Khān was a high ranking Moghul nobleman of the sixteenth century. His father, Niẓām al Din 'Alī Khālifa Barlās Marghīlānī, had been one of Babūr's early associates and later became his chief minister. Muḥibb 'Alī Khān dedicated the *Bāznāma* to Akbar (r. 1556-1605) and informs that he was nearing sixty when he wrote it. He died as Governor of Delhi in 1581...The composition of the *Bāznāma* is...probably to be placed fairly early in the reign of Akbar. Like the other servants of the Moghuls in the period before the Empire in India was solidly established, he would have spent less of the first half of the sixteenth century in down-country India than in what is now southern Afghanistan...

Sadly, the manuscripts of the *Bāznāma* that have so far come to light are of late date and of poor quality. Of the four available in London, three provide texts truncated to varying extents. Only the fourth (British Library MS Egerton 1013) preserves the chapter on cheetahs. This copy is dated to the month Rabī' II, and in the Moghul fashion, to the thirtieth regnal year. Reiu in the catalogue, suggests that the reign referred to was probably that of Muḥammad Shāh (1719-1748), thus dating the manuscript to 1161/1174. The manuscript does not look old enough to belong to the time of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), but the reign of Shāh 'Ālam II (1759-1806) is another possibility that may be noted. If this is the reign referred to, the manuscript was probably written in 1203/1788-9.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim state of Tonk in Rajasthan, though established as recently as the early 19th century, soon became a centre of Islamic culture. There is a Persian

manuscript from Tonk which is of specific interest. Only about 150 pages of it survive and the pages at the beginning and end of the manuscript are missing. The authorship and date of the work are not known. Dr Muzaffar Alam examined the manuscript and its text, and opined that the style of the script would indicate that it was written around the middle of the 19th century. It is in all probability a copy of an earlier work. The first 130 pages of the manuscript are on falconry, that is care and treatment of falcons and hawks and related matters. Pages 131 to 139 are devoted to the cheetahs-their trapping, training and treatment of their ailments. The rest is devoted to arms and armaments.

The small Bundela Rajput state of Ajaigarh in central India had a remarkable ruler in the person of Sawai Maharaja Sir Ranjore Singh who came to the *gaddi* in 1868 and ruled the state till his death in 1919. An eclectic person, he enquired into several activities of court life. He authored or commissioned 30 books on various subjects, including a two volume, one thousand page, work on culinary practices of the time, the *Ranjor Pāk Ratnākara*, and wrote a book entitled *Yudhabodha Mrigayābinoda* — the name reminiscent of *Mānasollāsa*'s chapters on hunting — which was an exposition of the art of warfare and *shikar*. Coursing with cheetahs was one of the favourite sports of the Maharaja. It appears that the cheetah trainers of his state had become restive and did not train the royal cheetahs with care and diligence. The fate of the errant keepers is not recorded, but consequently Kanwar Balwant Singh Panwar, the Maharaja's *risāldār* (master of the stable), took on the task of training cheetahs and chronicled his labours in a work entitled *Sa'idnāmah-i Nigārīn*, consisting of 52 pages divided into six chapters on the catching of cheetahs, determining their age and swiftness, taming and training them, hunting with them and treating their ailments. In addition the work has 46 illustrations most of which show the various activities of cheetah handling.?

Kolhapur state in the Deccan remained at the forefront of the sport of hunting with cheetahs and in fact was the last among Indian states whose princes coursed with these animals in the subcontinent. To commemorate the visit of the Prince of Wales (later the Duke of Windsor) in 1921, the Maharaja, Sir Shahu Chattrapati commissioned his court photographer, A.R. Pathan, to publish a Shikar Album. This album contains 57 photographs in all of which 29 are photographs of cheetahs, recording the various stages of trapping, training and coursing. The rest of the photographs are of other tame animals and birds including tigers, caracal, hounds and hawks.<sup>3</sup>

In Baroda State, coursing with cheetahs was a well-established practice too, and the animals were left in the care of noblemen who were close to the royal family. However, from 1917-18 onwards the cheetahs were maintained at the expense of the state.

During the rule of Maharaja Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, the procedure was streamlined and four cheetahs were regularly maintained at a cost of Rs 10,176 in 1924. Possibly, the high cost of maintaining cheetahs caused the administration of

the state to record all activities connected with it and thus a detailed account was compiled by none other than Major R.S. Parab, the *Khāngī Kārbhārī* (Private Secretary). of the Maharaja with the help of R. Annasaheb Bhavsahēb Jadhav, Shikar Superintendent of the state. The work was entitled *Chityāsambandhī Sāmānya Māhītī* — Common Information regarding Cheetahs. It was probably meant for restricted circulation within the administration of the state. It contains 38 pages divided into five parts, one each on general information; capture, taming, training techniques and on buying cheetahs; on keeping of cheetahs; on hunting with cheetahs: and on the food and other requirements for cheetahs in captivity.\*

With the demand for cheetahs developed professionals for catching these animals. Among the rich variety of tribals in India are the *bavariyas*, who are to be found to this day in Rajasthan and the surrounding areas. They were classed as a criminal tribe but in fact they are people who are primarily hunters, with highly developed skills for trapping and their knowledge of wildlife is consequently second to none. According to M. Azizuddin, the son of the last cheetah trainer of Jaipur state, cheetahs were caught by these tribals and subsequently sold to the *darbar*.<sup>6</sup> Around Baroda and the Deccan, the hunter/ trapper tribe of *pardhis* caught these animals.<sup>7</sup>

Over the years the *pardhis* came to be divided into several groups identified by the name or nature of their activities or dress. Among these were *shikari*

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\* The *Bāznāma* of Muhibb ‘Ali Khān is referred to as the *Bāznāma* for short in the text. Chapter 61 of this manuscript which deals with the cheetah, was translated by Dr A.H. Morton who also gave a critical note on its author, the date of the manuscript and other related matters. He states:

“Some damage done [to the manuscript] by insects has been carefully repaired but here and there, particularly at the tops and bottoms of the pages, a word or two of the text has been partly or wholly obliterated. The unnamed scribe was sufficiently conscientious enough to leave occasional blanks in the text of chapter 61. These vary in length from about an inch to nearly a whole line.”<sup>5</sup>

The *Tonk Manuscript* is referred to as such because it is unpublished and its title is not known. Its relevant portion was translated from Persian by Dr Chander Shekhar of Delhi University.

The *Sa‘idnāmah-i Nigārīn* was translated from Urdu by Dr Chander Shekhar. Page references have not been given in the text as the translation is unpublished and it has been referred to in the text as *Sa‘idnāma* for short. The title page of the book gives the names of Diwan Bahadur Samir Singh and Diwan Chait Singh as the authors. However, the text itself explicitly states that the work is that of the *risāldār*, the scribe being one Beni Prasad.

The *Chityāsambandhī Sāmānya Māhītī* was translated from Marathi by S. Ganu and Ranjana Kaul. This work has been referred as the *Baroda Manual* for short in the text and references to the pages are not given as the translation is unpublished.

or *bheel pardhis*, ones who used fire arms to hunt; *phanse* or *phase pardhis* (also known as *haranshikaris* -- hunters of antelopes -- in Karnataka), ones who used traps and snares and *telwale pardhis*, ones who sold crocodile oil. The smallest group of them were called *cheetawala pardhis*, ones who made a living by trapping cheetahs and selling them to princes. Hence they were sometimes called the *raj pardhis*. This group also used the cheetahs for coursing in their own right.<sup>8</sup> The *pardhis* to this day make a meagre living by hunting and trapping animals and birds, often finding themselves on the wrong side of the law. The late Professor D. D. Kosambi, who studied tribal peoples of the Deccan, stated that *pardhis* who were experts at making delicate traps for snaring hare, partridges and the like, were employed at the ordnance factory at Kirkee near Poona in their bomb disposal squads during World War II."

According to some English authorities the cheetah catchers used to call the animal by its Persian name *yūz*<sup>10</sup> and one may conclude that some of them could have been Muslims. The cheetah trainers were a different set of people, as the skills required were specialised. In Jaipur, Bhavnagar and Kishanganj they were Muslims." Information from Baroda and Hyderabad is unavailable, though photographs of the keepers at Kolhapur show them wearing the Maratha state's court dress including the turban. Hence it is more likely that they were Marathas, though as per the practice of the time, Muslim retainers, if any, would have worn the same dress.

