Chapter - 5

HUNTING THE GIANTS

“Elephants are found in considerable numbers in the Assam Valley and in the lower slopes of the Assam Range. They are also occasionally hunted with success in South Cachar and in South-eastern Sylhet. Extensive operations have been undertaken by the Government Khedda department; and mahals, or the right of hunting within certain areas not reserved for that department, are leased by auction sale to the highest bidder, who pays a royalty of Rs. 100 on each animal captured. During the period when the Government kheddas were working in the Garo Hills about 400 elephants were annually captured in the Province-The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908.”

Elephant hunting was different from wildlife hunting. Wild animals like rhinoceros, tigers, leopards, bears, wolves, hyenas, wild boars, wild pigs, hogs, wild dogs, deer, and bear were hunted for games but elephant was preferred to be captured. Still it was killed for the sake of ivory. Rouge elephants were killed for which a reward of Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 was sanctioned by the government. Other than administrative purposes elephant was used as a hunting friend. This chapter deals with the elephant hunting, how it was different from other wildlife hunting, elephant catching, khedda department, private lease system, the management of elephants, elephant protection policies, conflict over elephants and revenue from elephants. Elephant have always played an important role in the history of the province of Assam. A part of being a royal gift it was a sign of royal prestige and magnificence. It formed a major item as war booty in the pre-colonial period. It was considered as a major item of generating revenue in the colonial period.

---

1 The Imperial Gazetteer of India, (1908), Published Under The Authority Of His Majesty Secretary of State for India in Council, Oxford, Clarendon Press, P. 20
leisure pursuit of Ahom kings. They were caught not only for riding, hunting, and war purposes but also for carrying loads and dragging wood and for their tusks before coming of the British. Elephants were considered as an inevitable part of the army during the Ahom period. They were also used for clearing jungles to make new paths. Catching elephant for domestication was an old practice in the province. The importance of elephant during the Ahom age can be understand from the fact that the Ahom king Pratap Singha had an ambition of becoming the owner of one thousand elephants and assuming a title of pride, “Gajapati”. Though his ambition remained unfulfilled but he raised a small township (near to present Jorhat) known as Gajpur (a town of elephant). There was considerable research on elephant during the Ahom age. The Hastividyarnava (treaties on elephant) was prepared under the royal patronage of the King Siva Singha by Sukumar Karkayastha. According to the Nitisara of Kamandaka, the function of elephant is to help the soldiers in war against the enemy. Elephant hunting in the early part of the nineteenth century was primarily for the administrative purpose as it was a major part of military that time. They were also used for transportation by the colonial administrators into remote areas. Elephants were also caught in Assam for its supply in the markets of Bengal. Killing of elephants for sports and for its ivory was common. Even there are evidences of killing elephants for its flesh. Some of the tribes of Assam like Kookies (Kukis), Nagas and Mikirs (Karbi) used to kill the elephants not only for the sake of their teeth but also consider the flesh as a delicacy and eat it with great relish. Butler viewed that “The Kookies are fond of hunting, and destroy many elephants for the sake of the tack, which always meet with a ready sale in our markets.”

4 Gogai, Lila, (1986) The Buranjis, Historical Literature Of Assam (a critical survey), New Delhi, Omsons, 217
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.p.131
10 (ASA), 1851-64 K.W to file No.36/43, Bengal Government papers, papers relating to asserting of rights by government to hunt elephants in government territories. Letter from Lieut.Col.F. Jenkins, Commissioner of Assam to the Board of revenue, Fort William, Dated Goughatty, the 12th August, 1854.
11 Butler,J., (1854) Travels And Adventure In The Province Of Assam, During A Residence Of Fourteen Years, London: Smith, Elder and Co.,p. 89
section of elephant’s tusk from 2 ½ inches to 3 ½ inches deep) was used as the principal arms ornament by the Angami Naga tribe.\textsuperscript{12} Elephant teeth were also used as an item of gift. The chief of Luchye Kookie tribe residing to the South of Cachar presented to Mr. G. Verner, a British officer, two elephant teeth, as a symbol of their friendly relation.\textsuperscript{13} More over the clan like Kookie are accustomed to kill an elephant on the death of their Rajahs and men of rank and consider it to be a sacred duty indispensable for the due performance of the obsequies of the deceased.\textsuperscript{14} Zamindars also used elephants in their estates as an essential transport in those areas which were without roads or which were liable to water logging during the rains.\textsuperscript{15} Handicraft industries specializing in ivory were also flourished in the region.\textsuperscript{16} It was also strategic importance that led the British government to take initiatives towards the preservation of elephant. Gradually British took over its management in its own hands and played monopoly over it. However, earlier it was mere part of their sport. This change in their attitude towards a wild species and their desire to establish their control over the access of the animal led to conflicts between the state and the indigenous people for their rights over the animal. The government initiated the preservation of the animal and finally the legal act for the preservation of elephant came only in 1879. In 1854 Lieut.H.S. Bivar emphasized the need of putting some restriction on the killing of the animal and to preserve the noble race of animals which was fast decreasing and peculiarly fitted for the wants of a country like Assam.\textsuperscript{17} Elephant played an important place in the history of the fauna preservation movement of Assam as well as in generating revenue.\textsuperscript{18} The elephant hunting was different as they were used for other wild animals hunting.

Sir. William Jardine Bart showed the picture of elephant as early as 1836 which

\textsuperscript{12} Hutton, J.H., (1921), \textit{The Angami Nagas, With Some Notes On Neighbouring Tribes}, London: Macmillan and co., p.24
\textsuperscript{14} Lahari- Choudhury, D.K., (2006) \textit{A Trunk Full Of Tales}, New Delhi: Permanent Black, p.10
\textsuperscript{15} For a detailed study on this see. Rajen Saikia, (2001) Social and Economic History of Assam (1863-1921), New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, p.53-58
\textsuperscript{16} (ASA), 1851-64 K.W to file No.36/43, Bengal Government papers, papers relating to asserting of rights by government to hunt elephants in government territories.letter from Lieut.H.S. Bivar, Assistant Agent, Governor General in Charge of Northern Cachar, to Col.F.Jenkins, Agent Governor General and Commissioner of Assam, Gowhaty.Dated North Cachar, 28\textsuperscript{th} July 1854.
\textsuperscript{17} Sakia, A.J., (2011), \textit{Forest and Ecological History of Assam,1826-2000}, New Delhi: OUP,
depicted the conflict between tiger and people sitting on howdah (See fig. No. 5.1). It served strategic need it was mostly preferred to capture than to kill. It became an important part of army, it was used as a beast of burden, it was used to clear off the jungles, it was used for transportation in remote areas and it was used as a friend for hunting. Elephants were in constant requisition for garden service and cannot be spared for the hunt. They were used to roam the jungles of the hill tracts in considerable number.

