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KNOWLEDGE AND THE SKILLS OF TRIBES IN CAPTURING AND TRAINING THE WILD ELEPHANTS-A STUDY OF MYSURU DISTRICT IN INDIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the various indigenous skills of tribes in capturing and training the wild elephants and focuses on archiving their tribal expertise. The state of Karnataka is home to nearly 22% of the wild elephant population. Local tribal communities of Karnataka such as **Jenukuruba, Betta Kuruba, Kurubas & Paniyas** act as trainers because they are well versed with the process of capturing and taming of wild elephants. But there is shortage of mahouts and kavadis. As against the sanctioned posts of 62 mahouts and 67 kavadis there are 26 mahouts and 11 kavadi posts are vacant. The centre for **Research on Animal Rights** and the **Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organization** demanded that the state government immediately stop the capture of wild elephants. They are demanding a comprehensive plan of action to mitigate human-elephant conflict.

Key words: Capturing and Training Wild Elephants, Tribal Knowledge, skills of tribes

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1. Methodology

This paper has adopted **Quantitative Research Methodology** and relied on concrete facts and focused on research which is data driven. By applying this method, a systematic understanding of the research problem was possible. This approach has helped to understand the problem of wild elephants more scientifically and has helped to frame broader insights. This method helps to indicate suggestions for decision making authorities to apply them.

2. Primary data

- ✓ Wild Life Protection Act , 2022
- ✓ Karnataka Forest Act , 1963
- ✓ The Karnataka State Elephant Census Report, 2022
- ✓ Report on Research on Animal Rights, 2018
- ✓ Report on Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organization, 2019
- ✓ Report on History of elephant capture, section VI, Elephant welfare Association
- ✓ Prevention of cruelty to animals Act 1960 and 1982

3. Secondary data

- ✓ **Vikas kamat** , The Khedda system of catching wild elephants , 2016
- ✓ **Vikram Nanjappa** . History of elephant capture, 2018
- ✓ **Mahesh Rangarajan** – Displacement & Relocation of Protected Areas , Conservation & Society , 2006
- ✓ **Puttaraj Heggade-** Economic empowerment of tribal women in Karnataka a study of Mysore and Chamarajanagara districts, study of tribes and tribal people, Vol. 10, Issue 2, December 2012.

Introduction:

The south Indian states of Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil nadu are home to nearly 44% of the elephants. The state of Karnataka is home to nearly 22% of the wild elephant population.

The number of wild elephants in Karnataka

Year	2010	2012	2023
Number	5,740	6,072	6,395

Source: **The Karnataka State Elephant Census Report, 2022**

The south Indian states of Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh & Tamil nadu are home to nearly 44% of the elephants. The state of Karnataka is home to nearly 22% of the wild elephant population. There are 32 forest divisions in Karnataka State, where wild elephants are found. But it was 34 forest divisions in 2017, after deducting Bangalore rural and Tumkur, it came down to 32.

Previous references to taming wild elephants - the Indian history has several literary references to taming wild elephants. The **Matanga Leela**, a rendition of **Gaja Shahstra** by the Sanskrit poet Neelakantha provides five different techniques for capturing wild elephants. Chapter 12 of the book deals with training the captured animal.

1. Using female elephants
2. Using stockades
3. Noosing the elephant
4. Following the elephants till last forest boundaries
5. Attracting them with vast food stocks

After capturing wild elephants, some indigenous methods are used for training them. This includes harsh treatment and also humane positive reinforcement. A sometimes reward in the form of favourite food is also used to pacify them. Local tribal communities of Karnataka such as **Jenukuruba, Betta Kuruba, Kurubas & Paniyas** act as trainers. In Tamilnadu the local tribes of **Malasar** are well trained to capture wild elephants.

Taming and training wild elephants-

Taming and training elephants originated approximately 4000 years ago. Originally Temples used to have tamed elephants as a sign of divinity. The state of Tamil nadu has several literary references to tamed temple elephants. The temples used tamed elephants for carrying water from the river to temple precincts. As human needs grew, the wild elephants were captured and tamed to help humans in forests, in logging trees, in timber yards and in land clearing. The elephants were used in battle fields. They were the part of the **Chaturanga Bala**. They became a proud member of royal entity as kings employed them in other acts of economic development too. Elephants were also used for transportation, commutation and as a royal insignia.

