

Colonizing the Wild Elephant of Cachar (1850-1950)

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Abstract— Elephants have always played a significant role in Cachar's history. Elephant hunting was a monopoly of the British government in India during colonial rule as of its strategic importance. Elephants were given special attention by colonial officials because of their ability to navigate forests, their Tusks, and their role in hunting. The elephant capturing and management procedure was under British authority because it was one of the most important sources of revenue for the British government. Due to the poor transit system, the colonial rulers kept number of elephants on hand to perform various tasks. The purpose of this paper is to study how elephants were colonized in Cachar. Elephants provide both access and revenue to the government. The capture of elephants (Kheddah), access, and elephant revenue are all explored in this paper. The function of elephants in the Cachar's economic existence is also investigated and analyzed in this study. The research looks on the use of elephants to carry government officials during military operations in Cachar, as well as their role in forest management.

Keywords— Cachar, Elephant, Forest, Kheddah, Revenue

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the assassination of Raja Govind Chandra in 1830, Cachar was annexed to British territories and was supervised by a Superintendent based in Silchar. Cachar is nearly equidistant from Sylhet and Muniipoor, and is between the parallels of 24 ° 15' and 25 ° 50' North Latitude and 92° 10' and 93° 30' East Longitude [1]. Cachar is about 100 miles in length north and south, and 50 miles in breadth east and west, giving an approximate area of 5,000 square miles [2].

The upper Barák Valley is covered by the Cachar District. With the exception of the west, which confronts Sylhet, it is surrounded by high mountain ranges on three sides. These mountain-barriers rise abruptly from a tiny plain with lush green flora and a few hill torrents and white cascades. Aside from the majestic backdrop, the valley itself is beautiful. Elephants, rhinoceros, buffaloes, the metna or wild cow, tigers, black bears, and a variety of deer, such as the sambhar and barasingha, are among the wild animals found in the District. The government's

monopoly on the capture of wild elephants is extremely lucrative [3].

Elephants are one of the most important products of the Cachar forests. They are found in all the lower ranges of north and south plain lands of Cachar. Wild elephants are held to be the property of Government, and no one is permitted to hunt or kill them without a license from Government; but this principle may be liable to some modification in the case of permanently-settled districts. The question of the right of Government to monopolize the catching of wild elephants within its own territories was first raised in 1851, and a correspondence ensued between Government and the Board of Revenue, which extended over several years. Though the Board of Revenue and the Legal Remembrance seem to have differed in their opinion from Government, it appeared to have been accepted that Government, as sovereign, has the exclusive right to hunt and kill wild elephants in Cachar [4]

The rights of Government were not at first strictly enforced. Government Kheddah operations were carried on after a desultory manner in Sylhet, Jaintiá, and Assam, but

the general question remained in unsettled state. The Assam officials were most strongly of the opinion that it was impolitic and unfair to prohibit the destruction of elephants by private persons; and, yielding to their representations, Government, on the 6th June, 1859, sanctioned the abolition of the Kheddah establishment in Assam, and withdrew the restrictions upon elephant-catching by private persons. Finally, in 1862, all the Government Kheddah" were abolished. Government, however, by no means surrendered its proprietary right in wild elephants, and any person desirous of catching them had to obtain a license. Private enterprise, however, failing to keep up an adequate supply of elephants, the Government Kheddah at Dacca was re-established in 1865, and private hunting was prohibited in the Sylhet and Cachar forests [5]. The system of granting licenses continued in force, however, in Assam, and was extended to the Bhutan Duars. Since then, the greater number of the elephants caught in Assam have been caught by licensed hunters under rules framed by the Bengal Government, under which Government has the option of taking over any of the animals caught, at a fixed price.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to figure out how Cachar's elephants became colonized. In this work, the methods of capturing elephants (Kheddah), animal access, and elephant revenue are all discussed. The study investigates the employment of elephants to transport government officials in Cachar military operations, as well as their involvement in forest management. The study also looks into the role of elephants in generating revenue in Cachar's district.