Elephants were also used to hauling logs from the forest to the railways. A.C. Newcombe, Civil Engineer, viewed that “Elephants are better when the journeys are in jungly parts where the large trees and bamboos are not too thick, or over the rough and sometimes swampy ground where the tall reeds grows.” Barker, a tea planter viewed that, “A few words concerning the most useful brute in Assam, the elephant, will not be out of place. If they were to die out, I really can form no idea how the Eastern world would get on without them, or what could take their place.” Colonel Pollok viewed that “There is splendid sports to be had in Burma and Assam; but without elephants it is much wiser not to go to those remote provinces for shooting or without these necessary slaves you can neither see nor approach the localities where game abounds.” The Assamese elephants were large and handsome, and as ‘shikaries’ second to none.

---

20 Barker, M.G., (1884) The Tea Planter’s Life In Assam, Calcutta: Thacker : Spink & co., p.90
21 Stebbing, E.P., (1920) Diary Of A Sportsman Naturalist In India, London: John Lane, p.99
22 Newcombe, A.C., (1905), Village Town And Jungle Life In India, London: William Blackwood And Sons, p.268
23 Barker, M.G., (1884) op.cit., p. 204
24 Pollok, C., (1896), Fifty Years Reminiscences Of India, A Retrospect Of Travel, Adventure And Shikar, London: Edward Arnold, p. 167
5.1 Kheddah Department

Though elephant-human conflict cannot be ignored during British rule, as discussed earlier, it was mostly preferred to capture than to kill. With the progress of administration of elephant catching and its management the responsibility of capturing elephants was entrusted either to the kheddah department or private lessees (auctioned by the government for hunting rights of the elephant mahals to private lessees). The right of catching wild elephants in the jungles of Assam was a state monopoly.\(^\text{25}\) The kheddah department established in Dacca began to work in the early part of the nineteenth century which not only monopolized the capture of elephants but also their training and sale. In its initial phases the kheddah department was run by the private contractors for the service of the commissariat department in Bengal. In the mid-19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, elephants were generally brought to Dacca from Burma either in sailing vessels or overland but the large mortality of wild elephants could not be within the subcontinent especially in southern and north-eastern parts of the country. European management was introduced around the same time to lessen fatalities. The

kheddah department however did not prove to be economically remunerative. The department was abolished in 1862 for some time due to the failure of market supply. It started working properly only from 1866. Since then the area of Garo hills in Assam was considered to be the best place for elephant hunting. It was only from 1882 onwards that the department became self-supporting. The kheddah department with the help of ‘koonkies’, trained elephant and native hunter used to worked out in the forest of Assam along with the other areas of the region in the cold season. After that the captured elephants had to march to Dacca before the commencement of rain in the month of May. These elephants were trained in Dacca till about November and then they were sent to Barrackpore from where they were allotted to different commissariat stations. E.P. Stebbing, British sportsman and naturalist viewed, “Although protected now by Government their numbers were sadly thinned by the Kheddah Department, a Department which has probably done more to destroy game and thin out elephants during the last score of years dozen of British sportsmen could do in double the period of time.”

The Dacca kheddah could never established its credentials as it was bore heavily on the state’s coffer. Despite being function on a self-supporting basis and profitably contributing to the imperial revenue G.P. Sanderson, officer in charge of government elephant catching established in Mysore, and his successors had to consistently articulate a justification for the existence of the department. Many factors were led to the existence of the kheddah department and its operation in Assam. First, Assam had proved to be greatly advantageous in capturing the wild elephants and because of Kheddah operations in Assam, the market price of the animals had been kept low. It was also argued that the purchase of elephants for the government service would be more difficult and expensive. Secondly, the kheddah department formed a reserve of transport which was maintained at no extra expanse and thus proved valuable for small military expedition operating on the north-eastern frontier since 1864. Thirdly, the long experience of kheddah department made the department the expertise of capturing, training and managing elephants.

In spite of all these arguments, the question of the abolition of the Kheddah department was raised from time to time. The local official argues that elephants could be obtained at lower prices through the lease system. From the economic point

---

26 Stebbing, E.P., op. cit., p.99
27 (NAI), Revenue and Agriculture Department, Kheddahs Branch, A Pros Nos, 663-64 April 1891.
of view the Government Officials, the loss of revenue could have been gained through
the leasing of elephants mahals to private lessees. The existence of kheddah
department was not without hindrance. It was established mainly for managing and
regulating the elephant catching in the hands of government. Inspite of that it also
fulfilled the need of elephants for military without any extra expenses of the
government. Thus, the kheddah department functioned as an institution through which
government controlled/regulated the elephant catching.

Fig.5.2. Captured elephant in stockade, Source: reproduced from the progress report of forest
administration in the province of Assam for the year 1945-46
Fig. 5.3. A large tusker soon after capture, source: Photo by M.C. Bhattacharjee, P.F.S. Reproduced from annual progress report on forest administration of Assam, (1939-1940)
5.2. Private Lease System

Apart from Khaddah department, the right of capturing elephant was also given to the private lessees. The free-to-hunt and catch policy continued till 1874. After 1874-75 new regulations came into existence under which the government created elephant mahal or operational partition in the districts and the right of elephant catching in those tracts was sold by auction to private leases. Large jungles inhabited by the elephants were divided into mahals and the right to capture elephants in those mahals was sold by public auction to the highest bidder. During 1917-18 the mahals or each hunting area was open for a period of two years and was then closed for eight years. Mainly the British officials, local chiefs or mahaldars used to buy the Mahals. License for hunting in any Mahal was granted for particular hunting season which was mainly supposed to be from October to March. Simultaneous rest was also supposed to given to every elephant mahals. In many aspects the private lease system was an extension of the kheddah department. Both system functioned as complement to each other for the supply of elephants to the government commissariat department in Bengal yet very often their contradictory strategies created tension. Under the kheddah system the licenses in the form of elephant mahals were granted to the natives by its superintendent. But the lessees were subjected to the rules and conditions granted under the elephant preservation policy. The license holders were liable to the forest department rules with regard to the catching of elephants in all reserved or protected forests falling within the Mahals. Lessees were allowed to hunt elephants only in those forests which were not worked upon by the government kheddah. The lessees were granted permission to hunt in particular Mahals on a royalty of Rs.100 on every elephant caught and a sum of Rs. 50/- for every calf. The government reserved the right to purchase all elephants from Mahal owner on payment of Rs. 600/- for each elephant. Even elephants measuring 7 feet and over in height were first offered for sale to the government at the under mentioned prices, and could not be taken or disposed of by the lessees or any authorized person without first making such offer of

---

28 Sakia, R., (2001), Social and Economic History Of Assam (1853-1921), New Delhi: Manohar, p. 130
29 Sakia, R., (2001), op.cit, p. 130
30 Assam Legislative Council Proceeding, 5 October, 1918 cited in Revenue Administration In Assam by D.D.Mali, opcit, p. 209
31 (WBSA), Proceeding of The Governor of Bengal, Revenue Dept., June 1873
32 Sakia, R., op.cit., p. 133
sale to the government and only after government decline to exercise its right of purchase.