But as human civilization expanded the elephants were relegated to limited forest habitats and their importance was sidelined. The wild elephants capturing has been banned since 1970s. The capture operations are now restricted to **conflict mitigation** areas only. But capturing elephants is a part of the larger debate on elephant's conservation. There are

chances of elephants becoming endangered species if proper measures are not taken. There is also lots of criticism about using harsh method while training the captured elephants. Capturing wild elephants is a very complex and multi faceted task. **The Wild Life Protection Act** section has several clauses towards this intricate exercise. Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated that capture and relocation of wild elephant do not conclude suitably. There are always chances about wild elephants returning to their original forest range.

Importance of Local expertise-

1. **Knowledge about timings-** Local tribes including **Jenukuruba, Betta Kuruba, Kurubas & Paniyas** help in knowing the timings of the movement of wild elephants. Because they know that wild elephants leave forest start moving during early morning hours or late nights. Humans are trampled by elephants because they venture out in wrong time when elephants are also out looking for food.
2. **Knowledge about elephant behaviour-** The humans are considered an intrusion by the wild elephants, resulting in their aggressive and angered behaviour. The local tribes know the elephant behaviour clearly and act accordingly.
3. **Knowledge about food preferences-** The local tribes know the food preferences of wild elephants. The tree barks, roots, twigs, bushes, small plants, and grasses. Tree bark is the favourite food of the wild elephants because they are rich in calcium and aids in digestion. The local tribes serve the wild elephants with this preferred food.

The Recommendations of the Agricultural Ministry - The agriculture ministry tried to analyse the problem of wild elephants capture and has suggested some alternatives.

1. The Ministry recommends farmers to not plant any food crops that attract elephant herds.
2. The recommendations include persuading the farmers to grow crop a shift from commercial to flower or tree crops is difficult.
3. The Ministry recommends leaving some part of their lands as fallow which is also not accepted by farmers.
4. Providing alternate lands to farmers and relocating them whose lands are bordering the wild elephant's habitats, is also not executed.
5. Elephants live in herds hence the government need to think of moving out stray elephants to herds. Local people demand a clear demarcation of wild life habitat.
6. Local people need to spread awareness and stop themselves from putting barbed wires, electric fences, cracker explosion, bunkers etc. Local people need to have awareness

about Karnataka State Forest laws and government orders enshrined in wild life protection.

If the knowledge of the local people to be considered there are chances that human-wild life conflicts can be prevented and phased out if following measures are followed.

- 1. Reserving lands for Elephant Corridors** -The wild elephant capturing exercise conducted by forest officials always is considered as smokescreen to appease the wrath of general public. In general, these wild elephant capture operations do not end in peaceful co-existence as expected. Commercial enrichment of forest lands especially **Elephant Corridors** is the main drive in human -elephant conflict.
- 2. Recognition as Elephant protected areas**- Elephant reserves needs to be recognized as legally protected areas like tiger reserve. Even after 10 years since the 2013 High court order that the government has failed to declare notified forest areas with elephant's corridors as reserve forests under section 17 of the **Karnataka Forest Act**.
- 3. Eyeing on encroachments**- There is also a need to undo the damages caused by unrestricted encroachments by removing them from critical elephant corridors and habitats. Thos can only be achieved through strong political will to ensure protection of elephant and humans. There is a need to framing of guidelines to regulate power under section 11 of the **Wild Life Protection Act, 2022**. Capture of wild elephants as a solution to human wild life conflict is very unscientific ineffective and has been the cause for death of wild elephants. Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated that capture and relocation have failed to protect the wild elephants.

Findings

- ✓ There is a good number of increase in wild elephants in Karnataka state
- ✓ Due to increase in human wild life confrontation, the elephant population is under threat.
- ✓ Capturing the wild elephants is a multi faceted complex issue which needs the help from local tribes
- ✓ The skill of local tribes have been neglected and not considered for capturing wild elephants.
- ✓ The Karnataka government need to make authoritative and legitimate rules for capturing and taming wild elephants involving local tribes.
- ✓ The tribal knowledge of capturing and taming wild elephants needs to be treasured through electronic media assistance.

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2. The Karnataka Forest Department official website, 2023

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