III. SURVEY OF LITERATURE

According to E.P. Gee's article [6], elephants have long been recognized for their services to humanity. The Elephants' Preservation Act were enacted to restrict otherwise indiscriminate trapping activities and ivory hunting, as well as to keep the wild animal population at an appropriate and safe level. Apart from the fact that elephants are usually in high demand, there is another reason why they must be captured—or at the very least controlled—by killing. In Assam, the policy has been to award control licenses to approved and skilled sportsmen for the shooting of rogues, as well as the right to conduct elephant-catching operations in specific regions where elephants are known to be on the rise or causing major crop damage. In Assam, the author also discusses about Mela Shikar and the stockade method for catching elephants.

Elephant management in the Kheddah department, as well as the private leasing system, elephant trapping methods, elephant protection rules, conflicts over elephant access, and elephant revenue, are all explored, according to G. Singh [7]. Elephants were not only utilized for transportation, transporting, and administrative purposes, but they were also superb hunting companions, according to the author. Elephant hunting became a monopoly of the British government in Assam during colonial rule due to the animal's strategic importance.

Saikia [8] study highlighted the environmental loss which is too painful to record and document. However, he argued that in the pre-colonial period the forest of Assam was not totally untouched and there were also trade in forest resources. The contest over natural resources caused conflicts and frequent clashes between Ahom and Mughal rulers. Revenue was collected on different forest produce viz; cotton, elephants and birds. The state exchequer mostly relied heavily on the exploitation of forest resources like elephants and timber for constructing boats. Elephants were procured in large numbers not only to strengthen the military system but also for everyday uses of the royal palaces. M. Ragarajan's [9] discuss the wildlife history of India. According to author wild animals during the British rule in India was supposed as curse to be wiped out during British rule. The Practice of eradicating wild animals was new to India; no previous rulers were ever attempted to eradicate any species. According to him the idea of the British government was to push back the jungle land and to extend the area under cultivation so as to earn more revenue for British exchequer.

In the Assam province, for example, during 1877-83, about 735 elephants were captured, yielding to the government revenue of 12,173 pound sterling [10]. Milroy in his paper describes various methods practiced in Assam for capturing elephants without mentioning any statistical data captured wild elephants. Choudhury [12] in his paper covered the estimation of wild elephant's population in different reserve forest of Cachar in post colonial period. In Upper Assam elephants have been under pressure for over a century. In the early 19th century the tribes hunted them for ivory [13] and for meat, which resulted in their almost total destruction [14].

In the 19th century, nooses were used to catch up to 500 elephants each year in Assam, while Kheddah was used to catch another 100 elephants per year in Chittagong. By 1955 an annual average of 340 elephants caught in Assam between 1937 and 1950, nearly 500 being taken in the latter year where as by 1975 it gives an annual total of only 200 in recent years. About 80 elephants were captured in the three years 1974-1977, in North Bengal. [15]

Despite the fact that no relevant work has been done in Cachar, this paper has attempted to investigate the wild elephant status and British policy toward wildlife in Cachar. Despite the fact that no relevant work has been done in Cachar, this research work has attempted to investigate the wild life status and British policy toward wildlife in Cachar. The current research is justified by the fact that wildlife is an important aspect of our environment, and its preservation is critical for preventing environmental damage. The time frame for this study is 1826 to 1947.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 Elephant hunting rights during Cachari Rajah

Before the British obtained possession of Cachar or so long as the Cachar was governed by Cachari Rajah, there was an immemorial custom of giving the sole right of catching wild elephants to the Rajah. Without his authority, no person dared to catch one, indeed no person had even a right to keep one except the Rajah, unless it was given to him. Even in some cases, the attempts made by British officers to capture elephants in Cachar were failed. The Rajah had not only right over the catching of wild elephants but also all elephant teeth found in the district belonged to the Rajah, and all parties finding them were obliged to give them up. It also appears from the records of 1830 that the parties allowed to keep the 'elephant teeth' were required to pay three annas on every rupee's worth of ivory to the government. Thus, the restrictions on the elephant hunting were only for generating revenue from it and not for the preservation of the animal [16].

4.2 Rights of hunting during Colonial period

The right of capturing elephants in these places was leased to the natives of the District after annexation of Cachar by British. With regard to elephants, that the inhabitants might be permitted to catch them and make Kheddah is the third request contained in the petition presented to me. They say they are necessary to them, for without elephants it would be impossible to bring their timber to market. The wood cutters cut the timbers and afterwards elephants are sent to draw them to the banks of nullahs where it is made into rafts with bamboos to float it and when the floods come the rafts are carried down into the Barak river.