From 7 and ½ feet to 8 feet at ........................ Rs 300
From 8 feet to 8 and ½ feet at ........................ Rs 400
From 8 and ½ feet to 9 feet at ........................ Rs. 500

These license holders were not allowed to catch elephants by noosing or destroy any for the sake of its tusk, under penalty of the confiscation of the elephants caught in one case and of a fine of Rs. 500 for every elephant killed. The license holders had also to report to the deputy commissioner end of all the elephants caught by him or on his behalf at the end of every month and if these conditions were violated the license of the lessees were liable to get cancelled. A fee of Rs.20/- for each elephant, per year was also taken from the owner of the elephants whose elephants were used for dragging timber. Thus, even though it was a private leased system but mainly controlled by the government. But as it was necessary to keep down the number of elephant to save the crops as when crops were ripening elephants could do much damage unless the numbers of the herds were regularly kept down. For this reason hunting rights continued to be sold.

The whole Assam valley was divided by the Chief Commissioner, into blocks to be worked in succession for two years at a time and then to rest for two or more years, with a view to ensure that every year a certain number of elephant-hunting grounds in Assam proper should be offered on lease, so as to provide opportunities for continuous employment to the professional hunters who maintain large numbers of very valuable hunting elephants. The private leases were mainly bought by the British official or local chiefs used to buy the Mahals. License for hunting in any particular mahal was granted for particular hunting season which was mainly supposed to be from October to march and simultaneous rest was also supposed to

33 (WBSA), Proceeding of the Governor of Bengal, Revenue Dept., June 1873
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 RAPA, 1876-77, Shillong, 1878, p.134
38 Rune of Rambrai was permitted to catch elephant in his Elaka. (ASA, Assam secretariat, military B proceeding September, 1891 Nos. 41/42) in another case Mr. G. Earrol Gray was granted a license to hunt elephants in two elephant Mahals of the North Lakhimpur subdivision known as Nos, 14 (A) and 14 (B) for the season ending, the 31st march 1899 (ASA, II E (fin.) Assam Secretariat, Military B, Oct. 1898 nos.25/29)
give to every elephant mahals. It was mainly for a period of two years. In many aspects the private lease system was an extension of the kheddah department. Both functioned as complement to each other for the supply of elephants to the government commissariat department in Bengal yet very often their contradictory strategies created tension. Under the kheddah system the licenses in the form of elephant mahals were granted to the natives by its superintendent but the lessees were subjected to the rules and conditions granted under the elephant preservation policy. The license holder were also liable to the forest department rules with regard to the catching of elephants in all reserved or protected forests falling within the Mahals. Thus, lessees were allowed to hunt elephants only in those forests which were not worked upon by the government kheddah. Generally the lessees had to give half of the elephants measuring over 6 feet and below 8.5 feet at the shoulders to the government as rent. Sometime the lessees were also granted permission to hunt in particular Mahals on a royalty of Rs.100 on every elephant caught and a sum of Rs. 50/- for every calf. Elephants measuring below 6 feet and over 8 feet in height were allowed to remain in the lessees possession but the government was free to purchase any of these elephants and that too at a much lower price than that of the animals newly captured. But it is worthy to note that if for any reason the lessee did not capture any elephant from the Mahal he could claim the refund. A refund of Rs. 4275/-was ordered by government to the lessee Mahadev Saikia as he did not catch elephants from the Mahals Jaintia. It is also interesting to note that even the local rulers were not permitted to hunt in their own Elaka or estate without the permission from the government as all the elephants were supposed to be the property of the government. They were also supposed to pay royalty for every elephant they capture. Thus, even though it was a private leased system but mainly controlled by the government.

In the second half of the 19th century the government of India directed that the administration of elephant hunting to be done through the military department and the

---

39 In 1891 the marginally noted elephant mahals of Nowgong, khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills and the North Cachar were given simultaneous rest for two years.(ASA, II E (Fin.) Assam Secretariat, Military B, Progs, August 1891, Nos.148-156) the Panisagar and Nichantpur elephant mahals in Cachar were given Simultaneous rest during 1889-90. It was further extended in 1892 for the next cold season. (ASA. Assam Secretariat, Revenue, No.1795, 1892)
40 (ASA), Assam Secretariat, Financial department II E, file no.III f 291, 1907.
41 The Rune of Rambrai was permitted to capture elephant in his Elaka for a term of two years upon payments of Rs 100/- on every elephant caught. ASA, Assam Secretariat, Military B, proce. Sept.1891 Nos. 41/42
capture of elephants became privilege of this department only. During this period the
department used to receive supply of elephants from Assam. The provincial
government could also meet their requirement of elephants for transport by taking it
from the government after paying value fixed for the same. This shows the
dissatisfaction of government with the existing systems viz., Kheddah and private
lease though elephant hunting was not in the hands of the Military department for a
long time.

5.3 Methods of Elephant Catching

As far the methods of elephant capturing is concerned mainly kheddah system and
Mela Shikar were used. In the first method the elephants were captured mostly
during the months of October and March. In this method, kheddah or stockades were
built around the water bodies or in some strategic locations where herds of wild
elephants can be driven into and trapped in such stockades. In this method it was
possible to capture a herd of elephants at a time. There are evidences of capturing of
forty, sixty and even eighty elephants at a time in the Sylhet forest. Around 20 to 25
people were required to work to construct the stockades which were placed in close
proximity to any pung which showed the signs of being visited by the wild elephants.
It mainly took time of five to six weeks. After that these people had to wait patiently
for the advent of the herd of elephants at the lick. This wait might sometimes exceed
to 2 or 3 months but sooner or later one night a herd would turn up and as it was
unsuspectingly feeding at the lick it would be quietly surrounded and the firing of one
or two guns and the blowing of a few hours would be enough to make it rush off in
the required track. Before the herd of elephants could recover from its alarm it would
find itself inside the stockades and they would be lost to the jungles forever. Kheddah
work required a primary expense of Rs.8000 to Rs.10,000 and the lessee was required
to have in possession a large number of elephants to tame the wild elephants so that
they could be used for various works. Sanderson viewed that such a huge investment
was practicable only for the government and native princes. The kheddah system of
elephant capturing was similar to that of the gurh shikar as it also implies the capture

43 For more detail please see, Daniel, J.C., “The Asian Elephants- A Natural History”, Dehradun: Natraj
Publishers, P. 210-228.
44 (ASA), 1851-64, Home dept. file no.36/43, Bengal Govt. papers relating to asserting of rights by
government to hunt elephants in govt. territories. No. 259 of 1854, letter from
C.S.Davidson,Commissioner of Revenue to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, lower provinces.
of the wild elephants by decoying them into stockade enclosures called gurhs. The kheddah method was also used in other region like Mysore for capturing wild elephants.

