

*Aaramyak*

*Nourishing nature to secure our future*

# Biolink

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## ABOUT AARANYAK

Aaranyak is a registered society working towards nature conservation in Northeast India, since 1989. Our strength lies in applied research in biological and social fields and our thrust area of work is the Northeastern India and Eastern Himalayas.

## MISSION

Our mission is to foster conservation of biodiversity in Northeast India through research, environment education, capacity building and advocacy for legal and policy reform to usher a new era of ecological security.

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## THE MARK SHAND AWARD – A HUGE BOOST

Over two decades, Aaranyak has been striving within its limits for conservation of Asian elephants in Northeast India. Adopting a multi-pronged approach, the Elephant Research and Conservation Division (ERCD) of Aaranyak with constant support from all other divisions within the organisation, focuses on facilitating human-elephant coexistence while trying to mitigate human elephant conflict (HEC).

It conducts ecological studies, carries out habitat restoration, conservation education, and supplements the livelihood of people affected by the raging HEC among others to aid in the long-term conservation of elephants particularly in the state of Assam and Meghalaya.

Besides the benevolence of funding agencies sponsoring the organisation's elephant conservation and HEC mitigation efforts, the cooperation of grassroots community and government forest departments have been instrumental in carrying forward Aaranyak's steadfast initiatives to protect elephants as well as people and their property in HEC affected areas as much as possible surmounting numerous hurdles.

In recognition to the its exemplary tireless initiatives for conservation of the last remaining population of Asian elephants, Aaranyak was conferred with the esteemed 'Mark Shand Award' by UK-based prominent conservation charity 'Elephant Family' at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in London on May 13.

Aaranyak's senior scientist, Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, who heads its Elephant Research and Conservation Division, received the award on behalf of the organisation from Their Majesties King Charles and Queen Camilla, Joint Presidents of Elephant Family.

The Team Aaranyak's morale has been boosted immensely by the coveted recognition. While the team has been enthused to carry forwards its biodiversity conservation efforts with renewed zeal, Aaranyak remains grateful to all the people who are working with the organisation to save Asian elephant populations in the Northeastern part of India.

Elephant Family was founded by The Queen's brother, Mark Shand, who was an English travel writer and conservationist, and passed away at the age of 62 in 2014. Shand wrote four travel books and appeared in BBC documentaries about his journeys, most of which were about elephant conservation. His book Travels on My Elephant became a bestseller and won the Travel Writer of the Year Award at the British Book Awards in 1992.

Addressing the distinguished guests in the award giving function, the King of Great Britain said: *'This evening is an opportunity as well to pay a special tribute I think to all the wonderful people who do all the work on the ground to rescue not only elephants, but even more species. As the Trust and Elephant Family develop an even greater ability to manage the human and animal conflict, it just seems to be the greatest example why collaboration is far better than conflict, and also why if we are to rescue this poor planet from continuing degradation and restore some degree of harmony, we must also understand that whatever we take and exploit from nature, we need to give something back to it to enable nature to sustain us.'*

Aaranyak looks forward to greater cooperation from various stakeholders and other states of the region to expand its horizon of work for conservation of Asian elephants in the region.

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## TraMCA: Where biodiversity, culture and cooperation converge

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The Trans-boundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) is a biologically rich landscape spanning southeastern Bhutan and Assam, India. This region forms a vital conservation mosaic in the Eastern Himalayas, stretching from the Raimona National Park in India to Bhutan's Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary.

TraMCA encompasses three protected areas in Bhutan—Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary, Royal Manas National Park, and Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary—along with two biological corridors. In India, it includes the entire Manas Tiger Reserve.

The Manas Tiger Reserve in India and the Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan form the core of this biologically outstanding trans-boundary region that is home to Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Greater one horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), Pygmy Hog (*Porcula salvania*), Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), Hispid hare (*Caprolagus hispidus*) and more than 1,500 other species of mammals, birds and vascular plants.



An aerial view of Manas. Photo by- Binita Baruwati

The landscape boasts diverse habitats, from tropical grasslands at elevations of 40–150 meters to subtropical forests up to 900 meters, and warm broadleaved forests between 1,000 and 2,000 meters. It plays a crucial role in global tiger conservation efforts and reestablishment of the new rhino population through the translocation. Additionally, it supports the conservation of the Asian Elephant and endemic species like the Golden Langur, Swamp Deer, and Bengal Florican.

The region's rivers, descending from the Himalayas to join the Brahmaputra, provide essential ecosystem services to communities in both Bhutan and India. The Manas and Beki River system, flowing through Royal Manas National Park and Manas National Park, underscores the importance of protecting forests that sustain water flows, especially amid expanding hydropower development.

TraMCA is also culturally diverse. In India's Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), the Bodos are the predominant group, alongside Rabhas, Garos, Koch Rajbongshis, and others. Traditional Bodo attire, such as the Dokhna and Jumgra, symbolizes their cultural identity. According to the 2011 Census, BTR had a population of approximately 3.15 million, with a density of 326 persons per square kilometer. Bodos constituted about 31.5% of this population.

In Bhutan's TraMCA areas, communities are primarily Kheng-speaking, followed by Tshangla, Dzongkha, Lhotshampa, and Sharchop dialects. Most youth are multilingual, with English proficiency. Dzongkha, Bhutan's official language, is written in Tibetan script.



