



## Man-Elephant Conflict: A Case Study of the Forest Contiguous Counties of Northern Bengal

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### ABSTRACT

*The mutual conflict between man and elephant in Indian subcontinent seemed to have been begun with the most primitive endeavor of urbanization of the people of the same. But with the course of deforestation, at present, it has become a usual matter in the forest adjoining counties of Northern Bengal. The village dwellers are helpless in front of this massive creature. The massive animal is destroying crops and dwellings of the villagers in a regular basis. Even, the death of the villagers by the attack of this gigantic animal(Mahakal) is about a normal unpleasant incident in this county. But, the attack is not one sided, to a certain extent it is both sided. The death of elephant is also taking place at the hands of the people.*

**KEYWORDS : HASTYAYURVEDA, JALPAIGURI, DARJEELING, SQUAD, MAHAKAL.**

The testimony of the existence of elephant in the Indian sub-continent can be documented from the time even when human beings were not familiarized with the sedentary living. On the whole, some Mesolithic sites like Bhimbetka, Sarai Nahar Rai etc has brought in bones as well as work of art on elephants. Although it can be substantiated clearly by the archaeological evidences and biological vestiges from the time of the Harappan Civilization, the earliest civilization of the same sub-continent. In fact, in the midst of the bones of domesticated animals of the of Harappan Culture, the bones of elephant have been revealed. In addition, a few seal and terracotta animals of Harappan culture represents this titanic mammal. In the post Harappan period, predominantly from the emergence of imperial power in India up to the onset of the British empire, a number of powerful monarchs of India made use of elephant as an imperative device of warfare. Above and beyond domesticated elephants, the unfathomable jungles of India were the free roaming region of the wild elephants. It is amazing to note that there were treatises in ancient time on the diseases of elephant, which is well-known as Hastyayurveda(Supposed to be written by Palakapya in the Gupta Period) and deals ornately with the diagnosis and treatment of the major diseases of elephants. Still, the conflict between man and elephant seemed to have begun with the earliest attempt of urbanization(Harappan) by the Indians, in view of the fact that the Harappans slashed trees and cleared jungles in support of the progression of urbanization and considered the ivory items as export articles. The conflict was however a mutual one. Sometimes the defenseless people had to breathe their last under the foot of the elephants. The conflict increased step by step with the passage of time and with the course of deforestation. Presently, the man-elephant conflict is a day to day affair in the forest contiguous counties of Northern Bengal.

The forest contiguous counties of Northern Bengal basically belong to the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling(plain). In this region a number of important wild life sanctuaries are there. Among them, Jaldapara, Garumara, Buxa, Chapramari, Mahananda are worth mentioning. Moreover, a quantity of small forests, namely, Chilapata, Jayanti, Dhumchi, Moraghat, Murti etc. are situated in this region.

It is to be noted that in early times elephants, along with other animals used to rove around in these forest county with perfect non-chalance. They used to walk off from one jungle to another jungle by using their familiar corridors. They hardly used to enter into the nearby localities. The localities too were not so thick. Hence there were profuse empty passages which were exploited by the elephants as their corridors. But the situation altered in the post independence stage owing to a number of reason. Firstly, a huge number of people from Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan migrated to this region. Due to the partition of Bengal(1947) huge number of Bengalees came to this region. The treaties which were signed between India and Nepal in 1815 & 1950 facilitated the people of the latter to inhabit in this region. The Bhupalis(Nepalese of Bhutan) too entered into this region due to their conflict with the Government of Bhutan. These immigrated people erected their dwelling even on the elephant corridors. Secondly, the development of civilization directed the practice

of deforestation with full velocity. In the name of development or to make modern routes, namely, highways & railways and to build army cantonments jungles and bushes were slashed. Finally, the regular activities of the wood-robbers and inactive / hopeless job of the forest guards are playing a pivotal role to diminish the forest zones. The thickness of the jungles is decreasing day by day. Consequently, the subsistence of food of the elephants, explicitly grass, banana trees and bamboo shrouds is lessening. On the other hand, the report of the Forest Department of the Government of West Bengal states that the number of elephants in this part of West Bengal is increasing slowly but surely. The inevitable result is that the elephants in isolation or in crew are attacking the surrounding villages or localities nearly on a regular basis. Accordingly, the produced crop of the villagers- rice, maize etc. even the potato shrubberies are entering into the massive bailey of the elephants. The houses of the villagers are demolishing. Even, the death of the villagers by means of the attack of this gigantic animal is about a normal unpleasant incident in this county.