The second method of elephant catching is known as Mela shikar, one of the oldest methods of elephant catching along with the pit fall system. "The process adopted under this system is that the wild elephants are pursued by men mounted on tame elephants and are hunted down and noosed." The process sounds very simple although elephants were caught often in some dangerous situations. In this method one or two parties consisting of three koonkie (tame elephants trained to hunting and catching wild ones), two of which must be selected for speed and endurance, called uthanee and one for its strength, named khoonti were sent to the resorts of the wild herds. Sometimes the catching is possible with only one koonki and if the quarry is a small one but it is better to do with two or three khoonti to catch and master a big one. These parties mainly reconnoitre in open places at early morning or in the evening for the wild elephants always keep to heavy forest during the heat day and come out in open place only in the morning and evening time. These, on nearing a ‘Khanja’ or herd put on full speed to single out an elephant and then give an immediate chase. The koonki chased the animal until one koonki gets along side of the wild elephants. When the koonki were alongside the phandi or noosemen seeing his opportunity noosed the wild ones. If the noosed animal is a powerful one it struggles long and violently before it is choked and down. After the animal was choked the running nooses were loosed to give breath to them and a stopper was put on each to prevent their running. Two khoonki were again press on each side and one or two more pushing from behind forcibly dragged away the captured animal to a kheddah where it was strongly picketed and starved into tameness. After a month or two it became quite and tractable enough to be marched homewards, in the mean time they were led out frequently by the koonkies and gradually became accustomed to a rider. M’cosh astutely describes the catching of wild elephants. In his words “The plan adopted for

46 (NAI), Foreign, Political branch, Political A, Dec. 1876, Nos. 82-87, from S.O.B. Ridsdale, Esq., C.S., Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam to T.H. Thornton, Esq, D.C.L, Offg. Secy to Govt. of India, foreign Dept. No. 3680 dated Shillong, 6th Nov. 1876.
48 Ibid.
49 (NAI), Foreign, Political branch, Political A, Dec. 1876, Nos. 82-87, from S.O.B. Ridsdale, Esq., C.S., Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam to T.H. Thornton, Esq, D.C.L, Offg. Secy to Govt. of India, foreign Dept. No. 3680 dated Shillong, 6th Nov. 1876.
catching them is by female elephants, called Koonkis. The female are driven into the haunts of the wild ones, where they are joined by the wild ones, where they are driven into the haunts of the wild ones, where they are joined by the wild males. In the course of the courtship the Mahouts so contrive shackle the unsuspecting gallants to some convenient tree, that they are fixed to the spot immoveably, and thus are allowed to remain till confinement and want of food render them easily tameable.\(^{50}\)

The fresh elephants become thin and weak during the first six months. During the first rainy season there are most chances of elephant being ill and then die. If the elephant passes this stage the chances of their demise decrease after which they were called Pucka i.e. safe and acclimatized. There is no certainty about the mortality of fresh elephants and it is therefore always attributed to kismet or chance. This is why a kheddah wala or an elephant catcher is called to be an Ameer or Fugeer i.e. a prince or a beggar so proverbially his gains were uncertain and his trade was so full of risk.\(^{51}\)

This is because many of the elephants died before they were domesticated.\(^{52}\) A well-known appellation Hati-dhani i.e. rich in elephant wealth became very famous during British rule. There were many who made their pile out of earning from elephant hunting. Notable among them were Gangagobinda Phukan, Bhagyamalla Barua, Earl Grey, Kingsley, Radhakanta Phukan, Dhanbar Gam, Sadhanchandra Hazarika, Lankeswar Gohain and Manik Hazarika.\(^{53}\) Tarunram Phukan, earned fame and money by hunting elephants.

Other than these two methods there was minor mela shikar arranged from 1934 onwards. It was the name given to the system under which a few Koonkies were stationed with fixed camps near paddy fields which were likely to be raided by herd elephants. Permanent protection could only be given to crops by the removal of the offending herds by the means of kheddah operations, but mahals could only be opened in rotation on account of the market for elephants being limited. Koonkies stationed nearby are a positive safeguard to crops, but this new system is unpopular for the elephant catchers, who naturally would prefer to go and seek for the herds instead of waiting, without any certainty, for them to approach the fields.\(^{54}\)

\(^{50}\) M’Cosh, J. (1837) *Topography of Assam*, Calcutta: Bengal Military orphan press, p.44


\(^{52}\) John M’Cosh, (1837) *op.cit* p.41


\(^{54}\) RPFA for the year 1934-35, Shillong: AGP (1936), p.22
This system was more popular because of its low capital investment. The people who keep koonkies and supply the funds for catching elephants were known as ‘kheddah walas’. An elephant catcher or kheddah walas’s establishment consists of the following things. First, Koonkis i.e. tame elephants trained to hunting and catching wild elephants, second, phanaits i.e. noosemen, third Lohattias i.e. elephant driver, fourthly, mates i.e. under drivers and fifthly an abundant supply of ropes and cables for catching and tying up their massive quarry.\(^{55}\) Thus though the process sound easy but it’s not like that. It took tough work and patience for capturing herd of elephants at a time.

Other than these the pit fall system of elephant catching was also prevalent the oldest method of trapping wild animals.\(^{56}\) Even sometimes a ‘rogue’ elephant was captured by this method.\(^{57}\) Later British government restricted the elephant catching by this method. Government ignored those methods in which the chances of death of elephants were more. They preferred to capture them alive than dead. But the rogue elephants were preferred to be shot. Sometime it was necessary to shoot one that went ‘must’ and was pillaging the crops and attacking villages.\(^{58}\) The progress report of forest administration in the province of Assam for the year 1937-39 accounted one such killing of elephant in Haltugaon division by Mr. Gyles Mackrell. The elephant was reported to kill several people and had caused a good deal of damage to timber extraction carts. The report says “one particularly large and troublesome bull (male elephant) known locally as the ‘Bishmuri goonda’ was accounted for by Mr. Gyles Mackrell, who was good enough to report details of its measurement as folllows:- Circumference of forefoot 5’-4¼”, height 10’- 9½”, tusks 6’-0½” and 4’-11½” (the latter having been broken off) and girth of tusks 17 ¾” and 18”. This animal was known to have killed four people and had been followed up by Mr. Mackrell on nine separate occasions but he had only seen it once.\(^{59}\) The rogue elephants wonder about the country doing an immense amount of mischiefs but it was easy enough to get the permission to shoot the dangerous brutes.\(^{60}\) A.J. Milroy, the Conservator of forest,
Assam, expressed that nothing could be done other than to thinning out of the herds by shooting. At the initial stage he reported that 28 elephants were destroyed all of them were crop-raiders and some of them man-killers in 1936.\textsuperscript{61} It was very difficult to kill a rogue elephant. Colonel Pollok remarked that nothing could be worse than a rogue elephant.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{center}
Fig.5.4. Rogue elephant killed by Mr. Gyles Mackrell, Source: Reproduced from the Annual progress report on Forest Administration of Assam (1937-38)
\end{center}

\textbf{5.4 The Management of Elephants}

The Assamese people had good knowledge of the maintenance of elephant health and wellbeing.\textsuperscript{63} “\textit{Hastirbidyanarba}”, treaties on elephant, prepared under patronage of Ahom Kings, thoroughly describes several methods of elephant keeping, the types of elephant, its breeding, domestication and the mode of training etc.\textsuperscript{64} Under the British rule the everyday affairs of the elephants was looked after by the district administrator and supervised by a district superintendent. A record of captured elephants in various shikar was maintained by the district forest offices including its name, size, health and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{61} RPFA for the year 1935-36, Shillong: AGP, 1936, p.16, para, 115
\textsuperscript{62} Pollok, C., (1894), \textit{Incidents Of Foreign Sport And Travel}, London: Chapman & Hall, P.125
\textsuperscript{63} Sakia, A.J., (2011), \textit{op.cit.}, p. 278
\textsuperscript{64} Choudhary, P.C., (1976) \textit{Hastirvidyarnava}, Gauhati: Assam Publication Board.
\end{flushright}
details about its owner. Looking after health and working capability was an affair of Mahaut (caretaker). He was responsible for all the affairs related to the health of elephant and its working capability. If for any reason the health of an elephant deteriorated, which was mainly happens because of heavy workload, was ascribed to the negligence of Mahaut. There are some evidences when the Mahaut’s services were dispensed because of the death of elephants. Mahaut and grass cutter were maintained for the entertainment of elephants at the expenditure of government. Jamadar used to get Rs. 12/- per month.