Two photographs, however, show a bearded person, obviously a Muslim, wearing a fur cap and a long coat with the bearing of a head trainer." At Ajaigarh on the other hand, the Rajput *risāldār* of the state undertook the task of cheetah-keeping himself, but the religious persuasion of the state's intransigent trainers is not recorded. Interestingly, the book written by the *risāldār* is in Urdu which was the court language of many states in north and central India.

In the Indian subcontinental landmass, habitat variations are considerable and local variations in animals of different localities are not surprising. Cheetahs too had some differences, which were noticed

The *Bāznāma* states:

It should be understood that just as the colour of hawks varies, so the colour of the cheetah varies too. There are desert (*rīgī*) cheetahs and mountain cheetahs. Mountain cheetahs are ash-grey (*ramādī?*) and some of them red too. A true desert cheetah which has not...is not very red in colour. (They are?) powerful and strongly built...

The mountain cheetah favours the shade and runs little. It favours the shade because in the mountains, owing to abundance of trees, it always hunts in the shade. It runs little because, in the midst of the mountain jungle it takes the gazelle unawares and catches it easily. But the desert cheetah is not lazy when it is hot but runs well. It knows running well.

*Mir 'āt-i Aḥmadī* of 'Alī Muhammad Khān, a treatise on the administration of the Mughals during the time of Aurangzeb, states that cheetahs found in the region of Islamnagar [?], Palanpur and Kankrej which are arid regions of north Gujrat “were better and superior”, in relation to those available in other places and therefore the empire maintained a special department in Gujarat “to catch, train and tame them”. This source does not say why the cheetahs from north Gujarat were the best but the *Tonk Manuscript* states categorically that the cheetah is,

found everywhere and specially at five places in Hindustan. viz., (1) Multan, [Punjab, Pakistan] (2) Lakhi Jungle [Sind, Pakistan], (3) Ajmer, (4) Gujarat and (5) Deccan. The *yūz* found in Multan and the forest of Lakhi is short in height, intrepid and swift, those found in Gujarat, are tall in height, while they are of medium height in the Deccan.

When the *Bāznāma* mentions the mountain cheetah it probably refers to the Afghanistan region for Muḥibb 'Alī Khān spent his youth there though by 1525 he had accompanied Bābur into India and was already holding positions of command at Panipat and Karwa.<sup>14</sup> That this animal was smaller is not surprising as the terrain did not leave room for a chase.

The quarry was more likely stalked and pounced upon, an activity which could be performed more efficiently by a smaller animal. He also mentioned that the animal was ash-grey or red in colour — darker than the cheetah of the plains, and hence would be camouflaged better in the wooded mountainous terrain.

Both *Mir 'āt-i Aḥmadī* and the *Tonk Manuscript*, as well as British author James Forbes, mentioned earlier, single out the cheetahs of Gujarat as being the biggest and/or best for coursing with. The *Bāznāma* only states that the desert cheetah coursed better than the one from the mountains. The plains of Gujarat, the Kathiawar peninsula, Kutch and Sind afforded little cover which implied that the cheetah had to adapt to longer chases for successful hunts, which taller and swifter animals could accomplish more easily.

The blackbuck was the cheetah's most preferred prey as is evident from Mughal records, paintings and from the observations of British naturalist-sportsmen. The *chinkara* often occupied undulating terrain which is not the best ground for the cheetah's burst of speed, and was second to the blackbuck in preference. Two races of *Antelope cervicapra* are now recognised. The north-west blackbuck, *A.c.rajputanae*, extended over the plains of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, westernmost Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Sind and the Gwalior region of Madhya Pradesh. The other race, *A.c.cervicapra*, of the southern and eastern region extends eastwards from Kheri in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh from Bhopal eastwards, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It may be noted that of the 24 largest horned specimens mentioned in Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game that were obtained from known localities, 21 came from Punjab, Haryana and the adjacent tracts of northern

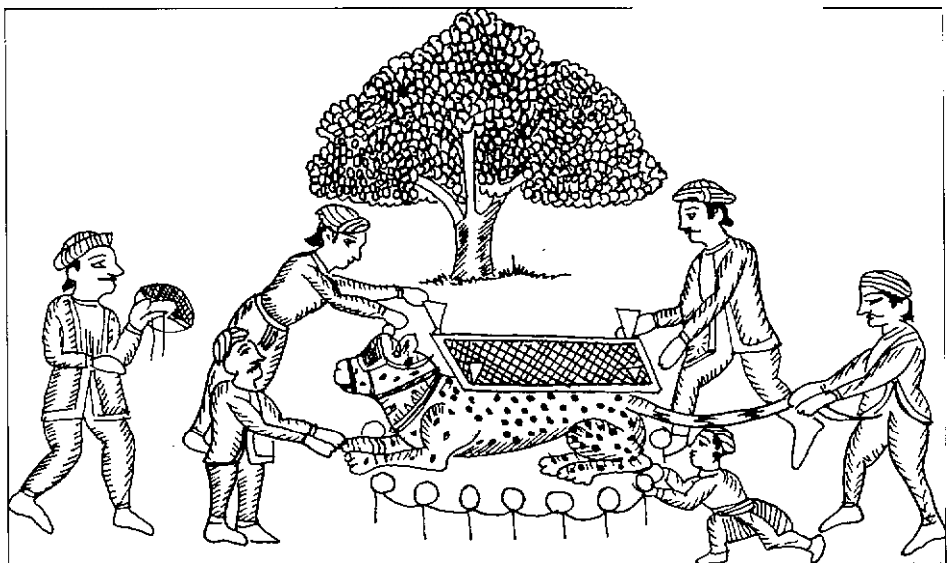
Rajasthan. The blackbuck of the north-west were larger.” As a result, the cheetahs of the north-western region would have been larger than the cheetahs from the Deccan. It is possible that the blackbuck of the Gujarat area were larger during the Mughal times than the animals subsequently recorded or studied in this century. The larger cheetahs from Gujarat and the north-western regions could have coursed more successfully, and hence the repeated mention in these records of their efficiency.

In the final phase of the cheetah’s existence in India they were being trapped in Berar and North India according to one source and if *bavariyas* and *pardhis* caught them, as has been noted, the statement stands corroborated. The *Baroda Manual* categorically laments that the cheetah population

has diminished along with diminishing jungle cover in parts of south India, especially in the western parts of Southern Hyderabad, Ballari [Bellary in Karnataka], the Anandpur [Anantpur now in Andhra Pradesh] district of Madras [Presidency], around Mysore, Konkan, Karad [Maharashtra], Agra, Ajmer, Multan [Sind, Pakistan], and Gujarat.

Both these sources appear to have recorded more from history and traditions of the past than from the current status as the cheetah had virtually disappeared from India by the turn of the century. The *So’idnāma*, compiled at about the same time, also gives similar locations, namely, Pali in Rajasthan. Isagarh near Guna, Rajangarh near Bhopal, Mundyawah in Ajaigarh State and the Kathiawar (Saurashtra) peninsula in Gujarat.

Since the object of catching the cheetah was to course with it, it became necessary to know the finer points of the animal and these were meticulously



The cheetah is made inactive by placing a cot over it.



recorded. The *Tonk Manuscript* states:

Amongst these [cheetahs from different parts of India] the best for coursing with are those who have broad face and eyes, medium-sized head and neck, wide chest, slim belly, large back, small tail.

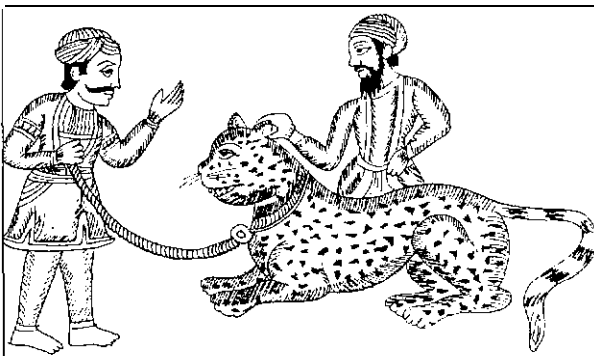
These are characteristics of a racing animal like a greyhound. The *Sa'īdnāma* on the other hand gives detailed instructions to find the age and agility of the animal. Firstly, in a young cheetah, the yellow on the tip at the back of the ear is of 'two fingers' breadth' which decreases in an older animal and turns blacker with age. In a leopard the same feature has been noticed, but with age the colour fades.<sup>16</sup> In a cheetah, however, when the backs of the ears become completely black, it has attained it's full life span. Secondly, the tip of the tail of a young cheetah is thin and sharp and it becomes less sharp and more fluffy with age. This is a characteristic peculiar to the cheetah and not to other cats. Thirdly, the pads of a young cheetah's feet are soft which harden with age. Fourthly, a young cheetah's teeth are small and white which yellow with age as in all large cats.

