CHAPTER III

CAPTURING AND TRAINING OF THE ELEPHANT
Tradition of capturing and domesticating wild elephants prevailed in almost all parts of India at a considerable early period. It was due to the demand for elephants in large number for being used in processions brought out for religious, royal and social festivals. Many temples, specially in the southern region of India, and some rich people kept elephants in groups to use them in time and sometimes to bargain them in the markets known as melas.¹ In places like Africa there is no such tradition presumably due to the lack of demand for elephants and patience and interest of the people to train them up for various purposes.

People of India resorted to various skills and methods of capturing wild elephants among which two systems viz., stockade system and pit system, were widely popular. The former one was widely popular in north India and some of the neighbouring countries like Ceylon and Burma, while the latter skill was preferred by the people of south-India from a very early period.

Methods like Kraal in Ceylon,² stockade and lassoing of the further east, i.e., Indo-China and Siam, Hall of upper Assam and Kheda of Mysore are basically the same

¹ Stracey, P.D., Elephant Gold, pp. 68ff.
² In the south India the elephant training enclosure is also known as Kraal cf. Elephant Gold, p. 103ff.
system: where elephants are caught after being driven for a time. The principle of this system is the same all over the country and abroad, while designs and the process of execution alone vary according to local conditions. In this process a large space is generally enclosed by a circular fence, thirty feet wide and twenty-four feet deep. The only entrance to the enclosure is by a bridge covered with layers of earth and tree-leaves. A few trained female elephants are kept inside the enclosure. Then wild elephants being attracted by the female-elephants enter into the enclosure. From the bank of the bridge, men keep watch over the movement of the wild herd. When the wild herd gets into the trap, the bridge is demolished. Then of the whole herd such elephants which are fit for training are retained inside the trap without food so that they may be taken out to the training place with the trained she-elephants known as Koonkis. Generally this skill was followed by the Aryans.³

Sanskrit literature introduces five methods of capturing wild elephants. These methods are arranged in different books in order of desirability as Vārī (pen or stockade method), Vasā (method of employing female decoys), Anugata (method of noosing from the back of trained elephants), Apāta (method of applying nooses concealed under earth) and

³ Stracey, P.D., Elephant Gold, Chap. 7, p.101
Avāpāta (pit system). The methods Vārī, Vasā and Anugata are suitable means to capture elephants. The last two are not favourable as they sometimes cause death to the captured one. So the last two methods are prohibited by the experts.

Vārībandha:

The tracts and paths of moving elephants as well as their spots of residence are marked through various means. Whether an elephant is a stray one or not, whether it is young or old, whether it is a leader of the herd, or a rogue, or one belonging to the rutting stage, or whether it has newly escaped from chains can all be easily known by the expert catchers. All these can be ascertained even in case of a whole herd of elephants. The courses of urine and dungs, small routes covered by plants and creepers, foot prints, broken trees, spots of sleeping and sitting, and newly destroyed banks of rivers and lakes — these are the sources to know their location. An elephant trapper being accompanied by servants and several assistants mounted on she-elephant or horse and equipped with noosing ropes and nets should enter into the forest generally in the summer season.

4. Gg, 6.20-21
   ML, 10.1
5. Gg, 6.21-22
   Mānasa, 2.3.187
6. Gg, 6.15-16
   Mānasa, 2.3.181-182
   AS, 2.2.
7. Gg, 6.13-19
   Mānasa, 2.3.183-184
The stockade or elaborate trap-pen method is indicated by the term Vārībandha in Sanskrit. Vārī is a technical term which denotes a lace for catching elephants or a hole or trap meant for the same purpose. This is the most suitable process for catching elephants in plains and is the only method for capturing elephants in herds. In this process a wide spot of elephants grazing is strewn with grass and savoury leaves and stalks of Sallakī (Boswellia thurifera), Priyāla (Buchanania latifolia), Pippala (Liper longum) and banana trees, sugar-cane, lotus bulbs, green bamboo leaves, etc. Covetous elephants come to eat those things. Observing their coming route, an area of about one Krosa around the spot of grazing is bounded with a stout fencing of trees keeping an entrance along the path of their usual movement. When the herd of elephant enters the trap, expert catchers close the entrance. Those elephants which possess all good signs and which are fit for training are kept confined inside the trap.