It has been determined that Government has a right to the monopoly of catching wild animals in Cachar, but as by the sale of timber considerable sums of money are brought into the district which enable people to take jungle lands and have them cleared and cultivated, it would be highly

advantageous to the district were the inhabitants permitted to catch elephants, so long as they did not interfere with the Government. Kheddah; the latter have always heretofore been made towards the south, and were the inhabitants allowed to catch them towards the east and northeast it would enable them perhaps to catch as many as they require but of course should it afterwards be found to interfere with the Government. Kheddah the lease might be withdrawn and as revenue is absolutely necessary towards the development of the district and so it was recommend and allowed to catch some, and also arrangements might be made whereby Government. would not be the loser.

But latter on the system of hunting discontinued under the orders of Government of India, No.1360,dated 30th November, 1865, and the elephant fields are now strictly preserved.

There are four places where elephants are caught: [17]

- Panisagor : South
- Nichintpur: South
- Jelalpore : North
- Baladhun: North.

4.3 Method of Hunting and Process of training elephant

Elephants were usually caught during the months of October and March under the Kheddah system. Kheddah, or stockades, were constructed around water bodies or in strategic sites where herds of wild elephants might be herded into and trapped in them. It was feasible to capture an entire herd of elephants using this strategy. In the Sylhet jungle, there is evidence of the capture of forty, sixty, and even eighty elephants at a once[20]. The stockades required about 20 to 25 people to build. These people were stationed near any spot that showed indicators of being frequented by wild elephants. The elephant hunting process took about five to six weeks. Following that, these folks had to patiently await the arrival of the elephant herd to the lick. This wait could be anywhere from two to two months, but eventually, a herd would appear one night. One or two gunshots and the blowing of a few hours would be enough to send elephants running in the desired direction. As a result, elephants were trapped inside the stockades and would be lost to the forests for all time. The lessee was required to have a significant number of elephants in order to tame the wild elephants. Besides this wholesale method of capturing elephants, there is a way of noosing them, which was much practiced in Cachar before the Government prohibition came out. A trained elephant, with two men on its back armed with spears, and provided with a stout rope, one end of which is attached to their own elephant, and the other formed into a noose,

boldly enter into the midst of a herd, and throw the noose over the head of any elephant who may approach near enough to them. But the chances are much against catching the elephant, and the experiment has to be repeated ten or twelve times before one is secured. Wild elephants are also caught by the administration of drugs.

A female decoy is let loose in the jungle, and attaches to herself a male, who deserts the herd in pursuit of her. Their position in the forest is marked, and the neighborhood is baited with dainty bits of sugarcane and plaintain pith, into which an intoxicating drug has been introduced. The animal eating it becomes quite drunk and unconscious, and finds himself, on recovery, made fast to a tree [20].

The Bengal Asiatic Society Journal provides the following information about the indigenous' capture of elephants: "Elephants are slaughtered in large numbers by the Kookies wherever they can be found, not just for their tusks but also for their flesh, which is highly valued". At a time, groups of twenty or more go out in search of them. When a recent elephant track is discovered in the forest, two or three members of the party climb a convenient tree whose branches overhang the track, the rest of the party follows it up, and once on the other side of the herd, scare it away from the ambush by shouting, beating gongs, and firing fire-arms. The animals are assaulted from above with long spears with massive iron bars covered with deadly poison, and each wound causes the animal to die within a half-mile of the location where he was struck. The elephants, on the other hand, are so cautious that only two elephants each herd are killed. At the location where their game is discovered dead, they begin cutting elephant and extracting his tusks; laden with these and as much of the flesh as they can carry, they return home, while other parties go out and encamp in the immediate area of the carcass until they have completely consumed it or are driven away by the excretions of decomposition [21].

4.4 Prices of Elephant

An elephant's price is determined by its height, caste, and age, however the current average price for well-trained elephants is: [22]

Table 1: Prices of elephant

Types	Height	Price(Rs.)
Koomeerah	7 feet high	1,100
Nussub	do	1000
Meergia	do	900

Elephants from Cachar are in high demand for transportation of timber and other purposes, and they command what can only be characterized as exorbitant

rates in Cachar. An elephant between the ages of six and seven is hired to carry a burden weighing ten to fifteen maunds, whereas a typical elephant carries a load weighing twenty maunds, and three tiny elephants are equal to two standard elephants. Standard-sized elephants are those that reach a height of seven feet or more, and the government has been known to pay as much as 750 rupees for them; nevertheless, demand for elephants is so high that animals of lesser size are often overlooked [23].