Greater one-horned rhino. Photo by- Krunal Desai

Agriculture in the TraMCA landscape remains largely traditional, with local communities cultivating crops such as maize, rice, foxtail millet, rapeseed, buckwheat, barley, vegetables, and fruits. Livestock rearing serves as an essential complement to farming, offering supplementary income. The region's dietary staples include rice accompanied by spicy chilies and cheese (ema datsi), while meat consumption—despite Bhutan's Buddhist majority—is common. Beverages like tea, butter tea, rice wine, and beer are widely enjoyed.

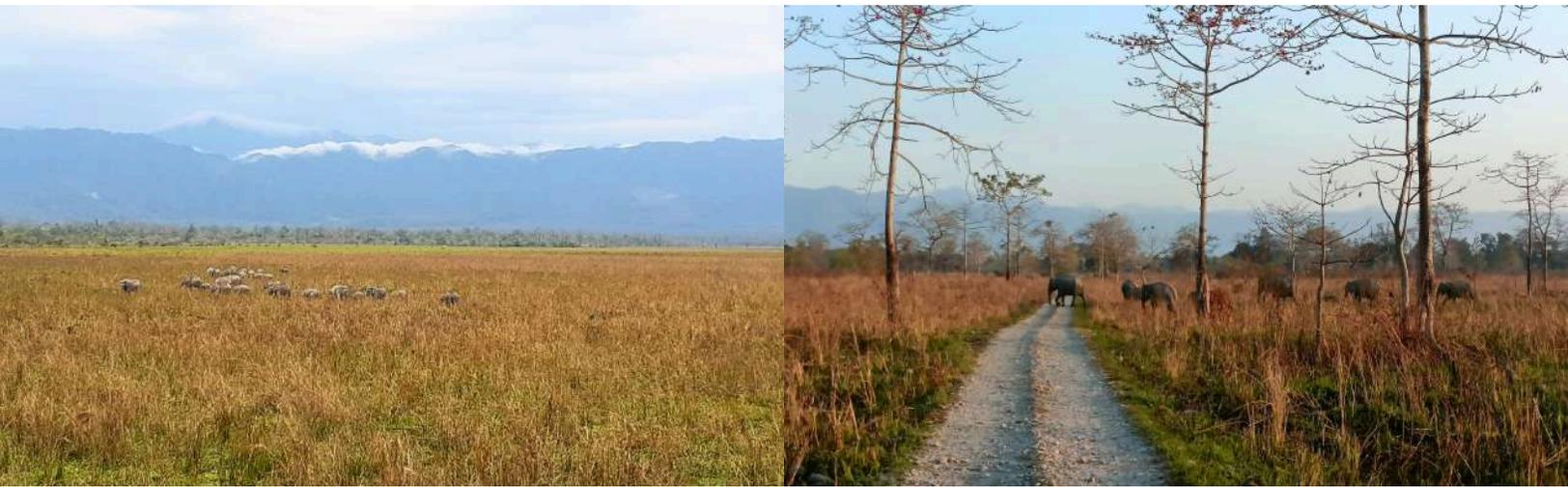
Forests serve as communal resources, supporting practices such as free cattle grazing and transhumance. In addition to farming, many communities depend on diverse livelihoods including cane and bamboo crafts, wild vegetable foraging, weaving, and off-farm labor. These multicultural livelihoods underscore the immense conservation value and cultural richness of the TraMCA region.

Rapid geopolitical changes, expanding industrial activity, and accelerating urbanization are placing growing pressure on the ecological integrity of the TraMCA landscape. These challenges are compounded by rising instances of human-wildlife conflict, poaching, illegal logging, and recurring flash floods, all of which pose serious threats to both biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities.

In light of these pressures, it is imperative to strengthen cross-border collaboration and conservation initiatives to protect this unique and ecologically vital region of the Eastern Himalayas—for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

The success of trans-boundary conservation in TraMCA, however, depends largely on robust governance structures and active community participation. Integrating local livelihoods into conservation planning is critical. Initiatives such as ecotourism, nature-based enterprises, and sustainable agriculture not only provide alternative sources of income but also promote environmental stewardship. These community-centered approaches can effectively address pressing issues such as human-wildlife conflict, land-use changes, and encroachment.

Through continued collaboration, India and Bhutan have the opportunity to demonstrate how ecological cooperation can strengthen international relations, address shared environmental challenges, and pave the way toward a sustainable and harmonious future. Together, these efforts will help secure the TraMCA landscape as a lasting symbol of peace, prosperity, and environmental integrity for generations to come.



Thriving wildlife in Manas landscape. Photos by- Binita Baruwati



## The silent crisis: India's growing exotic pet trade

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When officials in Assam cracked open a secret compartment of a truck crossing the border in 2022, they didn't find weapons or drugs — they found slow lorises, tiny primates with wide, sorrowful eyes, clinging to each other in fear. Smuggled in from Southeast Asia, these animals were destined for someone's living room, far from the dense forests. It wasn't an isolated incident. Across Northeast India — in Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland — border towns have quietly become passageways for a booming, yet largely invisible industry: the illegal exotic pet trade.

Today, India's appetite for exotic pets is growing fast. Brightly feathered macaws, colorful iguanas, rare turtles, and even miniature monkeys like marmosets are increasingly seen in homes, cafes, and on social media feeds. Many are unaware that most of these animals are trafficked illegally, often through brutal, life-threatening journeys that begin in foreign jungles and end in Indian cities. Northeast India, with its long, porous borders adjoining Myanmar and Bangladesh, has emerged as a critical transit route — a hidden artery in the global smuggling network.