The elephants were maintained at the cost of the state. During 1869-70, the total cost of keeping and maintaining 5 elephants was found to be approximately Rs. 2,214. The expenditure was for keeping jammaddar, mahout, grass cutter, cost of medicine and ration. If for any reason elephants died the responsibility fall upon the Jamadar. In case of elephant establishment in Goalpara Jamadar was dismissed from his service where two out of four government elephants were died. Thus, no case of negligence in the maintenance of elephants was tolerated by the government.

Buying of elephant mahals were not afforded by the Hunters. Sanderson admitted that most of the hunters were of poor economic background and could not invest resources. The hunters of the Miri community had mainly income from agriculture. The mahaldars belonged to rich social class who used to lease out their rights to skilled hunters. They often under quoted the number of elephants they captured and earned extra income. According to Sanderson these middle strata i.e. mahaldars used to have huge profit and thus, played an important role in elephant management.

5.5 Elephant Protection Policies

Though the preservation of wild animals started much later the attempts at preservation of elephant started in the mid of the nineteenth century because of its strategic needs. Various strategies and techniques were adopted by the government to exclude the local people from the high ranked zamindars and native chieftains to the local inhabitants and forest dwellers, to gain the maximum profit from elephant hunting. The establishment of kheddah department and the private lease system were

65 Elephants establishment in Goalpara, government of Bengal papers, file no.71/111 papers-2 agriculture department (ASA), as mentioned by Arup Jyoti Saikia, op.cit.p.286.
66 (ASA), Bengal Government papers, Agriculture dept., 1873, paper-2, file No. 72/111, Elephant establishment in Goalpara.
67 Ibid
the instrument through which restrictions were put on the open access of the animal. However, this monopoly over the animal was of utilitarian\textsuperscript{68} nature.

The first attempt at the preservation of wild animals or to put some restriction was started only in case of ‘Elephant’, that is only because of its strategic needs, as no restriction was put on the killing of other wild animals. On the other hand a good sum was expended on the killing of wild animals to pay the rewards. Though the Elephant preservation Act of 1879 was first legal attempt at the preservation of the animal, the Act of 1865 also put a fine of Rs. 500/- may also be inflicted by the sections 4 and 5 of Act VII of 1865 for the infringement of forest rules one of which may provide for the issue of a prohibition for the “collection and removal of elephants’ tusk;” but these rules would only apply to “government forests,” declared to be such under section 2 of the Act, and not to open forests generally. But as the rule was not applicable open forest, an immoral trade was found to have grown in the province. Many people for the sake of ivory were seen engaging in wilful destruction of the animal.\textsuperscript{69}

Apprehending that the indiscriminate killing would increase the chances of the extinction of this useful animal, the commissioner apprehended the board of revenue for the adaptation of certain preventive measures with immediate effect.\textsuperscript{70} Hopkinson, submitted a draft embodying certain provisions of law to restrain the capture and killing of elephants. He recommended a fine of Rs.200/- on those who intentionally kills or maims or capture an elephant in Assam\textsuperscript{71}. To portion of the draft underlying the penal provision was as follows, “whoever, without the written permission of the officers authorities by government to grant such permission, in any way intentionally kills or maims or captures an elephant in Assam, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs. 200 for each animal so killed, maimed or capture; and any animal

\textsuperscript{68} Here the term “utilitarian” relates the dictionary meaning in terms of pragmatic use and does not resemble the idea of “English Utilitarians”. Natasha Nongbri has also pointed out that the utilitarian notion of the British was the result of the extension of British monopoly over wild in her article “Elephant Hunting in late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century North-East India, Mechanism of Control, Contestation and local Reaction” Economic and Political Weekly; july 26 2003, p. 318

\textsuperscript{69} Goswami, S., (1987), Aspect Of Revenue Administration In Assam (1826-1874), New Delhi: Mittal,P.128

\textsuperscript{70} (ASA), 1851-64 Home Dept.,K.W to file No.36/43, Bengal Government papers, papers relating to asserting of rights by government to hunt elephants in government territories. Letter from Colonel H. Hopkinson, Agent Governor-General, North East Frontier, and Commissioner of Assam, to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Lower Province, the 12\textsuperscript{th} Dec. 1872

\textsuperscript{71} (ASA), 1851-64 Home Dept.,K.W to file No.36/43, Bengal Government papers, papers relating to asserting of rights by government to hunt elephants in government territories. Letter from Colonel H. Hopkinson, Agent Governor-General, North East Frontier, and Commissioner of Assam, to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Lower Province, the 12\textsuperscript{th} Dec. 1872
killed or captured shall be confiscated to government. But before the British obtain possession of any province or so long as the province was governed by its own Rajah, as we see in case of Cachar there was an immemorial custom of giving the sole right of catching wild elephants to the Rajah till it was ruled by its 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 teethes found in the District belong 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 teeths were required to pay three annas on every rupees worth of ivory to government. Thus, it can be understood that the restrictions on the elephant hunting was only for generating revenue and not the preservation of the animal. Though these hunting regulations later became an important adjunct to the forest conservancy but earlier it was only an attempt to generate revenue.

The Elephants Preservation act of 1879 can be called as the first attempt for the preservation of fauna in the late nineteenth century colonial India of wild elephants. It came into force on the first day of April 1879. The increasing awareness of the decline in wildlife and the fear of elephant extinction led to the passing of the act which restricted the killing and capture of elephant. With the extension of this act elephants became one of the earliest species of wildlife or most probably the first wild animal that was transformed from an open access resource, whose use had been loosely regulated by native rulers and landed classes into an exclusive privilege of the colonial rulers. The gist of regulation mention in the act clearly distinguishes between the act of shooting and that of hunting. License holders could hunt the elephants but not shoot. However, the rogue elephant or elephants that became dangerous to human life and property could be shoot but at the same time the wild elephant captured and the tusk of wild elephants killed by any unlicensed person shall be the property of the

72 (ASA), 1851-64 Home Dept., K.W to file No.36/43, Bengal Government papers, papers relating to asserting of rights by government to hunt elephants in government territories. Letter from Colonel H. Hopkinson, Agent Governor-General, North East Frontier, and Commissioner of Assam, to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Lower Province, the 12th Dec. 1872
73 Cachar District Record, published by D.Datta, Silchar Assam, 1869, No. 113 letter to the Superintendent & remembrance of legal affairs, fort William from G.Verner, Suprintendent, Cachar, August, 1851. p. 180
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
government. The licenses of killing or capturing wild elephants could be granted to any person by the collector or the deputy commissioner in their district but no such license shall authorizes any one to enter upon any land without the consent of the owner or occupier thereof. The act also put fine of Rs. 500/- or more if any one violates the above condition for the hunting of wild elephants.\(^76\)

In Assam the act has been extended to the district of Kamrup, Darrang, Naugon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Cachar, the Naga hills, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo hills (with the exception of certain portion of the estates of the Zamindars of Bijni), the Eastern Duars in the district of Goalpara, that part of the District of Sylhet which has not been permanently settled, Makokchang subdivision of the Naga Hills District and the Lushai Hills.\(^77\) Bijni Tract is regarded useless for the purpose of Kheddah operations and the government of India does not, therefore, wish to interfere with the rights of the owners to catch elephants in it.\(^78\) In case of Mechpara and Karaibari estate (transferred to the Garo hills from the Goalpara district) the government failed to make any settlement with the zamindars.