The construction of the stockades differs from place to place according to the nature of the soil. The Aryans in the north practised this method by digging a trench in the boundary of the stockade spot and piling up the dug up soil on the outer edge of the trench so as to form a steep and formidable bank outside the stockade. In the

8. AK, 2.8. p. 365
Śā, p. 1310
Raghu, 5.40
ŚV, 18.56

9. ĀŚ, 6.22-29
ML, 10.2-5
Mānas, 2.3.18-94

eastern part, specially in Assam, the trench is reinforced with a palisade wall because of the general softer nature of its soil than the soil in the northern part of India. Still farther east, in Burma, even the trench is unsuitable; and so a platform is built all along the top of the stockade, and the defence wall of the enclosure is built out from the platform. The entrance of the Aryan stockade was made by a bridge covered by earth, turf and leaves of trees. Female decoys were then driven into the stockade and the catchers kept watch upon the wild herd, hiding themselves on the steep bank outside the stockade. The wild elephants, blocked suddenly by the closing of the entrance, were kept without food for several days so that they could be easily subdued by the female decoys in the fighting inside the stockade. Afterwards the weak elephants were noosed in legs and with the help of Koonkis, they were taken to the training ground.

In modern times the wall of the stockade is made with wooden posts. A trench as a measure of safety and an entrance also are there in a modern stockade. Instead of the expensive old method of using Koonkis, captured elephants are now trained by their legs being tied to the walls of the stockade through various methods. These methods are known as Kraal in South India, Hal in Upper Assam among the Morans, and Karen in Burma. In most cases these processes resemble one

11. Ibid., p. 103.
12. Ibid., pp. 101ff.
13. Ibid., p. 103
in Burma. In most cases these processes resemble one another and this was perhaps the result of contact between the experts belonging to these different localities over the centuries. Sanderson in his *Thirteen Years Among the Wild Beasts in India* describes elaborately a *kheda* operation which involved about 1000 men and 30 or 40 tame elephants with months of preparation. The length of the surround sometimes reached up to 10 miles. In Assam the stockade does not exceed the size of a tennis court and this system requires the services of not more than twenty five persons. The main stockade in Mysore may extend over five acres.

The Shans i.e. the Khamtis and the Itonias construct an elevated platform instead of a trench, and from there people attack the animals with instruments. They sometimes construct a double stockade to catch a larger herd. Generally stockades of Assam are made near the salt springs or astride elephant paths, and in this case they have either one or two gates facing opposite directions with a pair of funnel-shaped walls.

Generally those elephants which are not fit for sale, which are too old or too young for training, which are pregnant and she-

13. Ibid., p. 103
16. Ibid., pp. 106, 109
17. Ibid., p. 107.
elephants with calves are set free from the stockade. 18

2. Vasābandha:

The next preferable method is the Vasābandha. This is the method of overcoming the male wild elephants with the help of trained she-elephants. The term Vasā means trained she-elephant. The male elephants in the forest in their period of rut are attracted by the female elephants. The expert she-elephant, concealing the mahut in her flapping ear approaches the innocent male wild elephant while grazing in the forest. She roams near him and tries to draw his attention. Skillfully she pretends to go away from him and thus being teased by the treacherous female the elephant blindly begins to chase her. It becomes tired of running after the skilled female without food and rest and when it is unable to run any more out of fatigue, the concealed mahut takes the chance to bind the hind legs and then the neck of the male elephant from the back of the female elephant. In case the mahut is scented by the male wild elephant, the latter may either run away to a great distance so as to be free from the grasp of the catcher or may kill the mahut at once. Hence a great skill is needed on the part of the mahut or the catcher.

18. Ibid., p. 102f.
Generally seven or eight expert healthy and stout she-elephants are used in vasābandha. The catchers, being well equipped with instruments for clearing the branches of trees and the roots and with goads and ropes for noosing the wild animals ride on the female elephants and enter into the forest. The entire system is, as a whole, comfortable and has less chance of injuring the captured ones. Hence the authors recommend the practice of this technique.

The method of capturing wild elephants with the help of female elephants is illustrated very briefly in Sanskrit works. The Gajasāstra describes it only in two ślokas as follows: Elephant drivers with ropes in their hands conceal themselves with leaves, ride on seven or eight trained female elephants, which are very stout and strong. They then place the ropes on the trunk of the she-elephant for binding the male elephant. The characteristics of the captured ones are determined after they are bound. 19

The Mānasollāsa also describes this method almost in the same line as in the Gajasāstra, in three verses. 20 But the second line of the second verse of these three and the third verse are not found in other works in Sanskrit. They, however, seem to be an improvement on what we have in the Gajasāstra. These newly inserted lines clearly indicate that