Discussing the cheetah's agility, the *Sa'īdnāma* states that if it has dark black spots and a small mouth, it may be expected to be stubborn whereas a cheetah of reddish (deep yellow?) colour would turn out to be powerful and libidinous. In direct contradiction to the *Tonk Manuscript* the *Sa'īdnāma* states that a cheetah with a long tail is swift. Finally, it records that a white (light yellow) cheetah with a big mouth is not playful.

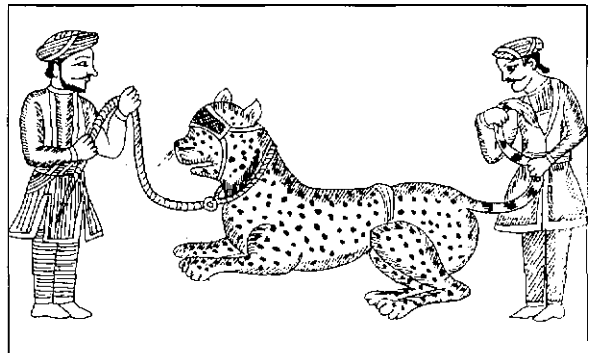
The *Baroda Manual* on the other hand agrees with the *Tonk Manuscript* in so far as it recommends a cheetah whose "face and eyes should be large, the neck and ears should be broad, paws and claws should be firm and well developed-and torso should be long and lean". The *Baroda Manual* goes on to state that if a cheetah is being purchased, care should be taken to see that the tip of the tail should be black

#### *Determining the Age of a Cheetah*

*Sa'īdnāma*



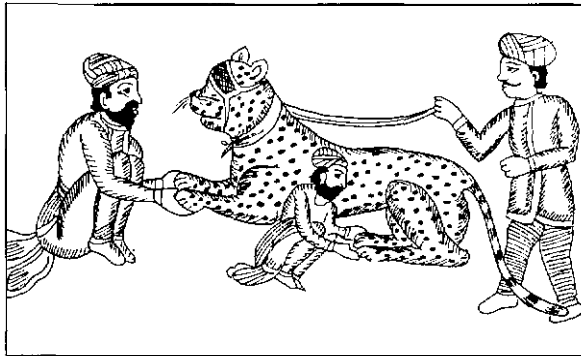
*By examining the back of its ears.*



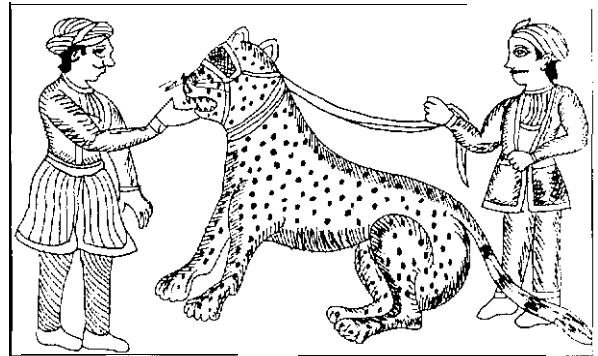
*By examining its tail.*

if the animal is from India and white if it is of African origin. This is the only difference recorded in the literature on cheetahs from India vis-a-vis the animals from Africa. At the instance of the author, Dr Asok Kumar Das studied 89 Mughal period paintings. In 67 of these the tip of the cheetah's tail is visible and in all cases it is black. The cheetah painted by Zaynu'd-Dīn at Patna in 1780 and the cheetah of Raja Serfojee of Thanjavur painted in 1803 have black tipped tails. However, the Stubbs painting c 1765. of the cheetah brought to London by Lord Piggot from Madras as well as the painting of Tipu Sultan's cheetah of 1799 show white tipped tails. There is no record of cheetah imports that early, but it is pertinent to note that Madras was an important centre of commerce and Tipu Sultan had a flair for the uncommon; he had Abyssinian troops, and unlike other Indian kings he sat on a tiger throne, *vyāghrāsana* and not on a *simhāsana* or lion throne. The possibility of these animals having come from Africa cannot be ruled out altogether, though it is unlikely. The two cheetahs sent by the Nawab of Oudh to accompany Governor-General Lord Auckland's party in 1837 had white tail tips too, as seen in a drawing by Emily Eden."

The tip of the tail of the mounted specimen in the Indian Museum, Calcutta acquired in 1898, is predominantly black with some dirty grey hair which could originally have been white or light yellow. The three cheetahs shot in 1925 at Rewa whose skins are at Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner have black tipped tails. Of the three cheetahs shot in Korea, one is a fully mounted specimen at Baikunthpur. The tip of the tail of this animal is "predominantly black-with a small quarter inch light yellow patch at the tip".<sup>18</sup> The other two specimens are flat skins with heads mounted. A photograph of these taken by Van Ingen and Van Ingen shows black tail tips. Two photographs of cheetahs from Iran sent to the author by Dr Colin P. Groves and Dr Paul Joslin show black tipped tails. The extant evidence examined here suggests that most cheetahs from India had predominantly black tail tips with the possibility of a very small white or light yellow patch at the very end of it. This



By examining its pads.



By examining its teeth.

difference in tail markings was noted at a later date by scientists elsewhere as well.

Further, if an animal from Africa had to be purchased, it needed to be bought with its cage as it was not likely to get used to a new one soon. This apparently was the only concession made for the cheetahs from across the Arabian Sea in the matter of preparing them for coursing!

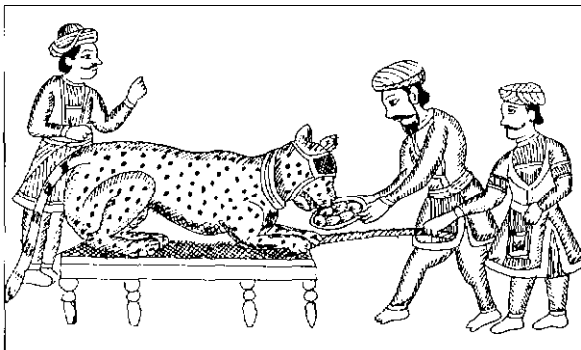
The maximum life span of the cheetah was 20 years according to the *Tonk Manuscript* and the *Baroda Manual*, whereas a record from Hyderabad states that cheetahs were used for hunting till in some cases they attained the age of 20 years." Several cheetahs lived upto the age of 10 in zoos and the record being that of one having attained the age of 15 years and 7 1/2 months. These were cheetahs from Africa.?" The Indian sources are emphatic in their statements regarding the longevity of the cheetahs. Whether careful and devoted care of cheetahs by their keepers was a cause of their longer life span in captivity cannot be verified as cheetah keepers have not survived to tell their tale.

A cheetah's prime was between the ages of five and ten years and its usefulness for coursing was not more than 15 years. Hence it was necessary to judge the age of the animal caught or bought. The *Baroda Manual* further states that if one was buying an animal, the best age would be between three and eight years if the animal was already trained. If the animal was untrained, it was best to buy one between one and five years of age and then train it to course. M. Nirmalkumarsinh noted that in Bhavnagar they did train cheetahs which were just a year old. Actually the young animals were easier to train and the best time to train them was before they were five years old." However, among British observers the general belief was that only "adult [cheetahs] are captured, Indian shikaris considering that the young can only be properly trained by the parents. The same view prevails in India with regard to falcons".'?