Recently a cluster of scholars of the Angela Ruskin University(England) expressed in their research paper that the elephants by and large prefer dark nights to pilfer the crops of the villagers. Although solo elephant can be seen in the localities of this county to steal crops even at some point in the moonlight. Whatever may be the fact, villagers are helpless in front of this giant animal. For the reason that the search lights which are supplied by the Forest department to the villagers to protect their villages and crops from the assault of the elephants are not adequate. Therefore, many villagers are obligated to use torch light at night. It is to be noted that the elephants chase after the villagers who use torch light. The forest department is also distributed crackers. But the elephants are accustomed with the sound of the crackers. Nowadays, they hardly show any anxiety about the sound of the crackers. Even they do not show any concern about the shout of the villagers. Rather, it hampers the throat of the people. To turn back the elephants from localities to jungles, the Forest department employed some 'Squad'(Group of forest guards). But it is also insufficient. presently, for a whole forest or for two-three forest only

one 'squad' is prevailing. Consequently, villagers are bound to spend at least two-three sleepless nights in a week. It is mentionable that there is an arrangement of compensation for the loss of crops and human life. But the compensation which is paid for the damages of crops is too little. On the other hand, Rs. 100000 is paid for the loss of a life of human being. But it is perceptibly unequal to the cost of a life of a human being. Actually, the cost of a life of human being is not able to be gauged.



However, the attack is not one sided, rather it is both sided. The death of elephant is as well occurring at the hands of the people. Yet, the animal which is worshipped in this region as living God(Mahakal) is assassinating by men in a roundabout way. The gigantic animal is taking its last breath over and over again because of their crash with the fastest trains, the developed means of transportation of the human being. It is true that even one decade ago there was meter gage in the area of our study. But the meter gage rail was replaced by broad gage rail to provide developed transportation service to the people of this region. Afterward, one after another passenger and goods fastest trains started to move about. It is already brought up that a lots of elephant corridor(32 identified/recognized) are there in this zone. As a result, one after the other elephants are dying due to their collision with the fastest trains. The 2nd biggest accident in this regard has been taken place on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2013. This accident occurred when Mahananda Link Express collided with a group of elephants. It took the life of four(3 died on the spot and the injured one died after 12 days) elephants. And the largest accident has been taken place on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 when the Kabiguru Express crashed with a group elephants ahead of Jaldhaka bridge at Nagrakata. This heartbreaking mishap took the lives of seven(two of them were expecting) elephants on the spot. Statistics is stating that total no less than 50 elephant died( average is more than 5 in a year) in the last decade(2004- November 15, 2013) in this fashion.

In addition, the elephants of this county, consciously or unconsciously or to meet their hunger try to enter into Nepal, the neighbouring country and consequently they lose their life owing to the firing of the Forest gourd of Nepal. This way no less than 4-5 elephants died in the very last decade.

To save this colossal animal the fastest trains, basically goods train(& the passenger trains which hardly has stoppages in this area) which run through the jungles and elephant corridors of this region can be shifted to NJP-Falakata-Coochbehar root which is absolutely out of the periphery of jungle. There is needed to build first-rate correlation- cooperation between the officials of North-Eastern Railway and officials of Forest Department of this region. Moreover, the Forest department of the province (West Bengal) and centre should make an effort to build solid understanding with the Forest department of Nepal.

The aforementioned attempts will definitely decrease the probability of the death of elephants. On the contrary, the forest ministry of West Bengal needs to take some apposite attempts to save the life and crops of the villagers and the density of the forest. Being an inhabitant of this region it would not be off beam to advocate some proposal in this perspective:

Firstly, seeing as the quantity of trees is plummeting and lots of blank places are deriving in each forest, the Government should endeavor to augment the density by planting fresh plants. But the new plants should not be just profitable like teak, Sal and so on. It should be mixture. Actually all the essential(suitable for the habitation of animals like elephant) trees are needed to defend the equilibrium of forestry or environment. Even, concern should be paid for the protection of shrubberies.

Secondly, those grasses are needed to cultivate/ nourish in the forest in a sprinkled mode which are suitable for elephant consumption.

Thirdly, in conjunction with the edible grass, bamboo shrubberies can be planted in a range of blank places of forest. Because bamboo sprout is a preferred food of the elephants.

Fourthly, banana trees should be planted adequately since banana trees are too much loved foodstuff of the elephants.

Finally, the 'Territorial' and 'Squad' which are employed by the Forest department for the defense of forest and to turn back the elephants from localities to forest are needed to be fulfilled by the youths of forest adjacent villages. It can be anticipated that this inoculation will boost up the liability of the people of forest adjoining villages in view of the fact that it is increasing the prospect of job for their sons. At the same it will be easier to turn back the elephants from the villages and accordingly it will help to diminish the crop damages of the villagers by a long way.

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