The trade is driven by fascination and status. Who wouldn't want a vibrant parrot perched on their shoulder or a "cute" slow loris for Instagram likes? Yet behind every such pet is a grim story of suffering. Slow lorises, for example, often have their teeth crudely clipped to make them "safe" for handling. Many die of infection or stress before they even reach buyers. In one major seizure in Mizoram in 2023, over 400 exotic turtles were found crammed into tiny boxes, dehydrated and gasping for life.



A slow loris rescued by Assam Forest Department from Satabari village, at Boko in Kamrup district of Assam. Photo by- Anuwar Ali Hazarika

The impact goes beyond animal cruelty. India's ecosystems are at risk too. Species like the red-eared slider turtle, popular in the pet trade, often escape or are released into the wild, where they outcompete native species for resources, leading to ecological imbalance. Invasive species, unknown diseases, and zoonotic threats — illnesses that jump from animals to humans — are all ticking time bombs quietly planted through this trade.

What's more troubling is the legal vacuum. While India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 strictly covers native species, it leaves a gray area for many exotic animals. Although India is a member of CITES, the global agreement to regulate wildlife trade, enforcement on the ground remains patchy. New rules like the 2020 exotic pet registration notification exist, but few pet owners comply, and illegal traders continue to exploit the gaps.

Stopping this crisis demands urgent action. Strengthening laws to include exotic species, boosting border surveillance, and training frontline enforcement officers are immediate priorities. But equally important is public awareness. Most people don't realize that buying an exotic pet could be fueling organized crime networks, driving species towards extinction, and risking human health.

There's also a role for better care of animals already caught in this cycle. Confiscated exotics often have nowhere to go, as India lacks multiple specialized rescue and rehabilitation centers for non-native wildlife. Of course, there is one such facility in western India catering to those. Building such facilities and establishing repatriation agreements with the animals' countries of origin would be crucial steps.

Ultimately, the solution lies in changing mindsets. Wild animals belong in the wild — not in cages, tanks, or living rooms. The next time someone is tempted to buy a macaw or a slow loris, they should ask: at what cost? Behind the bright colours and soft fur are stories of broken habitats, stolen lives, and ecosystems thrown off balance.

The exotic pet trade may be a silent crisis today, but if left unchecked, it will echo loudly across India's future. Now is the time to act — with stronger laws, greater awareness, and the simple courage to say: wild is wild, and should stay that way.



Iguanas are exotic species that are popular as pets.

# Wildlife Governance in British India: The Case of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879



Ajoy Kumar Das

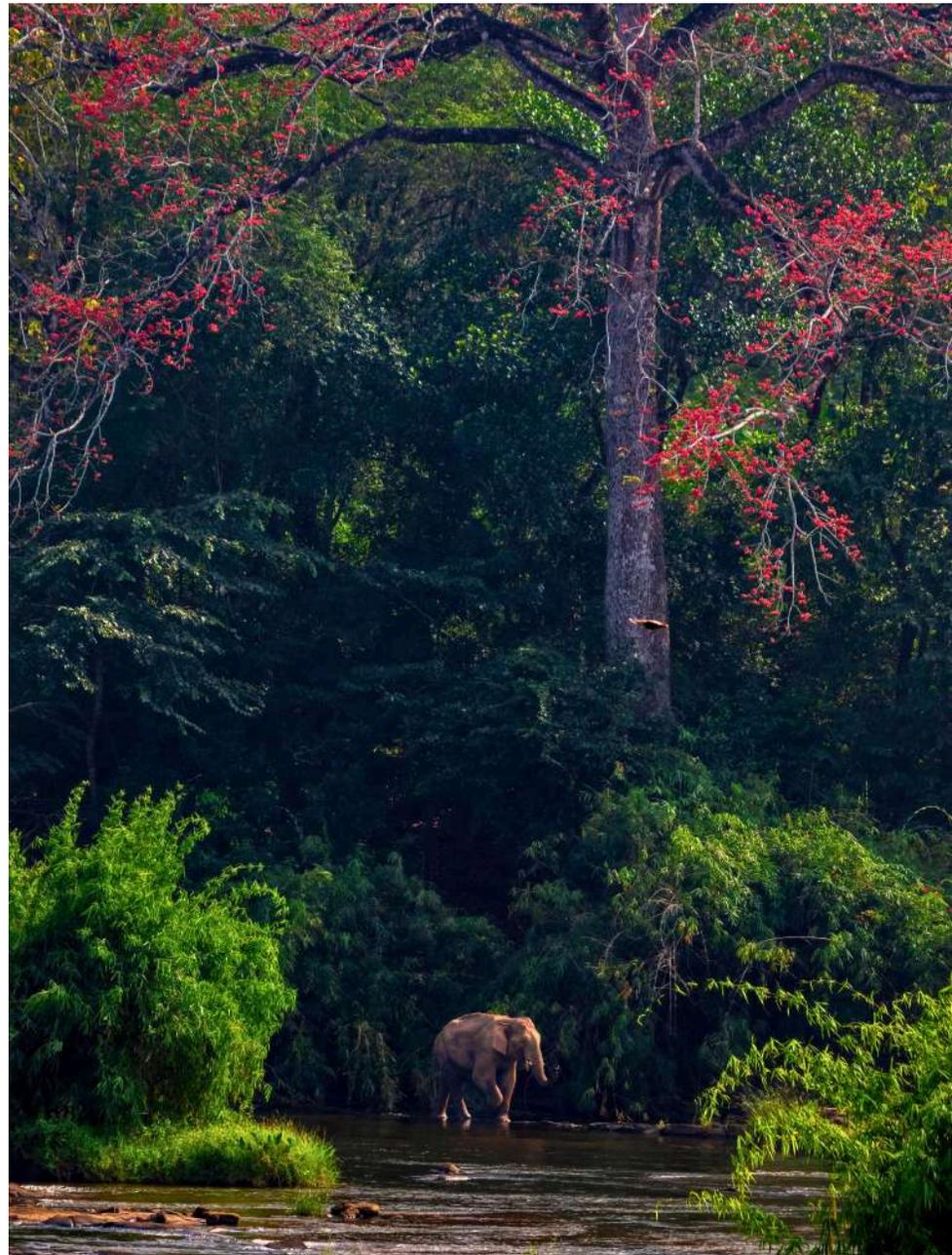
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The Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 (hereinafter referred as EPA) was one of the earliest laws introduced in colonial India to protect the wild elephants. Enacted on 22nd March 1879, the Act aimed specifically at the preservation of wild elephant populations.