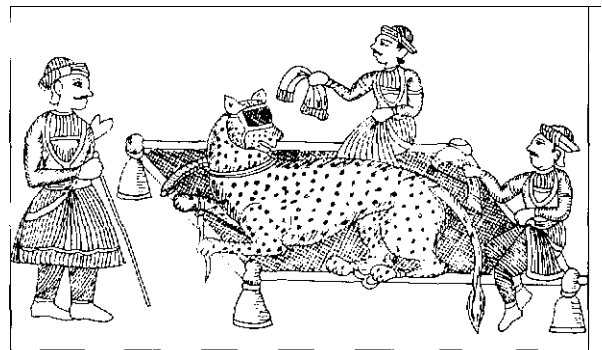
It would be logical to assume that cheetahs could be caught at any time

*Teaching a  
Cheetah to Eat*  
*Sa'idiyama*

*On touching the  
stick to the paw,  
the cheetah  
becomes irritated*



*and tries to bite it. Then a plate of food is placed before the cheetah and it starts to feed.*



*The body of the cheetah is gently stroked with a cloth while it is sitting on the cot.*

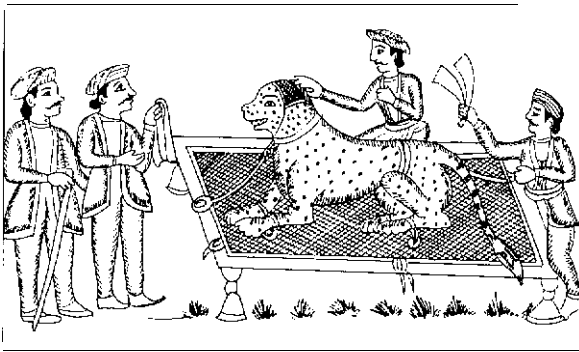
of the year except during the monsoon months when movement became difficult. The *Sa'īdnāma* however recommends the “months of *Kawar* [and] *Kārtik* of winter and the beginning and middle months of summer, *Chait*, *Bāisakhī* and *Jeth*,” but the reason for this selection has not been explained. The *Baroda Manual* on the other hand recommends the beginning of the winter season as the best time because the cheetahs became sexually active (came into *mastī*) at that time.

On the methods of trapping itself, the oldest recorded one appears to be that of making pits called *odī* in which the cheetahs would fall,

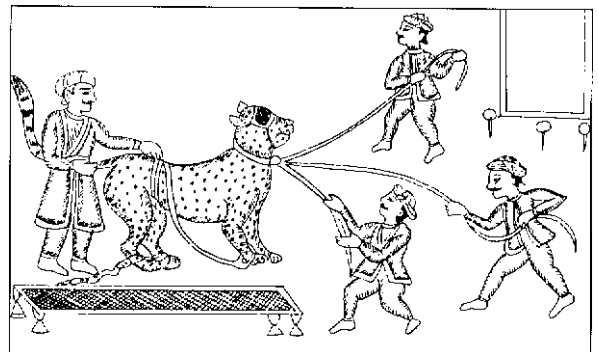
but they [the cheetahs] often broke their feet or legs or managed by jumping to get out again. Nor could you catch more than one in each pit...[Emperor Akbar] therefore invented a new method, which has astonished the most experienced hunters. He made a pit only two or three *gaz* [1.83 metres to 2.75 metres] deep, and constructed a peculiar trapdoor, which closes when a leopard falls into the hole. The animal never gets hurt. Sometimes more than one got into the trap.”

Apparently, the method of catching cheetahs in a pit was used in Afghanistan and may have come to India with the Mughals. The *Bāznāma* records that the Sulṭān Ḥusain Mirzā of Herat who came to the throne in 1468 was very fond of hunting with cheetahs as well as capturing them.

Generally they used to dig a pit to catch them, to a depth of nine *gaz* [8.23 metres]. After a huntsman had covered over his pit and gone home, he was unable to visit it for a week. On the first day a female cheetah with her six cubs happened to fall into the pit. For the whole week she brought her offspring food each day. leapt the *nine gaz* down into the pit, fed her cubs, leapt out and departed. When the cheetah-keeper became aware of this a snare was set at the edge of the pit. The end of the snare was fixed to a stone (of some



The hood is removed from over the cheetah's eyes while it sits on its cot.



The cheetah is being taken away from the cot.

kind) which stood beside the pit at a little distance (?). When the female cheetah, according to its daily habit, was coming to feed its cubs and reached the edge of the pit its foot was caught in the snare. The stone was dislodged (?) and she fell into the pit. They caught the female cheetah in this way and brought her and her cubs before the Mirza. After that they dug pits to a depth of eleven *gaz* [10.06 metres], but at this depth most cheetahs ended with broken tails. In the end the original nine *gaz* was settled upon.

The record of the incident appears to be exaggerated. A female with six cubs would be a rare occurrence to start with. It is also doubtful whether a cheetah could clear a height of eight metres without a run up. And yet the experiment was made to make the pit deeper, though it was unsuccessful. Akbar's innovative shallower pits with a trap door were a definite advance on the extant practice. Akbar is also believed to have caught cheetahs "by tiring them out which is very interesting to look at".<sup>24</sup> It is not clear what is meant, but it could suggest chasing the cheetahs on horseback until they were tired and became immobile due to exhaustion.

Apart from this method there is one particular one which is generally accepted by all the sources examined—snaring the animals around a favoured tree.

According to the *Sa 'idnāma* a cheetah becomes sexually active at the age of two and a half to three years when it comes to play around a tree trunk after dark where it remains for 10 to 15 minutes before moving on. The particular trees in the jungles, to which the cheetahs thronged, were well known. Such 'playing grounds' are called *akhur* [or *akhorī*, 'home territory']. The use of a particular tree or 'playing ground' by the cheetahs is indicative of their territory. In the Serengeti plains the cheetahs are not territorial and they follow the movement of Thompson's gazelle, their preferred prey, and contact with other groups of cheetahs is avoided by means of scent and smell.<sup>25</sup> According to another study, the cheetahs employ "a time-plan spacing system which allows individuals to occupy the same home range concomitantly, without disruption of hunting efforts in the Nairobi National Park". If the cheetahs came across fresh markings of another group they moved on and thus avoided meeting them.<sup>26</sup> Another study from Africa shows that a female cheetah leaves a scent trail when it comes into season through the discharge of sex hormones in its urine which the males follow." In India the cheetah's prey did not move vast distances as in Africa. It would appear that individuals or groups of cheetahs visited the same area repeatedly as a result of a time-lapse spacing system. The reference to sexual maturity of the cheetahs in the text may be incidental to adult or sub-adult males hunting in their own right and using the same territory. Why they should visit the tree at night is unclear, as cheetahs are diurnal. Around the tree, a trap made of 'deer gut' rope was laid. It was fixed to the ground with wooden nails with nooses (*phandē*) of the rope standing upright. The arrival of the cheetah would be heralded by a rustling of the leaves or by the bell tied to one end of the rope. The cheetah approaching the tree would be entrapped in the nooses and that was when

the cheetah catchers hiding in a leaf covered pit nearby swung into action. The vigil had to be maintained for days on end as there was no certainty as to when the cheetah would arrive.

According to the *Sa'īdnāma*, the moment the cheetah was trapped the cheetah catchers approached the animal, waving before it a leafy branch. The cheetah would bite the branch in anger and in the process its eyes would get covered by the leaves. At this moment a hood (top?) was put over its eyes and a cot quickly placed on the animal to restrain it. A cloth would be put over the animal thereafter, and a collar (*galīda*) and waist band (*kamarkach*) would be tied around the neck and waist of the animal to make a harness. The feet were also tied together with a knot (*ānt*). The cheetah was pulled up unto a cot; the process was called *santrā*.

The *Baroda Manual* largely repeats the same process except that it states that a *pardhi* catches hold of the base of the tail of the cheetah, while another holds its ears to pin it down before slipping a hood over its eyes. The Kolhapur album has a photograph of two cheetahs ensnared with a catcher throwing a net over them.”

A female cheetah can be caught by the same method OR by tracking it down and snaring it, says the *Sa'īdnāma*. The *Baroda Manual* on the other hand, states that the female with her young goes off to hill tops where she can be tracked, surrounded by cows, and then made to move towards an opening where she can be snared.

The *Sa'īdnāma* records that a cheetah could be trapped in an enclosure as well. but in such a situation it was difficult to transport it out. Therefore the animal had to be gently and constantly stroked with wooden sticks for days. and when it became used to this, it would permit the catchers to touch it with their hands, after which the animal could be tied up.

The *Bāznāma* states that upon capturing the cheetah. the catchers, immediately dress it [cheetah] in a coatee (*gabācha*) wetted with water. Coatee is what they call a garment which is sewn for hunting with cheetahs, and which in hot weather they wet and put on the cheetah so that it is not harmed by the heat. In length it stretches to the end of the loins (?) which they call...and in width to halfway down the ribs.

While the other authorities do not mention a coatee, the garment was certainly in use in India. Two cheetahs in a painting entitled 'Akbar Hunting with Cheetahs' by Basāwan and Dharamdās from an *Akbarnāma* are seen wearing coatees,<sup>29</sup> and two Oudh cheetahs which were sent to accompany the Governor-General Lord Auckland in 1837 wore embroidered coatees as well.“ It was winter and the garment must have been used to keep the cheetahs warm during the cold season.