19. Gā, 6.30-31
20. Mānasa, 2.3.195-197
the elephant driver acts as a match-maker between the she-elephant and the wild male elephant. The verse No. 186 in the Mānasollāsa, Chap. II, while presenting the best methods of capturing wild elephants, mentions Vasābandha first and the Vārībandha and Anugata-bandha in second and third places respectively. 21 In the Gaśāstra and the Matangalīla the methods are mentioned in the order of Vārībandha, Vasābandha and Anugata-bandha. 22

Mānasollāsa, however, gives the detailed description of the methods in the order of Vārībandha, Vasābandha and Anugata-bandha. The verse 2.3.186 of the Mānasollāsa, which appears to reverse the positions of Vārībandha and Vasābandha, in fact, contains a metrical flaw of not presenting a short fifth syllable and a long sixth syllable as is required by the ālōka metre. This could be avoided by reversing the order of the two methods. Hence, vārībandho vasābandho bandhascānugatah parāḥ is the better reading for vasābandho vārībandho, etc. that we have now in our printed text of the Mānasollāsa. This sort of manipulation of the earlier readings is often noticed in the Mānasollāsa. This may be either due to scribal errors and different textual traditions or due to a deliberate effort on the part of the author of the Mānasollāsa to effect an element of novelty.

21. Ibid., 2.3.186
22. GS, 6.20
ML, 10.1
Anugatabandha:

This is described as the third preferable method in which an efficient wild elephant is caught by chasing while it roams in a herd. In this process a herd of elephants is first spotted near a source of water. While the elephants sleep there for the night, elephant trappers surround them stealthily. Some of the trappers remain prepared on surrounding tree tops with various kinds of musical instruments like kettledrum and tabor, etc. While the experts keep ready for action being mounted on horses, tamed she-elephants and tamed male elephants. At the close of the night while the wild elephants are yet drowsy, the trappers suddenly raise a hue and cry so as to cause a great alarm for the wild elephants. Being scared, the wild elephants begin to run away in a state of great confusion. The trappers then chase them. When anyone of the wild herd happens to slip away from the company, he is chased by many trappers more vigorously so that in the long run he becomes completely exhausted and overpowered by the catchers. This is what is called Anugatabandha or the capturing of the chased.

The Gajasāstra and the Mātaṅgalīla present the Anugatabandha method also very briefly, i.e., in only one verse each. On the other hand the Mānasollāsa explains this

23. GS, 6.32
ML, 10.11
slill in as many as fifteen verses. 24

4. Apātabandha:

The last two methods of capturing elephants are not favourable. In Apātabandha (method of applying nooses concealed under the ground) half the length of a coir-ropes of at least sixty cubits length and as thick as the wrist is placed in the form of a noose in a wide hole (one cubit deep) and then covered by a layer of dust. The remaining part of the noose remains tied to some firm tree standing at the proximity of the hole, which remains stuffed with lotus stalks, bamboo leaves, bannana trees, white lotuses and sugarcane, etc. The trappers remain concealed in the nearby tree, and when some elephant gets engaged in eating the materials of the hole, they fasten the noose around the person of the elephant and overpower it. 25 In this style, the captured elephant suffers a lot and hence the authors do not approve of this method.

5. Avapātabandha:

The most undesirable method is called the Avapātabandha i.e. the pit fall method which prevailed from a very old time among the aboriginal inhabitants of Southern India. This method seems to have prevailed there due to the hilly

24. Mānasa, 2.3. 198-212
25. GS, 6.33
ML, 10.12-13
Mānasa, 2.3.213-216
nature of the land where stockade method was obviously not suitable. In this system a pit, four cubits deep, two cubits wide and five cubits in length remains covered under bamboos, bearing a straw mat surfaced by a thin layer of earth. Being hoodwinked by the camouflage some elephant falls down and becomes overpowered by the trappers. This is the worst system, because there is every chance of the elephant losing its tusks, of breaking its chest, of getting lame, or even of losing its life.26

Training of elephants:

The elephant was known to the Vedic Aryans and from its references in the Vedic literature it is also proved that this animal was little used in war.27 But the tradition of capturing wild elephants and using them in war was prevailing in the times of Vālmīki. Elephants were captured with other trained elephants after making them to fall in artificial pits.28 One limb of the army was formed by elephants. Bharata is described to be followed by ten thousand elephants equipped with war accoutrements in his march to Citrakūṭa.29

26. Gs, 6.34
ML, 10.14
Mānasa, 2.3.217-220
27. Infra, Chap. VI, pp. 270 ff.
28. R, 5.43.20
5.90.44-45
29. Ibid., 2.94.2 cf. dasanāgā sahasrāṇī kalivitāni yathāvidhi
The invincible trained elephants of Laṅkā.\(^\text{30}\) prove that regular training of elephants also prevailed in the Rāmāyana period.