## 1. Applicability

Initially, it was applied to regions governed by the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces and the Chief Commissioners of Oudh, the Central Provinces, and Coorg. It also allowed State Governments to extend its application to other areas. Particularly those not part of a Part B State before 1st November 1956, through official notification in the Gazette. Part B states were former princely states integrated into India after independence, governed by a Rajpramukh and an elected legislature. The Part B States (Laws) Act, 1951, extended central laws to them. This category was abolished by the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. The EPA came into immediate effect with respect to the power to make rules and declarations, while its remaining provisions were enforced from 1st April 1879.



A gentle giant amidst the serenity of nature. Photo by- Prasad KN

## 2. The British Burma and the EPA!

The killing of wild elephants was widespread in British Burma. Mostly, adult males are targeted for their tusks, which have reached marketable size. In some areas, both males and females are hunted. To prevent this wholesale and indiscriminate destruction, which, if unchecked, may have ultimately led to the extinction of the breed, the EPA was therefore framed<sup>[1]</sup>. Both the region, the India and Burma were under British rule together as one administrative unit from 1824 to 1937. That is, a span of about 113 years. Throughout the British period, Burma and India therefore operated under interconnected legal systems, each complementing the other within the unified imperial framework. The intensification of Burmese nationalist movements against provincial status prompted the British Government to enact the Government of India Act, 1935, which provided for Burma's separation. Accordingly, from 1st April 1937, Burma emerged as a distinct Crown colony with its own Governor and legislature, although it remained under British sovereignty. The words "British Burma" were repealed from the EPA, by the Adaptation order 1937<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 3. Extension to Northeast India

The EPA was progressively extended to various regions, which are now parts of Northeast India. Specifically, its application was notified to the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon (then spelled Naugong), Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Cachar, the Naga Hills, and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills<sup>[3]</sup>. Subsequently, it was further extended to the Garo Hills, excluding certain portions of the estates belonging to the Zamindar of Bijni<sup>[4]</sup>. The Eastern Duars region within the District of Goalpara was brought under its ambit<sup>[5]</sup>.

Additionally, the Makokchung Subdivision of the Naga Hills District was also brought under the Act<sup>[6]</sup>. The Tushai Hills were also included<sup>[7]</sup>. Finally, the EPA was extended to the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) region, subject to modifications introduced by Regulation 1 of 1962<sup>[8]</sup>.

## 4. The Madras Act, connection

The Madras Wild Elephants Preservation Act, 1873 (also known as the Tamil Nadu Wild Elephants Preservation Act, 1873, hereinafter referred as Madras Act) established a regulatory regime from 21 April 1873, prohibiting the destruction of wild elephants in Tamil Nadu except as permitted under the Act. While it allowed the State Government to frame rules for the grant and renewal of licences, including prescribing fees, it remained silent on matters like translocation or hunting by capture (shikar). The Madras Act created three classes of situations:-

- (1) Female Elephants on Waste or Forest Land
  - Unauthorized shooting without a valid licence was strictly penalized.
  - Licences could be granted by the Collector for limited periods.
- (2) Male Elephants on Government-Owned Waste or Forest Land
  - Unauthorized shooting was punishable.
  - However, landowners and their authorized agents were exempt on their own lands.
  - Government-issued licences could permit shooting on government lands.
- (3) Elephants on Cultivated Lands or Near Public Roads
  - Destruction of elephants was allowed in defense of persons or property.
  - No licence was required in such cases.

Penalties for unauthorized destruction included fines up to five hundred rupees, or imprisonment in default, with harsher penalties for repeat offenders, and prosecutions had to be initiated within six months of the offence.

## 5. Prohibition of killing of elephants:

Drawing from the Madras Act of 1873, the EPA prohibits elephant killing except under specific conditions and introduces a licensing system for the regulated shooting of wild male elephants on Government-owned forest or waste lands, along with provisions for rulemaking on license issuance and renewal. Unlike the Madras Act, however, the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 omits the clause permitting such destruction on private forest lands, as British Burma has no private forest proprietors, and elephants are absent from granted waste lands. The legislation was locally attuned measured to safeguard the region's dwindling elephant population<sup>[9]</sup>. The Act was one step ahead of the Madras Act because it prohibited not only killing but also capture of wild elephants. The element of provisions of capture was not present in the Madras Act. No person was permitted to kill, injure, capture, or attempt to kill, injure, or capture any wild elephant, except under specific circumstances. First, such action was permissible in defense of oneself or another person. Second, it was allowed where a wild elephant was found injuring houses or cultivation, or was present upon, or in the immediate vicinity of, any main public road, railway, or canal. Third, killing or capturing a wild elephant was lawful when carried out under the authority of a licence duly granted pursuant to the provisions of the Act<sup>[10]</sup>.