The *Baroda Manual* goes on to say that in Africa they did not capture a big cheetah. Instead, they shot it with a gun and then chased the young ones on

horseback or with dogs, tired them out and then caught them and sent them to India for training and coursing.

It further states that after being captured, the cheetah should be kept on the cot and turned from one side to the other every hour by its trappers, during which time it normally refused to eat out of fear and anger. The cheetah in this state was called *chormuth*. On the third day, a pound of cleaned goat meat pieces skewered on a thin bamboo stick were shown to the cheetah and it would accept the food. The cheetah must remain tied to the cot for about 10 days. The *Sa'īdnāma* on the other hand states that a cheetah would not eat for three days. It would have to be stroked, as already stated, till it accepted food when calmed down within ten to twelve days.

The *Bāznāma* states that a cheetah's hood is not removed for ten or fifteen days. The muzzle is tied on in such a way that it cannot get hold of it with its teeth. When it is somewhat gentler the corner of its hood is momentarily lifted from its eyes so that it can see and become familiar with the outline of the men-is replaced again After some days of this the hood is removed for a *gharī* [moment] or two. and then replaced until it becomes tame.

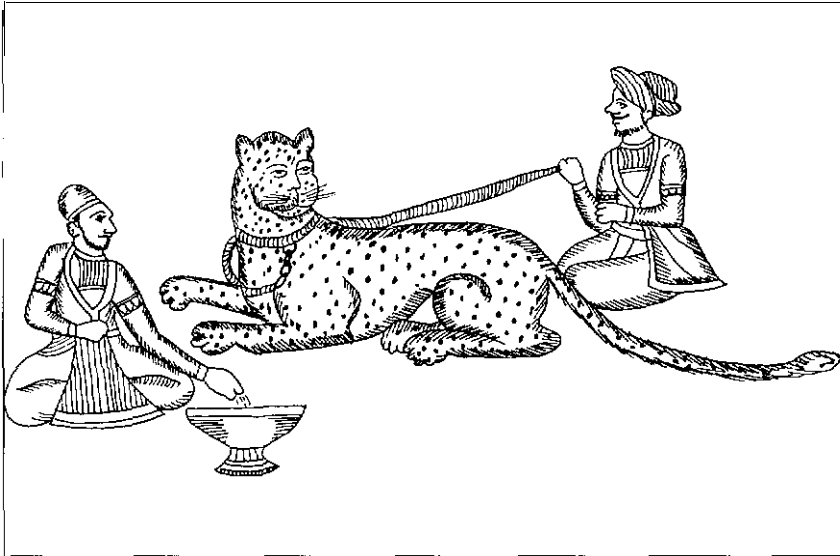
According to the *Sa'īdnāma* the next stage of the training of the cheetah was to get it to recognise the keeper, take instructions from him and in the process become attached to him. It gives a detailed account showing that the cheetah had to be made to stand with three ropes from the *bhanwarkalī* (swivel at the neck) held fast, similarly two ropes from the *kamarkach* (waist band) again held with a cloth screen at the back of the cheetah. The animal was made to stand in this fashion daily. It was irritated deliberately by an attendant carrying a *chorkāthī*, and who harassed the animal with such sticks and taunting calls. The *Bāznāma* differs here insofar as according to it the purpose of the *chorkāthī* is to cover the eyes of the cheetah with the cloth lest it attack the trainer. The keeper, who remained aloof, came to the cheetah only when the *chorkāthīs* were taken away and slowly made it take food from a *hankanā* (long handled wooden ladle). As the process went on, the cheetah was made to eat the food first with the *topī* on, then without it. Then the number of ropes were reduced, and ultimately only one was left. A cloth was kept at the back of the cheetah the purpose of which was to ensure that the animal was not distracted during training from anything at the back. If it did get distracted during training, it would become stubborn (*karā*). The animal was fed boneless pieces of meat offered in a *hankanā*. The *Bāznāma* states that the wooden ladle had a ring fixed to it which would make a sound when moved. Once the cheetah got used to it, it would associate the sound with food. According to the *Sa'īdnāma*, the amount of food to be given was three to four seers (one *seer* = 933.12 grams) a day. The animal was also made to eat/lick butter, of which it became fond, and was also made to drink milk and eat specially prepared cottage cheese. While butter was given in

summer, *khoyā*, dried fresh whole milk, or *pedās*, a sweetmeat made of milk, were given in winter. The amount was not to exceed 125 grams. The last stage of intimacy was attained when the cheetah licked butter smeared on the hand of its trainer.

To start with, the animal was fed only in its enclosure or while standing. Once this stage was completed it was taken to the jungle and fed. The reason for this was to get it used to accepting food in the jungle, so that it could be trained to give up its kill and come back to the keeper to be fed. Feeding the cheetah at night made it get used to its keeper faster.

Through feeding, the animal was taught to climb a *tonga*; the command for climbing up was *di*, and for climbing down, *parfī*. The object of the training was to create a bond between the animal and its keeper. Terms of endearment to be spoken to the animal were strongly recommended as well as sounds such as ‘*Aa-hā-hā-hā-hā-Aaī*’ during feeding. The animal was to be called by words such as ‘*ao betā, wah betā*’ (come on son, well done son), ‘*chale chalo bahādur*’ (march on, brave one) and so on. The animal was also taken for walks in the bazaar to get it used to crowds. This ritual was called ‘*phernā pherī par*’.

Taming a male cheetah generally took four to five months, whereas a female needed seven months. This difference in the training period was not explained. The total number of persons required to train a cheetah could be as high as twelve. The *Baroda Manual* gives a far shorter description of the process, though it does not differ in the essentials from the *Sa’idnāma*, except that according to it the total time for taming the animal was not more than three months and the number of persons required was six. However, according to M. Nirmalkumarsinh it took one



*Cheetah Ailment*  
*Sa’idnāma.*

*An indisposed cheetah’s ears are being examined to ascertain the nature of its ailment.*



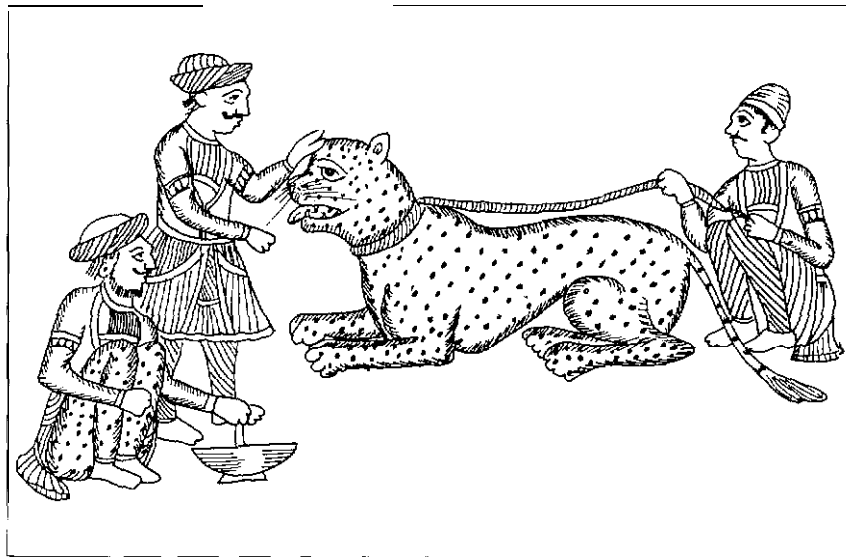
year to fully train a cheetah at Bhavnagar.<sup>31</sup> The Kolhapur Album has photographs of the entire process<sup>32</sup> and the *Sa'īdnāma* has drawings which illustrate the same.

After taming the cheetah, the next stage was to train it to hunt. The *Sa'īdnāma* states that before this stage commenced, the trainers had to ensure that the animal in question was completely tamed and confident. A sure sign of this was when the animals' tail stuck out when it was being fed. If it kept its tail between its legs, it meant that it was still nervous.

A blackbuck which had been incapacitated by a deliberately inflicted injury was let loose in the presence of the cheetah. The latter was released after removing the *topī* but along with the *satkā* (a long rope) tied to the *kamarkach*. The moment the cheetah had caught the antelope, the keeper ran after it following the dragmarks of the *satkā*, and the cheetah was caught with its help. The cheetah was made to release its grip on the blackbuck by luring it to the *hankanā*, and a *tamanchekeī topī* (box-like cap) was fastened over its eyes.