The growing number of wild elephants in the later part of the nineteenth century necessitated a conscious policy to regulate the animal. Inspite of meeting the requirement of the state need was felt to regulate their hunting in order to defend the local inhabitants from the havoc caused to their lives and property by the wild elephants. In the meantime the decreasing number of the wild elephants in the south necessitated the protection of elephants. Sanderson ardently admitted that “protection and utilization should go hand in hand.”\(^79\) Thus, though the state’s control over the extension of Elephant Preservation Act was necessitated for the protection of the life and property but it was not without the colonial interest of accreting state monopoly over elephants. It can be call an instrument of the government to play monopoly over elephant catching. Sanderson admitted that all elephant hunting regulations were grossly violated inspite of fixed regulation for the capture of wild elephants in the Assam more rigorous than in any other province. He mentioned an instance where an individual not himself a hunter purchased a lease for Rs.2000 at public auction.\(^80\)

Thus, hunting regulations can be called to be an important adjunct to the forest

---

\(^76\) The Elephant Preservation Act, 1879 (VI Of 1879) , Government Of India Press, New Delhi. 1934

\(^77\) Ibid.

\(^78\) (NAI), Home dept., Judicial Branch, March 1899, Nos. 697 to 702.

\(^79\) (NAI), Revenue & Agriculture Department, (Kheddahs), A Pros, Nos 1001-1027, November 1881.

conservancy. The state control over forest led to the extension of wildlife protection to other species like elephant and rhino in the north east region. But the elephant cases were more ought to be of revenue and not Judicial.

5.6 Conflicts over Elephants

Conflict over elephants was common amongst various branches of administration. The right of kheddah department over the elephants led to the dissatisfaction for the district administration as they could not procure elephants inspite of their need in various works. While in case of Goalpara it was possible to have elephants on hire from the houses of Zamindars but it was not the same in case of Kamrup. Even there were clashes between the Assamese privileged class and colonial authorities on the issue of right of elephants catching. Hostility was common before the commencement of any effective rule to supervise the elephant catching operations. The hostility was so much that the forest department could not keep the right of elephant capturing in its hand for a long time. But the main rival claimants of the wild elephants were the state on one hand and the native Zamindars one the other. The zamindari forest of Goalpara specially the estate of Mechpara and Karaibarizamindars has their independent rights over their estate and the state has no claim over them. In 1882 the Elephant Preservation Act 1879 was extended to the Garo Hills but the Zamindari tracts were not included under the said act. The government’s particular interest over these estates was abundance of wild elephants. Garo hills was an important center of elephant hunting and trade. Sanderson also consider it desirable for the government to acquire the sole right to hunt over them. Sometime the government used to get

---

81 (ASA), 1873 Govt. of Bengal Papers-6, file no. 6/9a, Prohibition against catching of elephants without a licence. Letter from Messrs J. MacKillican and Company to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated Calcutta, the 21st January 1873.Elephant captured by Mr. James Hossack, Manager of the Attabarrie tea estate, on the tea grant No.143 was claimed and sold by the Deputy Commissioner on the ground that all wild elephants are the property of government. Later the assistant Secretary to the govt of Bengal, Agricultural Department viewed that by established custom the elephant in Assam is a royal beast and can only be hunted under Government license. however he directed the commissioner of Assam, to sanction a payment of Rs. 100, as an act of grace to Mr. Hossack which elephant might have fetched. (no. 1241,letter from the Assistant Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal in the Agricultural Department, to the Commissioner of Assam, Calcutta the 9th June 1873). A draft regulation under Cap.33, Vic., forbid the capture of elephants without a license. And it was expected to apply to the districts of Assam, cachar and Sylhet including Cooch Behar Division. No. 2024, letter from the Offg.Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, in the Agricultural Department, to the Commissary-General, Calcutta the 28th July 1873.)

82 ASA, Goalpara papers, file no 62 Govt of Bengal papers 1868

83 Sakia, R., (2001), op.cit., p. 133

84 (NAI), R &A Dept., Kheddah Branch, A Nos. 424-31 Nov 1883.
assistant from zamindars for elephant hunting as in case of elephant hunting in sylhet and cachar district in 1873. The superintendent of kheddahs, Dacca asked for the assistance from the zamindars of sylhet and cachar, to get the full number of coolies to conduct government kheddahs, on the terms that after the government kheddahs are successfully completed they would be allowed to have a kheddah in the same fields on their own account under the usual contract conditions that they pay the usual royalty to government, and government also retains the pre-emption to all elephants captured, that is they promise to sell any or all of the same rates allowed for new capture for taken from the elephant kheddah lessees in Assam.\(^{85}\) The state’s control over the Zamindari estates was long debated. Had the Government has right to catch elephants on the Zamindari estates and if not, what share, as royalty of the captures could the zamindars claim? Certainly the zamindars had no right to catch elephants on their own lands without a license, but the zamindars could bring an action against the government for trespass, but not for the value of the elephants, which are certainly not the property of the zamindars but “fera nature.”\(^{86}\) In this case the zamindars could argue that if they have no right to catch elephants in their own land, the government has no right to come on to my lands to catch them without payment of compensation.\(^{87}\) The Commissary-General J V Hunt and Mr. Sanderson stated that the zamindars has no more right to catch elephants on his zamindari than the English farmer has to shoot his landlord’s pheasants and the elephant hunting is the prerogative of the government and if it would be applicable to all the case what would become of the right of government to hunt elephants anywhere except in waste lands.\(^{88}\) A conflict on the issue of trespass was also not neglected. In one case a wild muchno elephant captured by the zamindar of Gauripur in the district of Mymensingh was detained on the ground that he caught it in a portion of his zamnidari within the permanently settled part of the Sylhet district where the Elephant Preservation Act of 1879 was not in force on the other hand the local officer thought that the elephant was actually caught within the limits of the district of Mymensingh but there was no more evidence to prove the same and to prevent any similar capture of elephants in future it was proposed that the act should be extended to the permanently settled part of

\(^{85}\) (WBSA), proceeding of the governor of Bengal, revenue dept., October, 1873

\(^{86}\) (NAI), Home, Forest, Oct. 1883, 20/B Note by Accounts Branch, Military Department.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) (NAI), Home, Forest, October. 1883, 20/B Note by Accounts Branch, Military Department
Thus, the government wanted to establish monopoly over the elephant hunting and protection of life and property from the ravages and depredation of the animal was not their main concern. This monopoly was established probably under the Elephant Preservation Act. This would also exclude any rights to destroy elephants, an assessable asset.