4.5 Role of elephant in forest management

The scarcity of manual labour can only be counteracted, as, in fact, it has been in the Cachar forests, by the employment of elephants, which, however, is a somewhat unsatisfactory alternative, since elephants, especially when employed on timber-dragging, are undoubtedly very delicate, and cause the greatest possible anxiety and frequent disappointment to forest officers. Inquiry made by the Deputy -Commissioner of Cachar, regarding the number of elephants employed in timber-dragging in the Cachar forests, resulted in 120 being reported, whilst the Deputy Commissioner believes there are at least 200 employed on this work .The fact of there being about 200 elephants employed in timber work in the Cachar district, is in itself sufficient to show that the Forest Department cannot undertake the direct working of these forests by Government agency.

They are chiefly employed in dragging timber, and the hire of an elephant so employed is either paid in kind, in the proportion of one- half or one-third of the timber, according to the distance it has to be drawn to the nearest water channel, or at the rate of Rupees 5 per diem[24]. The number of elephants is substantially more than recorded, according to the testimony of the Deputy Commissioner cited above. Figure 1 shows that elephants continue to be an essential mammal for colonizing the Cachar's forest resources. The number of elephants utilized for dragging has increased in parallel with the number of forest-clearing permits received, as represented in the fig.1 below.

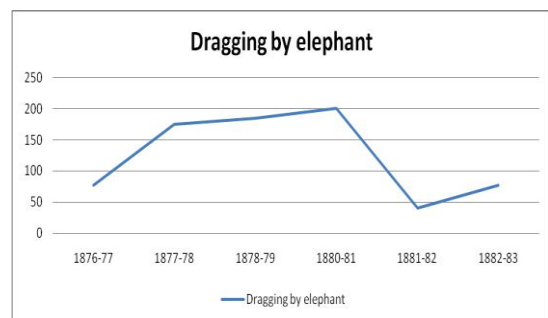


Fig 1: Role of elephant in dragging timber

As reported in the book "Zoologist" [25], 150 elephants were captured or rather imprisoned in a stockade made by felling trees. Of the 150 elephants taken, only thirteen were tied up, and two died soon after due to a lack of courtesy. The fig. 2, ascertained that the number of elephants captured was initially higher, but that the number of elephants captured decreased over time. Elephant population decline could be one of the reasons for the fall, as elephants were caught without conservation previous to the Elephant Preservation Act of 1879. Around 100 elephants resided in the 1950s in the Barail range's foothills in Cachar, Assam, and the Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya.[26]

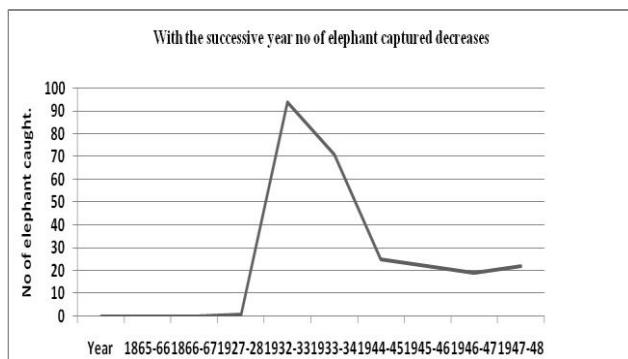


Fig2: Elephant Captured decreases over period of time

The amount of revenue from elephant hunting thus derived in year 1866–1867 amounted to 1,623, in Cachar [27]. The revenue was realized between 1865-1867 [28] was 9709 and 1623, although the actual number of elephants captured was not reported. Also due to a higher number of catches throughout the year than in 1880-81 [29], the district of Cachar saw an increase of Rs. 3,550. The number of elephants captured in 1883-84[30] and 1888-89 [30] was 19 and 96, respectively, although the exact amount of revenue could not be determined. In addition, the number of elephants captured and revenue realized over time [31] [32] are illustrated in the fig. 3 below.