If an antelope was not available, a goat could be substituted for the purpose. Care had to be taken to ensure that training was given on flat land, clear of bushes. A cheetah with a *satkā* tied to it should be released only in a ploughed field or field of wheat or rice. Since the quarry was already incapacitated to make it slower, the only purpose of releasing a cheetah in a ploughed field would be to make it slower so that it could be retrieved easily should it decide to make a bid for freedom. However, the *Sa'īdnāma* does not give any reasons. The process was to be repeated often enough until the cheetah was fully trained to hunt. The *galīda* and the *kamarkach* were always retained during a hunt.

The cheetah was taken to a herd of antelope on a bullock cart. The cart



*Cheetah Ailment*  
*Sa'īdnāma,*

*An indisposed  
cheetah's eyes are  
being examined to  
ascertain the nature  
of its ailment.*

was driven in an uneven and circular motion called *ḍāv karnā*, meaning to perform a strategy, in order to get close to the herd. It was suggested that the cart be driven upwind, and wherever possible, the cheetah should be released in front of the herd. The cheetah was trained to only hunt a male, which was done by showing it a male when unhooded. It was sure to hunt the blackbuck down successfully if the male antelope was following a herd, or when two males were sparring, as the quarry was obviously distracted in such situations.

Once the cheetah had caught its prey, the keeper would go to the animal, give the same call that was given during feeding at the time of its training and show it the *hankanā*. The moment the cheetah released the antelope, the *tamanchekī topī* was put back over its eyes. The antelope's throat was slit and its blood filled in the *hankanā*, to which the cheetah was attracted. It would leave the kill and not bother about the antelope. The hind leg of the antelope was to be cut and the meat from the leg chopped into small pieces and fed to the cheetah so that it felt that it had eaten its prey. However, if the cheetah was to take the field again on the same day, it should not be allowed to feed to its satisfaction. Also a young cheetah recently trained should not be released on *chinkara* as they were believed to be very clever and would lose the cheetah easily in ravines.

A cheetah with three to four years' hunting experience could also be used on moonlit nights. Care had to be taken to ensure that the hunting ground was open, else it would become difficult to locate the cheetah. The procedure was to drive (*hānknā*) the antelope towards the stationary cheetah or to get them to move towards the cheetah pushed forward by men moving slowly behind them (*tālnā*).

In addition, other methods of hunting with cheetahs were (a) *agot*, that is by stationing a cheetah near the path of animals; (b) *dwārī* (*dwār, gate*), hunting animals as they would come out of the only exit of a forest area; (c) *pānī* (water), hunting animals on a water hole or watering place; and (d) *cheroe* (*churāi, grazing*), hunting animals at their grazing grounds. In such methods, the cheetah would be made to sit in a depression (*gadḥḍhā*) along with its keeper. The place would be surrounded by foliage and the cheetah made to keep quiet by feeding it butter and *pedās*. Once the cheetah was released on the quarry, the procedure was the same as when it was released from a bullock cart.

The *Baroda Manual* recommends that the cheetah should be allowed to roam the jungles with a long rope tied to it and trained to come back to the keeper on command. It states that there were 15 different commands to control a cheetah, but it does not go on to list them.

The keepers simulated the *shikar* environment. A man ran with a blanket on his back towards and past the keeper with the cheetah in tow. If he reached the keeper, the latter would command the cheetah to stop. If not, the runner would lie down on the ground and the cheetah would run on towards the keeper without attacking the runner. The entire emphasis was on the cheetah obeying the commands and stopping when commanded to do so by its keeper. Thus

from 5 am to 10 am daily the cheetah was allowed to roam the jungles and from 10 am to noon it was made to go through the command drill. In the evening, the cheetah was taken out into the town until about 9 pm, when it was given a call command, fed and returned to its cage.

The *Baroda Manual* recommends that cheetahs should start with hunting fawns, thus recreating a natural practice of the wilds. After the cheetah made a kill, it was fed with the left hind leg of the antelope which was held up by the keeper in front of its mouth. Later it was fed the heart, liver and lungs of the animal.

While the *Baroda Manual* agrees broadly with the *Sa'īdnāma*, it differs in one important aspect. According to it, all impediments such as the *galīda* and *kamarkach* had to be removed to allow the cheetah total freedom of motion while coursing. Three paintings from the Mughal period showing hunting scenes, demonstrate this. One is of 'Akbar Hunting with Cheetahs' from an *Akbarnāma* painting by Basāwan and Dharamdās, c 1590, and the other is that of 'Prince Salim Hunting Rhinoceros' in the style of Maṅṣūr, c 1600. Both these paintings show cheetahs killing blackbucks, and in each case they are wearing only the collar. The third painting is of 'Akbar Resting During a Hunt' from an *Akbarnāma* illustration, c 1604. This painting has two cheetahs on palanquins surrounded by their keepers. Only one cheetah has the *kamarkach*, but both are wearing the collar." In Kolhapur the cheetahs coursed with both the collar and the *kamarkach*.<sup>34</sup>

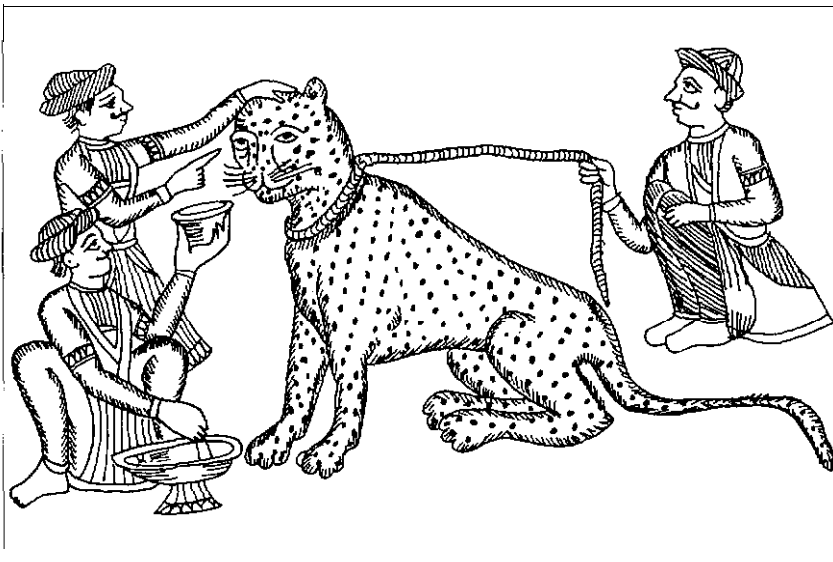
Apart from another method of hunting antelope, that is, driving them towards the cheetah, already noted by the *Sa'īdnāma*, the *Baroda Manual* also records that cheetahs could be taken out on horse carriages, as antelope do not run away from them. However, a cheetah could be made to walk towards a herd of antelope alongside a bullock to get within coursing distance. Finally, it records that cheetahs were now being taken in a motor car! Both these documents, for obvious reasons, lay great stress on placing the cheetah as close as possible to the herd of antelope, as the great forte of the cheetah was monumental speed for a short burst. The *Baroda Manual* records that a cheetah needed at least half an hour to regain its breath after a chase. Whereas according to M. Azizuddin, a cheetah was made to hunt only once a day at Jaipur. They were released after blackbuck or *chinkara* at a distance of 150 to 200 metres and a well-trained cheetah seldom missed its prey. In Jaipur there were approximately 15 hunts in a year.<sup>35</sup> This obviously refers to hunts for royal guests as there would have been a far greater number of regular practice hunts taking place.

Though neither the *Sa'īdnāma* nor the *Baroda Manual* dwell at length on the speed of the cheetah, their authors recognise this specific quality of this feline in running down its quarry. The *Bāznāma* on the other hand considers the speed of the cheetah to be the one attribute which sets it apart from other animals. Chapter 61 begins by stating that "Although a description of the cheetah is not demanded here [as the work was concerned with falconry], nevertheless, because of its ability to soar (*parandaḡī*, literally 'to fly') and its swiftness it is classified together with flying birds of prey"

It quotes an interesting instance:

The story is well known that Sulṭān Abū Sa'īd Mirzā [who took Herat in 1457 and died in 1469] had a cheetah which had been named Golden Collar (*zarrīn tawq*); it was one of the Mirzā's famous cheetahs. It had caught twelve gazelles in a single day, and not at a battue. The Mirzā was given the greatest pleasure by its hunting. One day it occurred to his noble mind that it should be set upon a gazelle with thirty *gaz* [27.45 metres] of cord tied to its neck. The Mirzā's idea was carried out and the cheetah was set in pursuit of a gazelle with the thirty *gaz* of cord. From the spot the cheetah began its rush on its prey to the place where it caught the gazelle was 500 *gaz* [457.50 metres]. It went the 500 *gaz* and caught the gazelle without the end of the cord touching the ground. From then on in the books on falconry (*Bāznamā-hā*) cheetahs have been declared to fly and hawks to run! Certainly one has to realize that in the class of running animals none is equal to the cheetah.