## 6. Licensing procedure:

The Collector or Deputy Commissioner of any district had the authority, subject to the prevailing rules under the Act, to issue licenses for the killing, capturing, or both killing and capturing of wild elephants within that district. However, such licenses did not permit entry onto any land without obtaining prior consent from the landowner or occupier<sup>[11]</sup>. In the case of Assam, the Collector or Deputy Commissioner of any district has to take an approval of the State Government, while issuing licenses<sup>[12]</sup>.

## 7. Review, and the Elephants Preservation Assam Amendment Act 1959:

Any person aggrieved by an order passed against the granting a licence, the order which was passed with the approval of the State Government, may file an application for review to the State Government within 30 days from the date of the order. Upon receiving such application, the State Government, after giving a hearing to the parties concerned, may either reject the application or, if it finds sufficient grounds for review, grant the same by either withdrawing its approval and remanding the matter to the Deputy Commissioner for a fresh enquiry, or by directing the Deputy Commissioner to issue the licence to any of the applicants. This provision of review and revision was added by the Elephants Preservation Assam Amendment Act 1959, which came into force on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1959, as section 5A in the Act<sup>[13]</sup>. The State Government could, from time to time, declare what would be deemed main public roads and canals under the Act. It could also make rules consistent with the Act for regulating: (a) the grant and renewal of licenses; (b) the fees, whether in money, tusks, or captured elephants, to be charged; (c) the duration for which licenses would remain in force; and (d) the conditions, if any, on which they would be granted. All such declarations and rules were to be published in the Official Gazette and would then have the force of law<sup>[14]</sup>.

## 8. Penalty:

Whoever in contravention, kills, injures or captures, or attempts to kill, injure or capture, any wild elephant, was made punishable with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees for each elephant concerned; and whoever breaks any condition contained in a license granted under this Act shall be punished with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees. Any person convicted of a second offence under this section shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both. When any person holding a license under this Act is convicted under this section, such license shall become void and shall be delivered up to the convicting Magistrate<sup>[15]</sup>. Any Revenue Officer, Police Officer, or Forest Officer who found a person killing, injuring, capturing, or attempting to kill, injure, or capture a wild elephant could require him to produce a license granted under the Act. Killing or capturing a wild elephant was lawful only when done under a license duly granted pursuant to the provisions of the Act. If the person wilfully refused or failed to produce such a license when requested, he was liable to punishment under the Act. In addition, he could be fined up to one hundred rupees<sup>[16]</sup>.

### References

- [1] *Statement of objects and reasons of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*
- [2] *(section 2) Repeal : the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879*
- [3] *The Assam Gazette, 1880, p. 340*
- [4] *The Assam Gazette, 1899, Pt. II, p. 431*
- [5] *The Assam Gazette, 1883, Pt. I, p. 2*
- [6] *Assam Gazette, 1891, Pt. II, p. 36 (Notification No. 168-J)*
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- [11] *Section 5 of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*
- [12] *Section 2 of the-Elephants Preservation Assam Amendment Act 1959 (w.e.f. 20<sup>th</sup> May 1959)*
- [13] *Section 3 of the-Elephants Preservation Assam Amendment Act 1959 (w.e.f. 20<sup>th</sup> May 1959)*
- [14] *Section 6 of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*
- [15] *Section 7 of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*
- [16] *Section 8 of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*
- [17] *Section 9 of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*
- [18] *Section 10 of the Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879 Act No. 6 Of 1879*

## 9. Limitation of prosecution:

Every prosecution under this Act had to be commenced within six months from the date of the offence<sup>[17]</sup>. The provision which is similar to the Madras Act! Any fee payable under a license granted under this Act could be recovered from the licensee as an arrear of land revenue<sup>[18]</sup>.

## 10. End of Elephants' Preservation Act, 1879:

The EPA came to an end with its repeal by the Wildlife Protection Act, 1872. Its sprits now stand merged into the wider framework of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The EPA may be repealed, but its legacy lives on through the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

# LIVING UNDER THE GIANT'S SHADOW



# In the footsteps of giants : Stories from Assam's conflict zones



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Human-elephant conflict (HEC) is a serious problem in many parts of Assam. As human settlements expand exponentially and elephant habitats shrink, people and wild elephants come face-to-face more often. These face offs often damage crops, homes, schools, and sometimes lead to deaths of both humans and elephants. For the past nine months, I have worked with the Elephant Research and Conservation Division at Aaranyak.

My fieldwork has taken me to some of the worst affected areas—Udalguri, Baksa, and Tamulpur—where I have seen how HEC affects local communities. My job entrust me to help the community members implement practical solutions to reduce conflict and promote living-together peacefully.

## Understanding the conflict:

The main cause of human-elephant conflict is habitat loss and breaking up of forests. When forests are cut down for farming and development, elephants are left with no option but to go into villages and farms to find food. In places like Baksa and Tamulpur, whole communities live in constant fear of elephant visits, especially during harvest time. These visits by wild elephants often destroy crops, damage homes, and scare villagers. Schools in remote areas are also at risk, with buildings damaged and student safety a growing concern. Through our work, we have learned that each village faces different challenges. We need to understand the local geography, crop patterns, elephant movement routes, and community needs to work out effective solutions.

## Community engagement and awareness:

One of the most important parts of our work is involving the community. We spend time talking with villagers, farmers, teachers, and students to understand their experiences and worries. Through awareness programmes, we teach communities about elephant behaviour, safety practices, and why elephants are important for the environment. In schools, we hold interactive sessions to build awareness among young students. We teach them about biodiversity, the role of elephants in nature and how people can live peacefully with wildlife. These efforts not only create a safer environment but also build respect and understanding for wildlife among future generations.