On the other hand the zamindars claimed that they had been capturing elephants without hindrance for over 60 years and therefore had acquired a right for the elephant hunting. The zamindars were also in conflict with the wild tribes for whom elephant was dangerous beast and the contemporary protection policy used to give them the power to kill the animal in defense of life or property. The zamindars were not only against the government hunting but also to the tribes capturing and destroying of the animal. Thus, the zamindar’s main interest was only in obtaining whatever small tax they could from the elephant hunting.

Prior to the extension of zamindars right on elephant hunting within their own estates, the kheddah practices were often evoked hostile reactions from the native zamindars to what appeared to them as an incursion of their rights. During the commencement of these operations in the Garo hills district some tribes, who were tenants of the Zamindars were persistently threatened against taking up employment in the Kheddah. In fact the labourers were recruited from Chittagaon and its adjoining areas to work out the kheddahs. Over the years the native zamindars tried to disrupt the activities of kheddah department in their territory by various means. In one side the kheddah department was in competition with the zamindars in their hunting activity on the other side the zamindars even tried to prevent elephants from being captured by the department. Other than the zamindars the local tribes were also put hurdle not the kheddah operations. Mr. Wight pointed out that the hunting grounds all lie outside of the inner line and though they could and did prevent natives of Cachar district slipping across that line during Kheddah operations to any extent, it was absolutely out of their power to prevent the hill tribes outside of their jurisdiction.

89 (ASA), Assam Secretariat, 1891 Diary no. 1 Rgr No:12985 g., Rev Dept., Forest, No.586.
90 (NAI), Revenue and Agriculture Dept, Kheddahs, A pros nos 1601-11, November, 1885 mentioned by Natasha Nangbari, Elephant Hunting in late 19th Century North-East India, Economic and political weekly July 26, 2003
91 Ibid.
92 (NAI), Revenue and Agriculture Department, (Kheddahs), A Pros, Nos. 426-27, May 1878, Pro No.426
93 (NAI), Revenue and Agriculture Dept. (Kheddah), Pros Nos. 379-82, Mar 1899, Annual Administration of the Dacca Kheddhas for 1897-1898.
from traversing the hunting grounds in search of game. Only a continuous system of frontier outposts along the outer line would help the British officials in this matter and both political and financial considerations forbid such a course.94 The elephants are said to be a terror to the inhabitants, whose crops are exposed to their ravages though a large numbers were captured annually by the Kheddah department.95 The local people were also unsatisfied with the British policies towards elephant hunting as it hinders their usual work of cultivation. The existence of government kheddah operations in Assam provide evidences of conflicts with the local people claims on forest use and the scientific forestry operations claimed to have an upper hand. Even though the instances of such conflicts were not abounding yet it did exist though not necessarily under the rubric of resistance per se.96 The private license or lease system of elephant conservation, which was created as a fundamental regulatory instrument for the preservation of elephants provided tough competition to the traditional local and tribal shikariees.

Even the creation and reservation of elephant mahals was an abstraction in the agriculture work of local inhabitants and was not without local reaction though passive in nature. In 1881 a petition was made by the Durar Mirsan Chaudhari and other inhabitants of Nagdigram in the district of Cachar praying for the removal of the restriction on the extension of cultivation on land that was reserved for Kheddah operations.97 But the petition was rejected on the ground that the tract in question was one of the best hunting grounds of the kheddah department and its reservation had to be continued for future elephant capturing operations. Thus, government had an upper hand here also and not only the zamindars and native rulers had to compromise with the government policies but also the interest of local inhabitants, wild tribes and forest dwellers were also curtailed.

The awareness of conserving fauna led to the preservation policy of elephant from 1879 in the north-eastern region. It also meant that elephant hunting and its management is a governmental concern. The contest over game thus went in favour of the state. The local shikaries were put in its margin and the exclusive hunting rights of

94 (NAI), Revenue and Agriculture, A, December, 1885, file no. 2884-85,
95 (NAI), Home, Forest branch, 20/B, Oct., 1883, note by Accounts Branch, Military department.
96 Nongbari,Natasha, “Elephant Hunting in late 19th Century North-East India, Mechanism of Control, Contestation and local Reaction ” Ecoonomic and Political Weekly, July 26 2003, p. 3196
97 (NAI), Revenue & Agriculture, Kheddahs, B, April 1881, 1652-53. Prayer from inhabitants of Nagdigram Cachar for the removal of the restriction by which cultivation is prohibited in certain tracts in that district which are reserved for elephant hunting.
the kheddah department denied the hunting access of the native population consisting of native estate-holders and the local inhabitants including forest tribes. Conflicts and tension were common because of various contradictory selfish interests.

5.7 Revenue from Elephants

The British government used to get revenue from certain miscellaneous sources. One of the important sources was the elephant mahals.98 The Administrative Report of Assam (1892-93) says that among the “commercial Staples” of Assam, elephants should also be mentioned.99 The colonial officials marked the abundance of elephant in this region. John M’Cosh mentioned in his book “Topography of Assam” that about 700-1000 elephants were exported every year at an average value of Rs.300.100 The elephants were largely captured by the private contractors and were bought by Bengal government for commissariat department. The revenue derived from this source was originally not very significant. Gradually more and more speculators engaged in this profession and capitalist from outside began pouring into the province with a view to obtain licenses from the government.101 Revenue thus derived in 1866-67 amounted to Rs. 1623 in Cachar, 200 in Khasi and Jaintia hills, 220 in Darrang, 340 in Goalpara, 60 in Lakhimpur, 180 in Kamrup, 340 in Nowgaon, and 1558 in Sibsagar.102 The amount decreased considerably in 1871-72 and a sum of Rs. 1,420 only was collected from the licenses issued to catch elephants in Assam proper.103 Since then the revenue increase considerably as shown in the table no. 4.1. The revenue from elephants mahals was always been shown as ‘miscellaneous land revenue’ but after Assam was separated from Bengal the revenue from elephant mahals was included in the forest branch by Gustav Mann, Deputy Conservator of Forest, Assam. He too mentioned that if this revenue had to transfer under land

98 Mail, D.D., Revenue Administration In Assam, New Delhi, Omsons,1985, p. 209
99 Physical and Political Geography of Assam,(1893) reprint from Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam 1892-93, Shillong: The Assam Secretary Printing Office, p. 43
101 Bengal Revenue Proceeding, January, 1868, No. 12 Appendix A-2, Report on the land revenue administration in lower provinces for 1866-67 cited by Shrutidev Goswami in Aspect f revenue administration in Assam (1826-1874)
102 Bengal Revenue Proceeding, May, 1873, Head No, 7, file 8, 1-3, Appendix B, McNeil to secretary to government of Bengal, revenue department, 18 september,1872, cited by Shrutidev Goswami in Aspect of Revenue Administration in Assam (1826-1874)
103 RAPA for the year 1878-79, Shillong: AGP,1879, p.133
revenue it would seriously affect the forest budget.  

