



Exotic Aliens: The Lion and the Cheetah in India

Romila Thapar, Valmik Thapar

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In the sixteenth century, Dutch traveller Jan Linschoten noted the absence of lions throughout the Indian subcontinent. Two hundred years later, echoing similar comments made by various hunters and observers of Indian wildlife, the British shikari and writer, Captain Thomas Williamson, emphatically declared: There are no lions in Hindustan. Much the same was said about the cheetah in the region. These observations piqued the interest of well-known naturalist Valmik Thapar. After an enormous amount of research and study he now believes that, contrary to existing scientific theory, neither of these animals were indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. Remarking on the lack of accounts of encounters with these animals as opposed to the tiger and the leopard which are extensively documented as well as inconclusive genetic studies, he argues that, over the centuries, the lion and cheetah were brought into the country from Persia and Africa by royalty, either as tributes or to populate their hunting parks and menageries. Enlisting the help of renowned historian, Romila Thapar who analyzes historical accounts and representations of the lion in early India and scholar, Yusuf Ansari who looks back at the lives of the Mughals and their famed hunts to further validate his theory, Valmik Thapar concludes at the end of this thought-provoking book that the Indian lion and the Indian cheetah were, in fact, exotic imports, and not indigenous subspecies. Tracing the history of the lion and the cheetah for over 5,000 years, and substantiated with pictorial evidence, Exotic Aliens is a pioneering work that could turn field biology on its head.



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