The speed of the cheetah is believed to be as high as 100 to 110 kilometres per hour according to most authorities. However, a tame cheetah running behind an electric hare was clocked at a speed of 70.7 kilometres per hour on three occasions, while one chased by a car in Kenya was reported to have attained a speed of 82 kilometres per hour.<sup>36</sup> These are instances of cheetahs from Africa. The speed of cheetahs from India has not been recorded. However, black-buck have been timed at almost 90 kilometres per hour for a distance of 600 metres at Wankaner and at 88 kilometres per hour at Bhavnagar in Saurashtra.<sup>37</sup> The cheetah must have attained comparable or faster speed to pull down its quarry in India.

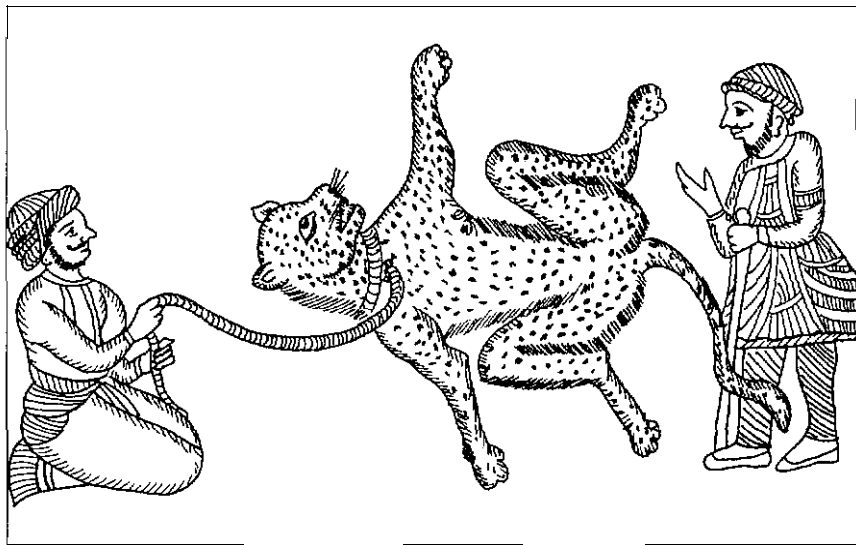


**Cheetah Ailment**  
Sa 'idnāma.

The cheeti has  
a bodyache; note  
the expression on  
its face.

The *Sa'īdnāma* records that the cheetah could be trained to hunt four horned antelope, *cheetal* and *jungli bheid* (barking deer?). Similarly, cheetahs could be trained to hunt large animals as well such as *nīlgai* and *barasingha*. Though cheetahs could hunt the fawns of these two species singly, the full grown ones could only be brought down by releasing a pair of them to course simultaneously. An illustration in the book shows three collared cheetahs attacking a *barasingha* stag; one at the throat, one at the hind leg and one at the stomach. The work however does not detail the special mode of such training. Interestingly, a Mughal miniature from Allahabad dating between 1599 and 1604 shows Prince Salim out hunting. Astride an alert mount, he holds a bow and arrow while a retainer brings to him two dead hare. In the foreground are three retainers with a palanquin, one holding a *topī* and another a *hankanā*, as they look upon a cheetah which has brought down a female *nīlgai*.<sup>38</sup> The *Tonk Manuscript* on the other hand, mentions seven to nine cheetahs coursing simultaneously on a herd of antelope. It records that the cheetah could be trained to hunt on a particular animal by feeding it meat of the chosen quarry and allowing it to train on that prey, as was done for the blackbuck.

The *Sa'īdnāma* interestingly records what was required to be done when a female came in oestrus. A *cheetī* (female) looks for a male and locates it by its smell. It would lick the body of a male and the latter would be aroused. The two were to be kept, every day, in a large enclosure from 3 am to 10 am and for a similar duration in the evening. Care had to be taken to see that both animals were made familiar with each other prior to their release. Both the animals had to remain tied to the *satkā*, in order to enable separation in the event of their becoming aggressive. Once the pair had copulated they had to be separated and the *cheetī* was not to be given strenuous work thereafter, and even its walks had to be curtailed.



**Cheetah Ailment**  
*Sa'īdnāma*

A cheetī becomes restless as it suffers from a stomach ailment.

From the description it becomes evident that the male and female were to be brought together only when the female was in oestrus. Further, the male would be excited on being licked by the female and care had to be taken to ensure that the two accepted each other, hence the need to retain *satkā* in case something went wrong.

Observations made of captive cheetah breeding at the San Diego Wild Animal Park have shown that the long-term holding of a male and female in the same enclosure resulted in lower frequency of breeding and it was important that both the male and the female accepted each other. However, at San Diego it became evident that solitary females did not show strong signs of sexual receptivity and “Those who wait for behavioural indicators of estrus may therefore miss the occurrence of physiological estrus and receptivity”.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the *Sa'īdnāma* documents stimulants for arousing sexual desire among cheetahs and also for curing diseases of their reproductive organs.

The keeper of the *cheetī* had to take care of the cubs as well. He had to be careful in the early stages of the *cheetī*'s motherhood as the animal developed an aversion to others at that time. Once they were able to walk, the cubs were taken for strolls with the mother to exercise them. If this was not done their legs were likely to become deformed. They were also taken hunting with the mother in course of time, to impart training to them.

The *Sa'īdnāma* records the breeding of cheetahs, care of their cubs and the various medicines to be administered, as a matter of course without mentioning that such occurrences were rare or unusual. Nor would its author have gone to such lengths to include this information unless such breeding was taking place successfully. More than two hundred and fifty years had elapsed since Jahāngīr's record and it was quite possible that advances had taken place in captive breeding since then.

The *Sa'īdnāma* also records that a *sher* (tiger) and a *tendūā* (leopard) could be tamed and taught to hunt, but the process of training them was a very difficult proposition. The author does not claim to have done so himself or seen it being done. Taming of large cats was fairly widespread in India as many sources testify. In Kolhapur, tigers were tamed but there is no record of hunting with them.”

The *Baroda Manual* carefully lists the cheetah's diet. Only goat's meat was to be fed after it was completely cleaned of blood vessels and fat and chopped into small pieces. Sheep's meat was not recommended at all for cheetahs as its fat would cause diarrhoea. The normal wild prey of the cheetah was lean meat except for an occasional piglet. Venison was considered excellent fare for the animal and the diet had to be varied to make it interesting with chicken and peacock meat. Peacock meat particularly, was strongly recommended during winter. The diet consisted of six *seers* of meat a day for a full grown animal; and for a one year old animal it was two *seers* plus half a *seer* of milk. Once the animal had been fed it was given water to drink. During the summer months the diet was to be supplemented with one *seer* of

milk and a quarter *seer* of butter which the cheetah licked from its keeper's hand. This would have provided all the fat a cheetah would need in a hot climate. It may be recalled that according to the *Akbarnama* the first category of cheetah received five *seers* of meat daily; this category may have been of adult animals in which case the *Baroda Manual* differs by one *seer* per day only, which is a remarkable continuation of a practice spanning three centuries.

At times the cheetah went off its normal behaviour: The *Baroda Manual* records that in such an event it refuses to hunt, or when released to course, it simply runs away or bites its keeper. It was most important to understand individual traits of every animal before a disturbed animal could be coaxed back to normalcy. The cheetah keeper had to treat the animal with great patience and understanding. He must talk to it with affection, stroke it continuously and feed it himself. All this would lead to calming the animal and over a period of time it would quieten down. Once this happened it had to be reintroduced to its routine slowly and with care.