Photo by- Partha Pratim Das

### Mitigation measures and support initiatives:

To reduce the immediate risks of conflict, we use several practical strategies. These include:

- Solar street lights and flashlights to improve visibility and safety at night, helping people move around without fear.
- Solar fences around homes, farmlands and schools to keep elephants away without hurting them.
- First-aid training programmes to teach villagers basic medical skills for emergencies during elephant encounters.

Besides safety measures, we also focus on improving how people make a living. Many families we work with depend entirely on farming, and frequent crop damage due to wild elephants causes severe financial problems for them. To address this, we promote alternative crop systems that elephants find less attractive. We also give out bee boxes, which serve two purposes—bees naturally keep elephants away, and honey production creates a new source of income.

These alternative ways to make a living help communities become stronger and less dependent on traditional farming methods that wildlife can easily damage.

### A message of living together:

One of the most powerful lessons I've learned during this journey is that elephants are not enemies—they are simply trying to survive in an area that once belonged to them. Trying to chase them away or seeing them as threats only makes the conflict worse. Instead, we must learn to live together by giving them space, understanding their behaviour, and using practices that make us less vulnerable.

We cannot completely stop elephants from entering human settlements, but we can reduce the chances of conflict through smart planning and community-driven solutions. When elephants are respected and allowed to use their natural paths, they are much less likely to cause damage.



**Conclusion:**

Working in these areas has enlightened me about the importance of conservation work in the field and the value of community participation in protecting both people and wildlife. The journey is challenging, but it brings along with it learning, networking with , and hope. As we continue to work with communities across Assam, our goal remains clear: “to build a future where humans and elephants can live together in harmony, respecting each other's space and right to exist.”





# মানুহ-হাতীৰ সহায়স্থান আৰু গাঁৱৰ মহিলা

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Photo by- Avijan Saha

অসম প্ৰকৃতি আৰু জৈৱ-বৈচিত্ৰৰে ভৰা এখন ৰাজ্য। ইয়াত থকা প্ৰাকৃতিক সম্পদবোৰৰ ভিতৰত হাতীও অন্যতম। বিভিন্ন জাতি-জনগোষ্ঠী আৰু বাৰে-বৰণীয়া ভাষা-সংস্কৃতিয়ে ৰাজ্যখনক সমৃদ্ধ কৰি ৰাখিছে। কৃষি আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ সৈতে অসমৰ সংস্কৃতিও সংলগ্ন হৈ আছে। অসমৰ জন-জীৱনৰ লগতে সাহিত্য-সংস্কৃতিতো হাতী ওতঃপ্ৰোতভাৱে জড়িত হৈ আছে। হাতীক লৈ অসমীয়া গল্প, উপন্যাস ৰচনা হোৱাৰ লগতে চলচিত্ৰও নিৰ্মান হৈছে।

তদুপৰি অসমীয়া বিভিন্ন খলুৱা গীত-মাত, প্ৰবাদ-প্ৰবচন, সাধুকথা আদিতো হাতীয়ে বিশেষ স্থান লাভ কৰি আহিছে। আমাৰ সমাজত হাতীৰ প্ৰতি থকা অপৰিসীম শ্ৰদ্ধা আৰু ভালপোৱাই এই বিশাল জীৱটোক এক বিশেষ মান্যতা প্ৰদান কৰিছে। তৎসত্ত্বেও সাম্প্ৰতিক সময়ত অসমৰ বিভিন্ন প্ৰান্তত মানুহ-হাতীৰ সংঘাত আৰু সমস্যাসমূহ দিনে দিনে বৃদ্ধি পাই অহা দেখা গৈছে। জনবিশ্লেষণ আৰু তথাকথিত উন্নয়নে যেন সমগ্ৰ হস্তীকুলক সংকটৰ গৰাহলৈ ঠেলি পঠিয়াইছে।

সংকুচিত আৱাসভূমি, বিচৰণস্থান, হাতীপথ আৰু খাদ্যৰ অভাৱত বন্যহস্তীকুলে খাদ্যৰ সন্ধানত বিভিন্ন গাঁৱে-ভূঁইয়ে প্ৰৱেশ কৰি শস্যৰ লগতে ঘৰ-দুৱাৰৰো ক্ষতিসাধন কৰিছে। এনে ক্ষেত্ৰত হাতীত আৰু মানুহ উভয়ৰে সহনশীলতা হ্ৰাস পাইছে। ফলস্বৰূপে মানুহ আৰু হাতীৰ মাজত সংঘাতৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছে। গাঁৱৰ চহা সমাজত ই যেন এক জটিল সমস্যাৰূপে থিয় দিছে। এই সমস্যা সমাধান আৰু নিয়ন্ত্ৰণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত গাঁৱৰ ৰাইজে সমূহীয়াভাৱে বিভিন্ন প্ৰচেষ্টা অব্যাহত ৰাখিছে।

আনহাতে, এই অঞ্চলবোৰত সংঘাত নিয়ন্ত্ৰণ কৰি সহায়স্থান প্ৰতিষ্ঠা কৰিবলৈ বহুতো বেচৰকাৰী সংগঠনে চৰকাৰ তথা ৰাইজৰ সহযোগিতাত নানা উপায় অবলম্বন কৰি আহিছে। তাৰ ভিতৰত সৌৰশক্তিচালিত বেৰ, টৰ্চ লাইট, সৌৰশক্তিচালিত বিজুলীবাতি, হাতীৰ অহাৰ আগতীয়া সংকেট ব্যৱস্থা, হাতীয়ে নোখোৱা বিকল্প শস্যৰ ব্যৱস্থা, টঙীঘৰ, নেমুটেঙাৰ বেৰ, বৃক্ষৰোপন, হাতীৰ আৱাসস্থলিত পানীৰ উৎস আৰু বনৰ পুনৰুত্থান ইত্যাদি উল্লেখযোগ্য।