On October, 1876 the government of India declared that the revenue from elephant Mahals and royalty levied on its capture would remain under the department of “forest”. Each year a good sum was of amount was made from elephant hunting which were uses for various administrative purposes. The following table shows the number of elephants captured and revenue earned from elephant catching during each successive year.

Table no.5.1. Statistics of elephant captured and Revenue collected from elephant hunting during 1875-1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of elephants captured</th>
<th>Total revenue</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of elephants captured</th>
<th>Total revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875-76</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs. 55137</td>
<td>1911-1912</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-78</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>Rs.31870/-</td>
<td>1914-1915</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878-79</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>Rs.108656/-</td>
<td>1915-1916</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>Rs.45177/-</td>
<td>1916-1917</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-81</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs.63108/-</td>
<td>1917-1918</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Rs.105450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-82</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>Rs.39269/-</td>
<td>1920-1921</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Rs.32000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882-83</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>Rs.85735/-</td>
<td>1922-1923</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>Rs.230301/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-84</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs.83891/-</td>
<td>1923-1924</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>Rs.202922/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-85</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>Rs.87160/-</td>
<td>1924-1925</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Rs.67340/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-86</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>Rs.51654/-</td>
<td>1925-1926</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs.63872/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886-87</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>Rs.68335/-</td>
<td>1926-1927</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs.58170/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887-88</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>Rs.43412/-</td>
<td>1927-1928</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>Rs.195700/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888-89</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>Rs.38547/-</td>
<td>1928-1929</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>Rs.184250/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-90</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>Rs.28899/-</td>
<td>1929-1930</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>Rs.1,25000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-91</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>Rs.35677/-</td>
<td>1930-1931</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>Rs.77300/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs.18102/-</td>
<td>1931-1932</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Rs.24600/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893-94</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>Rs.47592/-</td>
<td>1932-1933</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>Rs.26900/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894-95</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>Rs.50452/-</td>
<td>1933-1934</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>Rs.44050/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-96</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>Rs.39155/-</td>
<td>1934-1935</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>Rs.32562/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-97</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Rs.45701/-</td>
<td>1935-1936</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>Rs.63000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-98</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>Rs.48019/-</td>
<td>1936-1937</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>Rs.58000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-99</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>Rs.30750/-</td>
<td>1937-1938</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>Rs.40000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>Rs.23390/-</td>
<td>1938-1939</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>Rs.63000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903-1904</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rs.54997/-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report on the administration of the province of Assam during the year 1877-1940

Income from elephants remained a key source of generating revenue. The amount of revenue realized in 1875-76 on account of elephant mahals and royalty on capture of elephants was Rs. 45,431-8.

---

104 (ASA), 1877, Assam Secretariat proceeding, Revenue department, A, progs. nos.2/3, Revenue derived from elephant Mahals, Letter from Gustav Mann, Deputy Conservator of forest, Assam to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, No.158, dated Shillong, 1st January, 1877.

105 Ibid. letter from S.O.B. Ridsdale to the government of India, Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce Department, no. 527 dated Shillong the 19th February, 1877.
If this item had not been transferred from land revenue to forest the forest revenue would have been as follows-

Amount credited in 1875-76 .......... Rs. 107,302
Deduct elephant mahals ................. Rs. 45,432
Actual forest revenue .............. 61,870

This shows a falling off compared with 1874-75 in which year the revenue was Rs. 65,949.\(^\text{106}\) Elephant was an important part of generating forest revenue during the British rule.

The given table shows that elephant hunting was a good source of revenue. The difference in the elephant captured was because of the sale of elephant mahal varies from year to year. It was not possible to lease all the mehals every year, as such a course would rapidly ruin the mahal by driving the elephants away entirely. It was therefore necessary to allow a period of rest after every two years for the mehal to recover itself.\(^\text{107}\) The catching of elephants continued till the end of the British rule.

Answering to the question of Mr. E.W.B. Kenney, during the Legislative Assembly session of 1947-48, Revenue Minister J.J.M. Nichols-Roy replied that, a total of 233 elephants (141 female, 47 tusker, 45 Makhana) were caught during the year.\(^\text{108}\) Thus, a large number of wild elephants were caught under the British rule.

Being an essential adjunct of warfare and royal gift elephant played an important role in the pre-colonial period. The colonial expansion led to the change of their perception towards the animal from a mere sport to a strategic resource not only for the military needs but also for generating revenue and thus, to play monopoly over it, was crucial for the colonial state. No doubt the awareness of game preservation gave rise to protective legislations in India however the Elephant Preservation Act of 1879 also helped in establishing monopoly over the animal. It was an instrument through which the government established their control over the animal and Dacca Kheddahs was an institution through which the capture, training and the sale of elephants was put in control of the government. “The aim of the monopoly was not protection per se but a means to garner and keep alive a critical resource. Capturing combined with the clearance of the elephant’s jungle for plantation became a powerful depleting force,

\(^{106}\) (ASA), 1876, Assam Secretariat proceedings, Revenue department, Progs. 190 Nos 20/23. Revenue derived from elephant Mahals and royalty on Captures, No. 186-2, 287 dated Shillong the 30\(^{\text{th}}\) August 1876.

\(^{107}\) RAPA, 1878-79, Shillong 1879, p. 134.

\(^{108}\) Debate of the Legislative Assembly, 1947, March session, vol. 1 No.1 Sub. Number of wild elephants caught in each district. P., 850
the former whittled down the herds, the latter their natural home.  

Every year a good number of elephants were captured (see, Table no. 5.1) in the province which ultimately led to the demise of the animal from where once they were very numerous. The necessity to put some restriction on the open access of the animal generated the need of regulating elephant hunting in the province that was done through the Khedda and the private lease system as controlled by the government. Various strategies and techniques were adopted by the government to exclude the local people from the high ranked zamindars and native chieftains to the local inhabitants and forest dwellers, to gain the maximum profit from elephant hunting. Though the government strategies to play monopoly over a strategic natural resource was not without local reactions from every strata of people. Though the Elephant Preservation Act was not in any case an absolute right on the part of the government, still it was used as an instrument to gain the full control of a wild species in the province as all the elephants were supposed to be the property of the government and once the said act was extended to a particular area the right of the zamindars or native chieftains over the elephants of their estate was also curtailed. Thus, Khedda department or The Elephant Preservation Act etc., were various means through which the colonial government established its monopoly over a wild species. This monopoly over the animal was of utilitarian nature.

The monopoly over strategic natural resources though not direct but contested, also strengthened the administrative power of the British over the province. May be for any reason the British government started the preservation policies, it also harnessed the ideas like preservation, conservation, utilitarian concepts and the maintenance of ecological balance that ultimately brought consciousness about forest management and conservation. In case of wildlife it led to the emergence of term like game reserve, wildlife sanctuaries and national park for the preservation of wild species. It also provided a systematic management of wild animals. Thus, the contest that was started over a strategic wild animal ultimately led to the evolution of fauna preservation movement in India.

---