None of the sources record what happened to old animals that were unable to course. The princes and the rich no doubt simply 'retired' them in their paddocks, but there is one instance of a cheetah being released back in the wild from Hyderabad:

I have once sighted a cheetah at Adikmet grasslands. (near Osmania University, Hyderabad City). chasing a hare. Both the predator and the prey disappeared into the grasslands within a hundred yards and the outcome was not known to me. This cheetah was probably an old one released into the forest after having served its master, perhaps for well over 2 decades. This same animal was sighted again after several weeks, at a nearby village. Here it stayed on and enjoyed the hospitality of the villagers, who either out of pity or for fun fed it on scraps of meat from the local butcher. This animal though not friendly with any one person, did allow humans to come within 3-4 yards, any closer and it would snarl. Once when it occupied the bed of a villager it was chased off and it was next sighted at 'Koh-e-Moula', a nearby hillock about 10 miles away on which a shrine of a Muslim saint was located. Here at that time, H.H. the Nizam (6th) was camping, it being the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal (11th of which is the Prophet's birthday) where maunds of biryani (or pulao) was being cooked everyday for the poor. The bones were piled up behind the kitchen and this provided a feast for the cheetah. When someone sighted the animal and informed the king, His Highness ordered the animal to be trapped and kept in a cage and was to be fed the choicest meat till it could eat no more. Some people say that this animal brought a plea before the king that since he (the cheetah) had provided good sport and fun for one and all. now that he could hunt no more and was famished, it was but proper that Man should take care of him."

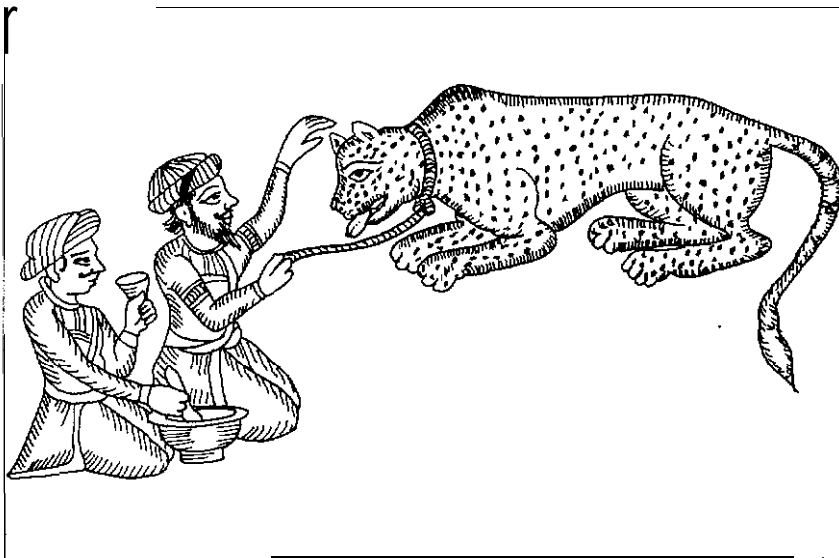
Coursing with cheetahs was a common enough practice and some of the less well-to-do masters or even careless ones may have released useless animals to

fend for themselves. However, the process of trapping, training and maintaining them was a very expensive proposition, and such instances would have been few.

Strange, rare and unusual animals and birds at Indian courts were a common sight and indeed many of them performed equally strange feats. The cheetah was among the forefront of such menageries at royal courts. but they were used only for coursing antelope. Some no doubt remained as 'strange' pets, wandering around palaces, but there is one unique instance of cheetahs being used for inter-specific fights.

The court at Awadh was lavish and the last nawabs of this kingdom were unmatched patrons. Their music and dance were unparalleled, their cuisine *par excellence*, their cock fights legendary, and so were the animal fights which included elephants, rhinos, tigers, leopards and strangely, even cheetahs:

All animals are normally kept hungry for a day or two before a fight. but for the cheetah special arrangements are required to be made. This is because though it is a heartless and merciless beast normally, in a fight it proves to be equally a coward. Actually, like a spoilt young nobleman, it is inclined towards flattery. For it will fight only if it wants to and if it is not inclined towards combat, it will not fight regardless of what inducements are made to it. During a fight it goes away from its opponent into a corner and pounces back on it and wounds it, after a couple of such jumps both the cheetahs stand on their hind legs and maul each other with their claws. Their fight is a bloody one in which both the contestants keep growling at each other and keep fighting with their claws. Ultimately, the weaker one falls and the stronger dispatches it. But even the victor is wounded from head to foot."



*Cheetah Ailment*  
Sa'idiyama

*An eye infection  
of a cheeti is being  
examined.*



With the snuffing out of the kingdom of Awadh by the British in the 1850s, a unique culture and a way of life was lost and with it went the only known instance of cheetah fights. Today the practice seems gruesome. but for the norms of those times cheetah fights unknown elsewhere, were a matter of great wonder.

Cheetahs in captivity required special care and handling and several persons were required to keep a single animal. A photograph in the Kolhapur Album shows 11 cheetahs lined up for a group photograph with 27 keepers. While this document is a photographic record of a sport, to commemorate the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1921, it has left behind an invaluable account of trapping, training and coursing with cheetahs. It provides a visual record of the sources used here and even adds the fact of a daily bath for the animals!"" The four cheetahs at Baroda cost Rs 10.176 per annum in 1924 and by the same arithmetic, Kolhapur state would have annually spent about Rs 28,000 in 1921, a large sum by any standard.

The good health of cheetahs therefore, was of paramount importance to Indian princes and the treatment of their ailments was an exact procedure. An extensive listing along with recommended treatments, was the main thrust of the *Tonk Manuscript*. It lists as many as 25 ailments and afflictions and recommends treatment for 23 of them; from purging, to worms in the stomach, to the removal of fleas from a cheetah. The *Yūznāma* of Thanjavur, a work in Marathi and an early 19th century compilation commissioned by Raja Serfojee was based on earlier traditions and it lists 14 ailments and their treatment. The *Sa'īdnāma* is also equally detailed in its coverage. It records that in the wild the cheetah nurses itself to good health by eating grass. But the *Yūznāma* lists four or five proven prescriptions for any ailment. Medicines in the form of tablets and powders were to be administered by mixing them with the food, whereas liquids were mixed with milk, taking care that the mixtures did not have a strong taste.

According to this document, the cheetah suffers from two types of diseases; one type being those which inflict the internal organs while the other type which inflicts the external parts of the body. It lists 10 ailments of the first type and 21 of the latter. The following illustrates the depth of knowledge and exact practices:

Among the ailments listed by the *Yūznāma* is fits, convulsions and phlegm in the mouth. Its treatment is 'Sour betel nuts 20 *tonks* [one *tonk* = 1 *tola* = 11.664 grams] soaked overnight in water or milk. Two *honbar* weight [one *honbar* = 32 *gunj*, 1 *gunj* = to the weight of 1 jecurity seed] of this soaked water to be added to 2 *seers* [1 *seer* = 933.12 grams] of milk to be given in the morning. No feed to be given in the previous night. The cheetah to be tied *in* the sun until it gets exhausted and the food given'. The treatment for falling hair of the tail was Pepper. *Asfoetida* and *Black Aloe Indica* to be ground in thin paste separately. The portions where the hair has fallen to be scrubbed and scratched till [it] bleeds and the paste to be applied one over the other.<sup>41</sup>

The *Sa'īdnāma* prescribes two courses of treatment to check vomiting.

One was to grind a mixture of “one small *ilāichī* (cardamom), *tejpattā* (leaf of *Lauris cassia*) *tiv khār* and *tukh̄m-e-ber* (seeds of *Zizyphus jujuba*). Give each with sugar candy, weight 4 *māsha* “(1 *māsha* = 0.972 grams). The other cure was to “grind 1 *māsha* broiled small *ilāichī*, one *māsha* burnt *resham* (silk) one *māsha pipal* (pepper) and three *māsha misri* (sugar candy)“. A sprain was treated by fomenting the affected part with boiled buds of *post* (poppy). Also an ointment of “one *tolā* of honey and 3 *māsha* salt” is prepared and applied. “It is also useful for swelling in the throat”.

The information contained in this chapter is primarily based on documents written towards the end of the cheetah’s existence in India. They are the last repositories of the accounts of interactions between humans and cheetahs for the purpose of sport. In the true Indian tradition, these activities like the domestication of the elephant, and falconry were developed into a fine art if not into an exact science. It is impossible to say just how much of the knowledge was homegrown and how much of it was assimilated from elsewhere. Suffice it to say that it met the requirements of the day admirably.

Coursing with cheetahs passed into history along with the Indian princes. No one survives to tell the tale today at Ajaigarh, Baroda, Hyderabad and elsewhere. In Jaipur and Bhavnagar, sons of the last cheetah trainers give information at second hand. Even Indian zoos have learnt nothing from these rich experiences of management of cheetahs in captivity, nor have they recorded anything. This great art has disappeared for all time.

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