অতীজৰে পৰা দেখা যায় যে অসমৰ গ্ৰাম্যসমাজৰ উন্নয়ন তথা ৰাজহুৱা কামকাজত বিভিন্ন জাতি-জনগোষ্ঠীৰ পুৰুষ-মহিলা উভয়ে জড়িত হৈ থাকে। এই ক্ষেত্ৰত অসমৰ বিভিন্ন প্ৰান্তত মানুহ-হাতীৰ সংঘাত উপশমৰ অৰ্থে ৰাইজৰ সহযোগত কৰা ওপৰোক্ত কামবোৰত পুৰুষসকলৰ লগতে মহিলাসকলৰো ভূমিকা যথেষ্ট লেখত লবলগীয়া।

সাম্প্ৰতিক সময়ত অসমৰ গোৱালপাৰা, ওদালগুৰি, বাক্সা, তামুলপুৰ, ডিব্ৰুগড়, তিনিচুকীয়া, যোৰহাট, শিৱসাগৰ আৰু মাজুলী জিলাৰে সৈতে মেঘালয়ৰ পশ্চিম গাৰোপাহাৰ জিলাত মানুহ আৰু হাতীৰ সংঘাত বিষয়টো অধিক স্পৰ্শকাতৰ।

এই গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ বিষয়টো নিয়ন্ত্ৰণ আৰু সহায়স্থান প্ৰতিষ্ঠা কৰাত উক্ত জিলাসমূহৰ বিভিন্ন গাঁৱৰ লোকসকলে এক অগ্ৰণী ভূমিকা লৈ আহিছে। মানুহ আৰু হাতীৰ সংঘাত নিয়ন্ত্ৰণ আৰু সহায়স্থানৰ অৰ্থে এই অঞ্চলসমূহত বেচৰকাৰী সংগঠন “আৰণ্যকে” গাঁৱৰ ৰাইজ তথা আন আন অংশীদাৰসমূহৰ সহযোগত এক অবিৰত প্ৰচেষ্টা আগবঢ়াই আহিছে। এই প্ৰচেষ্টাত পুৰুষৰ লগতে মহিলাসকলেও সমানে সহযোগিতা আগবঢ়াইছে।

অসমৰ গৌৰালপাৰা জিলাৰ লগতে দাঁতিকাষৰীয়া মেঘালয়ৰ বহুতো অঞ্চলত মানুহ আৰু হাতীৰ সংঘাতে জটিল ৰূপ ধাৰণ কৰাত এই অঞ্চলৰ ৰাভা, গাৰো, হাজং, কোছ, বড়ো, ৰাজবংশী ইত্যাদি জনগোষ্ঠীয় লোকসকল নানান সমস্যাৰ সন্মুখীন হৈ আহিছে। এই লোকসকলে পৰম্পৰাগত সংঘাত প্ৰশমন ব্যৱস্থা প্ৰয়োগৰ দ্বাৰা হাতীৰ সৈতে সহায়স্থান কৰি আহিছে। অৱশ্যে পৰৱৰ্তী পৰ্যায়ত এই অঞ্চলসমূহত কেইটামান আগশাৰীৰ বেচৰকাৰী সংগঠন তথা বনবিভাগৰ সহযোগত সংঘাত প্ৰশমনৰ বাবে বিভিন্ন ব্যৱস্থা লোৱা দেখা গৈছে।

এই ব্যৱস্থাবোৰ কাৰ্য্যকৰী কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত মহিলাসকলেও এক সবল ভূমিকা লৈ আহিছে। যোৱা ৫ টা বছৰত বেচৰকাৰী সংস্থা “আৰণ্যক”ৰ উদ্যোগত আৰু বনবিভাগৰ সহযোগত গৌৰালপাৰা জিলাৰ ডাকুৰভিটা, নিশ্চিতা, কাশিবাৰী-কোচপাৰা, বৰদ’ল, পুখুৰীপাৰা, বৰজুলি, আমবাৰী-শিগ্ৰী, মেধিপাৰা,কেওঁটপাৰা, চাপ্লেংকাটা ইত্যাদি গাঁৱৰ উপৰিও পশ্চিম গাৰোপাহাৰ জিলাৰ বৰগোবল গাঁৱত সৌৰচালিত বেৰৰ সংস্থাপন কৰা হৈছে। এই কাৰ্য্যত মহিলাসকলে ঘৰৰ দৈনন্দিন কাম-কাজ কৰি আহিও নিজ হাতে বেৰৰ খুটিবোৰ কঢ়িয়াই আনি গাঁত খান্দি পুতি দিয়াত আগভাগ লয়। আনকি দুই এগৰাকী মহিলাই নিজৰ কেচুৱাটিক বোকোচাত বান্ধি লৈও গাত খন্দা কামত লাগি থকা দেখা যায়। মূলতঃ জীৱন, সম্পত্তি, শস্যৰ লগতে হাতীকো সুৰক্ষা প্ৰদানৰ বাবে মহিলাসকলো আগবাঢ়ি আহিছে। বহু কেইখন সৌৰশক্তিচালিত বেৰৰ পৰিচালনা সমিতিৰ সদস্যৰূপে মহিলাও জৰিত হৈ আছে।