The traditional divisions of the Indian army were four, viz. elephant, cavalry, chariots and infantry. Of these elements the most important one was the elephant.\(^\text{31}\) They were trained with great care and attention, and marching in the front of army they acted like the tanks in modern warfare. Breaking up the enemy's ranks, destroying various defences as palisades, gates etc., crossing the watery paths and rivers, they performed a great duty in the battlefield.

The captured elephants are trained with regular instructions so that they are fit to be used in different fields of work. In training the elephants their efficiency, age and physical fitness should always be kept in mind. Palakāpya states that the elephant which possesses all auspicious signs and a divine nature, whose colour of the body is white or reddish or like that of the Kusa grass, which is healthy, which resides in forest, and which brings happiness, should not be captured.\(^\text{32}\) On the other hand, that elephant whose soles are thin, the part about the hips is broken, limbs of the body are more or less in number, and deformed, and which is aged or young, weak and indifferent to she-elephant,\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Ibid. 5.4.37-38
\(^{31}\) Basham, A.L., The Wonder that was India, p. 129
\(^{32}\) GŚ, W.3,4, p. 132
pregnant, and a she-elephant with calf, should not be captured. The Arthasastra recommends the catching of only the twenty years old elephant. An unweaned calf (i.e. a sucking calf), an elephant having tusks as large as those of a she-elephant, a tuskless one, a diseased one, a pregnant one and the she-elephant which is still nourshing a calf, should not be captured.

The summer season is the suitable period of elephant catching.

The superintendent of the elephants should be intelligent, endowed with a kingly disposition, pious, devoted to the master, pure in heart, truthful, free from addictions, self-controlled, modest, enthusiastic, experienced, suit-voiced, efficient, steady, magnanimous, skilled in curing diseases, dauntless, skilled in various lores and the disciple of a good master. He should also be a master of the art of training and that of the art of handling the goad and the mace. He should be well-versed in determining the strength, place of origin, appropriate time for various activities and the must of the elephants. Further he should have the dexterity of climbing up and descending from the elephants, he should be calm and composed and a

33. Ibid., vv. 1, 2, 5 pp. 1319
34. AS 2.31
35. Ibid. 2.31
There are eight ways of climbing on an elephant and they are namely, by sliding over the two ears (2), the four feet (4), the face (1) (i.e., presumably the trunk) and by jumping on to the back from behind (1). Likewise there are ten ways of getting down, namely, by sliding over the tail (1), the four feet (4), the face (1), the two flanks (2) and the two years (2).

There are different places for sitting on person of the elephant. In the front part of the body, there are three places for sitting. The seat between the neck and the hump of the shoulders is the best, the seat above the hump of the shoulders is the mediocre and the seat below (i.e., behind) the shoulders, is the worst. The places for sitting in the hind-quarters are five in number. Without going into the details of these five places, the Gājasāstra dwells on the utility of the three places of the fore-part. It maintains that the best seat is to be occupied when the elephant raises its forepart, the mediocre seat is to be occupied when the elephant keeps its body in an even position and the worst seat should be occupied when the elephant lowers its hind-quarter. Similarly these three seats are to be

36. ML, 12.1,2
37. Ibid., 12.26
38. Ibid., 12.27
occupied in different situations and the variety and physical formation of the elephant concerned should be taken into consideration in time of choosing any one of these three positions. 39

The Mataṅgalilā appears to maintain just the opposite view when it is said that the position between the backbone and the hump (of the shoulders), one on the top of the hump, and one to the forepart of the hump are respectively the best, mediocre and the worst positions. 40

The Mataṅgalilā, however, speaks of the different postures of sitting on the elephant's back. These postures are broadly divided into two varieties. In one variety the rider stretches out his legs on both sides of the body of the elephant while in the other variety the rider keeps the knees bent. The first variety may be called Prasāritapāda while the second, Anatajanuka. The latter variety has three sub-varieties as follows: when the bent knees are raised up, the posture is called Utkatajanuka, and when the bent knees are kept low, the posture is called Kurmasana and when the lowered bent knees are brought together on the back of the elephant, the posture is called Manḍukāsana. 41

Styles of movement of the elephant are of three kinds viz. Manda (slow), Śīhṛa (speedy) and Dhāvana (running).

