



## Exotic Aliens: The Lion and the Cheetah in India

By Romila Thapar, Valmik Thapar

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**Exotic Aliens: The Lion and the Cheetah in India** By Romila Thapar, Valmik Thapar

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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#### **About the Author**

Valmik Thapar is India's foremost wildlife conservationist and an internationally renowned natural historian. The author of twenty-three books, he has also presented several documentaries for the BBC, Animal Planet and Discovery, most notably BBC's *The Land of the Tiger* (1997). He is a member of the National Board of Wildlife chaired by the Prime Minister of India and is working on the definitive book on tigers, *Tiger Fire* (to be published by Aleph Book Company). He lives in New Delhi.

Romila Thapar is one of India's most eminent historians. She writes on the history of ancient India, and is Professor Emeritus, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Yusuf Ahmad Ansari graduated from the London School of Economics in 2000 and spent the next few years working in politics in the rural heartland of Uttar Pradesh. He has served as a member of the All India Congress Committees Department of Policy Planning and Coordination (DEPCO) and has authored two books. He is currently working on a biography of the third Mughal emperor, Akbar.

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