The license for catching elephant issued in Assam was for 2 years. The purchaser has to pay the amount for in the following installments:

- One-eighth on the 30th September
- One-fourth on the 31st December
- One-eighth on the 1st March
- One-eighth on the 30th September
- One-fourth on the 31st December
- One-eighth on the 1st March

Also the figure3 shows that the revenue realization increases over time. The government received a royalty of Rs. 100 to every elephant captured by a hunter or hunters

working in the mahal, as well as every elephant killed in the attempt to capture it.[33]

If the license holder fails to notify the government of the capture of an elephant, or the killing of an elephant in an attempt to capture one, they must pay the government Rs. 500 for each elephant not reported; and, if that was not done, recovery was made in the manner described in clause XI., and the declaration subjoined, or by criminal procedure under Act VI. Of 1879 (Elephants Preservation Act) [34].

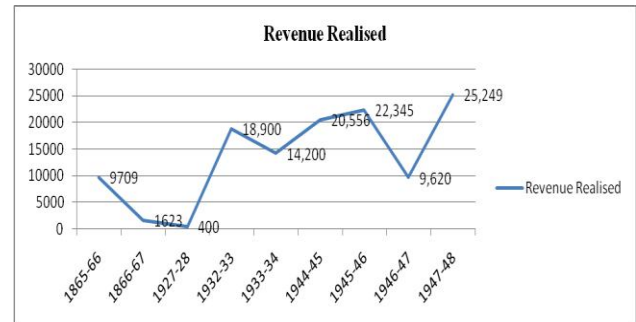


Fig3: Revenue realized from elephant

However, when the elephant was used as labour the rate of elephant was Rs.4 per day [34] and when elephant was used for carriage in Cachar the municipality charged a tax of Rs.6 for every elephant per quarter [35].

4.6 Role of elephant in Military expedition

The Looshai mission in 1871 involved two columns, one advancing from Cachar and the other from Chittagong, during military training. Following the path of streams, machete-wielding coolies who hacked out passages, and evidence of wild elephant movement, whether temporary or permanent, were the three primary methods of mobility [36]. The Cachar Column consisted of half a battery of artillery, a company of sappers and miners, and 500 men from each of the 22nd Punjab Native Infantry, 42nd Assam Light Infantry, and 44th Native Infantry, plus 1,200 commissariat coolies, 178 elephants, and an 800-man coolie corps under Major Moore. On the expedition, this was the actual number of people who were sent. As a result of the reduction in the number of coolies for carrying, the number of elephants that were escorted was calculated below.

The idea of using elephants to transport government officials during military exercises for the Looshai expedition was based on the assumption that coolies would be provided to convey luggage and ammunition. The number of followers leaving the base would be decreased in half if elephants were provided in their stead, from 780 to 264 (i.e. $780 - 516 = 264$). 417 coolies would be required to move baggage, while 99 coolies would be required to

haul ammunition. As a result, 264 coolies and 37 elephants are required instead of 516 (i.e. $417+99=516$) coolies [37].

4.7 Elephant as a pack animal

Around 252 miles from Chittagong, the Assam-Bengal Railway enters the Cachar region a few miles east of Badarpur junction. The railway separates here, with one branch branching south of the Barak and the other branching north of the North Cachar Hills and towards Assam.

The Hill is mostly made up of kaolinite bands, which expand when exposed and cause heavy slips or put enormous strain on the tunnel walls. To relieve the pressure, enormous masonry, arched cuttings, and innovative techniques to allow drainage to escape were required. Aside from the technological problems, there was significant suffering due to a lack of local labour and food supplies, as well as the terrain's unsuitability. In addition to railway materials, food for over 25,000 workers had to be brought into the hills on elephants, bullocks, ponies, and other pack animals all at once [38].

V. CONCLUSION

Elephants have always been an important factor of the Cachar forest resources. The Raja had the right to catch elephants under the Cachari kingdom, while the British administrator had the authority to catch elephants after the British takeover. The forest was leased out to private and government lease holders for the purpose of catching wild elephants. Prior to 1879, there were no precise procedures for catching elephants. Private parties employed elephants to penetrate dense forests near the river in search of forest resources. Elephant mahals (areas where elephants were hunted) yield revenue for the government, as well as royalties from each elephant captured. The elephant was also used as a pack animal for carriages when the municipality board collected taxes in Cachar. Although not all elephants are captured from the Cachar forest, the military expedition of 1871-1872 was made feasible with the support of wild elephants. The free roaming elephant track, on the other hand, was used to move through the forest. Elephants also assisted with the extension of railway lines in the highland part of Cachar.

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