39. GS, vv.1-6, pp.151ff.
40. ML, 12.14
41. ML, 12.15-16
If the zigzag motions in the forward and backward directions are taken into account, the number of styles become five.\textsuperscript{42}

At the time of training an elephant, in all eight persons should be engaged as guards; three persons in its front, two persons on its either sides at the point of the ears and two more persons behind. The trainee elephant also should be flanked in either sides by two fully trained she-elephants. Then all the people equipped with weapons (āra) in hand should begin to subdue the elephant.\textsuperscript{43}

All the treatises uniformly recognize the applications of three different agencies in the time of training. The agencies are viz. Vāk (speech), Pāda (striking by foot), and Āṅkusa (goading).\textsuperscript{44}

The trainer should use any language convenient for him to make the elephant understand the orders. He may use Sanskrit, Pākrit or colloquial.\textsuperscript{45} There are some common terms used in different places. Such terms are like ehi ehi, to make it come forward, heda heda, to make it retreat, phāpa phāpa, to make it remove its sides, Visī, to make it seat, nunnu, to make it rise up, vāpihara, to make it contract its trunk, bharīha, to make it raise its trunk, hīja hīja,

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 12.13
\textsuperscript{43} Gs', v.1-2, p.148
\textsuperscript{44} Gs', v.12, p.150
\textsuperscript{45} Gs', v.4, p.148

ML, 12.9
Manasa, 3.2.290

ML, 12.3
Manasa, 2.3.289
to make it adhere to a pillar etc., bhale bhale, to make it raise its body, kih kih, to make it lower its hind part, de de, to ask for something, hehaiya twice to make it strike against something by the trunk, curu curu to make it eat grass, mā mā to prohibit, higa higa, to make it strike on the ground with its tusks, hu hu to make it strike the outside by the trunk, leca leca, to make it move slowly, iccha bhūbha to call it, ghe ghe to ask it to accept something.  

After making the elephant understand the words of instruction, he is engaged in learning practical deeds. The instruments required for binding the trainee elephant are such as tether post (ālāna), collars, girths, bridles, legchains, fetters etc.  

Weapons like goad, hook, bamboo staff, mace, and probe are necessary for training the elephants. These weapons are of four types in respect of their shapes, viz. Bajra, Ardhacandra, Nakha and kaitakakantaka, and are used in the parts of the elephant's body like the Vitāna fleshy parts), Vidu (middle of the temples), Grīvā (neck), Nirvāṇa (outer corner of the eye), Māstaka (head) and Avagraha (forehead).

46. Manasa, 2.3.291-300
47. Asś, 2.32
48. ML, 12.18
49. Ibid., 12.19
Elephants are grouped into four heads according to the nature of training. They are Damva (tamable), Sannahya (trained for war), Aupavahya (trained for riding) and Vyala (rogue).

Tamable elephants are trained with the help of trained domestic elephants. They are first trained to give up their wild nature which is possible only amidst the domestic elephants. They are trained through various stages as skandhagata, stambhagata, varigata, avapatagata and yuthagata. In the first stage it is forced to take a man on its shoulders, in the second stage it is tied up in a tether post, in the third stage it is taken to the water, in the fourth stage it is made to lie in pits and in the last stage it is attached to its herd.50

War elephants are trained in activities like upaasthana (drill), samvarthana (turning), samvana (advancing), vadha-vadha (trampling down and killing), hastivydha (fighting with rival elephants) and nagaravana (assailing forts and cities). Before instructing these motions, it is tied with girth, put on collars and is made to work in company with a trained herd.51 They are furnished with mail armour, club, arrow and other instruments and are decorated with garlands called Vaijayanti, Ksurapramala, litter and housing etc.

50. As, 2.32.
51. Ibid., 2.32
Elephants trained for riding are grouped into seven heads viz. Kuñjaraupavāhya (which takes a man to mount over it when in company with other elephants), Sānnāhyonapavāhya (which suffers riding when led by war elephants), Dhoraṇa (which is taught trotting), Ādhanagatika (which is taught various movements), Yaśthyunapavāhya (which is taught to move by using a stuff), Tetrōpavāhya (which is taught to move by using an iron hook), Sūddhopavāhya (which is taught movements without the help of any stuff). This type of elephant is used in hunting.\textsuperscript{52}

The Vyāla elephants are trained only through punishment.\textsuperscript{53}

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52. Aś, 2.32
53. Ibid., 2.32
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