গাঁৱৰ মহিলাসকল এনেবোৰ কাৰ্য্যত জৰিত হৈ থকাৰ উপৰিও সৌৰচালিত বেৰ নিৰ্মানত লাগি থকা কাৰিকৰী কৰ্মী আৰু ৰাইজৰ খোৱা-লোৱা যতনাই দিয়াৰ ক্ষেত্ৰটো সেৱা আগবঢ়াই আহিছে। তাৰোপৰি সৌৰচালিত বেৰখন চোৱা-চিতা কৰা আৰু প্ৰতিদিনে সঞ্চালন কৰি ৰখাৰ দায়িত্বও মহিলাই লোৱাৰ দৃষ্টান্ত আছে। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে বৰগোবল গাঁৱৰ অয়নদেৱী ৰাভা বাইদেউৰ নামটো এই ক্ষেত্ৰত উল্লেখ কৰিব পাৰি। সৌৰচালিত বেৰ আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে উদ্বোধন কৰি ৰাইজলৈ হস্তান্তৰ কৰা অনুষ্ঠানত মাংগলিক কাৰ্য্যসূচী সম্পাদন, অতিথিসকলক সম্বৰ্ধনা জনোৱা আৰু আপ্যায়ন কৰা সকলো কাম গাঁৱৰ মহিলাসকলে সুচাৰুৰূপে সম্পন্ন কৰি সমাজখনত এটা গুৰু দায়িত্ব পালন কৰে। এনে বিশেষ মুহূৰ্তবোৰত মহিলাসকলে পৰম্পৰাগত সাজ-পোছাক পৰিধান কৰি স্বকীয় সংস্কৃতিক দাঙি ধৰি এক উৎসৱমুখৰ পৰিৱেশ সৃষ্টি কৰাত আগ ভাগ লৈ আহিছে।





হাতী-মানুহৰ সহায়স্থান প্রতিষ্ঠাৰ বাবে আয়োজন কৰা বিভিন্ন সজাগতা সভা, প্রশিক্ষন আৰু কৰ্মশালাত যেনে সৌৰচালিত বেৰৰ প্রশিক্ষন, জৰুৰীকালিন প্রাথমিক চিকিৎসাৰ প্রশিক্ষন ইত্যাদিত মহিলাসকলেও সক্ৰিয়ভাৱে অংশগ্ৰহণ কৰে। তদুপৰি সংঘাত প্রশমনৰ ব্যৱস্থা কাৰ্য্যকৰী কৰাৰ সিদ্ধান্ত লোৱাত বহুতো মহিলাই নিৰ্নায়কৰ ভূমিকা গ্ৰহন কৰা দেখা যায়। শেহতীয়াভাৱে আৰণ্যক আৰু বন বিভাগৰ উদ্যোগত গোৱালপাৰা জিলাৰ ডাৰাপাৰা গাঁৱত অনুষ্ঠিত হাতী সংৰক্ষণ শীৰ্ষক এখন সভাত নিৰ্নায়কৰ ভূমিকা লোৱা সেই গাঁৱৰে সৰবৰহী তথা সমাজসেৱিকা অলকা ৰাভা বাইদেউৰ নামটো বিশেষভাৱে উল্লেখ কৰিব পাৰি।



এখন সুস্থ সবল সমাজ গঢ়ি তোলাত মহিলাসকলৰ ভূমিকা উল্লেখযোগ্য। দৈনন্দিন সাংসাৰিক দায়িত্ব পালন কৰিও মানুহ আৰু হাতীৰ সংঘাত প্রশমনৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত মহিলাসকলৰ অবদান সচাকৈ শলাগিবলগীয়া। হাতীৰ সমস্যা জৰ্জৰিত গাওঁসমূহৰ আৰ্থ-সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক, ল'ৰা-ছোৱালীৰ শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পুষ্টি, পৰিৱেশ আদিৰ উন্নয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত মহিলাসকলৰ অৰিহনা অতি প্ৰশংসনীয়।



# On the margins of the forest: Tales of survival and hope



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The forest here doesn't just exist outside the village; it lives alongside it. The soft hush of trees, the low growl of distant thunder, and the occasional, terrifying trumpet of an elephant are all part of everyday life. In this little-known stretch of Assam's bhabar belt, life is as much about resilience as it is about beauty. Villages dot the foothills like patchwork: some settled near old tea gardens, others tucked along seasonal streams. Bound by the common thread of resilience, the Bodo, Adivasi, Nepali and Assamese communities have weathered many storms-not as victims, but as stewards of endurance and quiet transformation.

**Farming with uncertainty:** Agriculture is the primary occupation for most households in this region. Fields of paddy, mustard, and ginger mark the seasons, but cultivation is rarely easy. The land here, typical of the bhabar belt, is stony and porous. Water drains fast, making irrigation a constant concern. Most farmers still rely on rainfall and shallow tube wells, which are prone to drying up in winter. More than 86% of farmers in Assam fall under the small and marginal category, cultivating less than two hectares of land (Agricultural Census, 2015–16). In this part of Udalguri district of Assam, where undulating terrain meets forest edges, farm sizes are often even smaller.

Fertilizers and machinery are used sparingly, if at all. While Kisan Credit Cards exist on paper, access remains poor. Many villagers still depend on informal credit from local moneylenders during sowing season. Market linkage is fragile. Most farmers sell their produce in weekly haats at throwaway prices, without any storage or bargaining power.



**The tea gardens: A double-edged lifeline:**

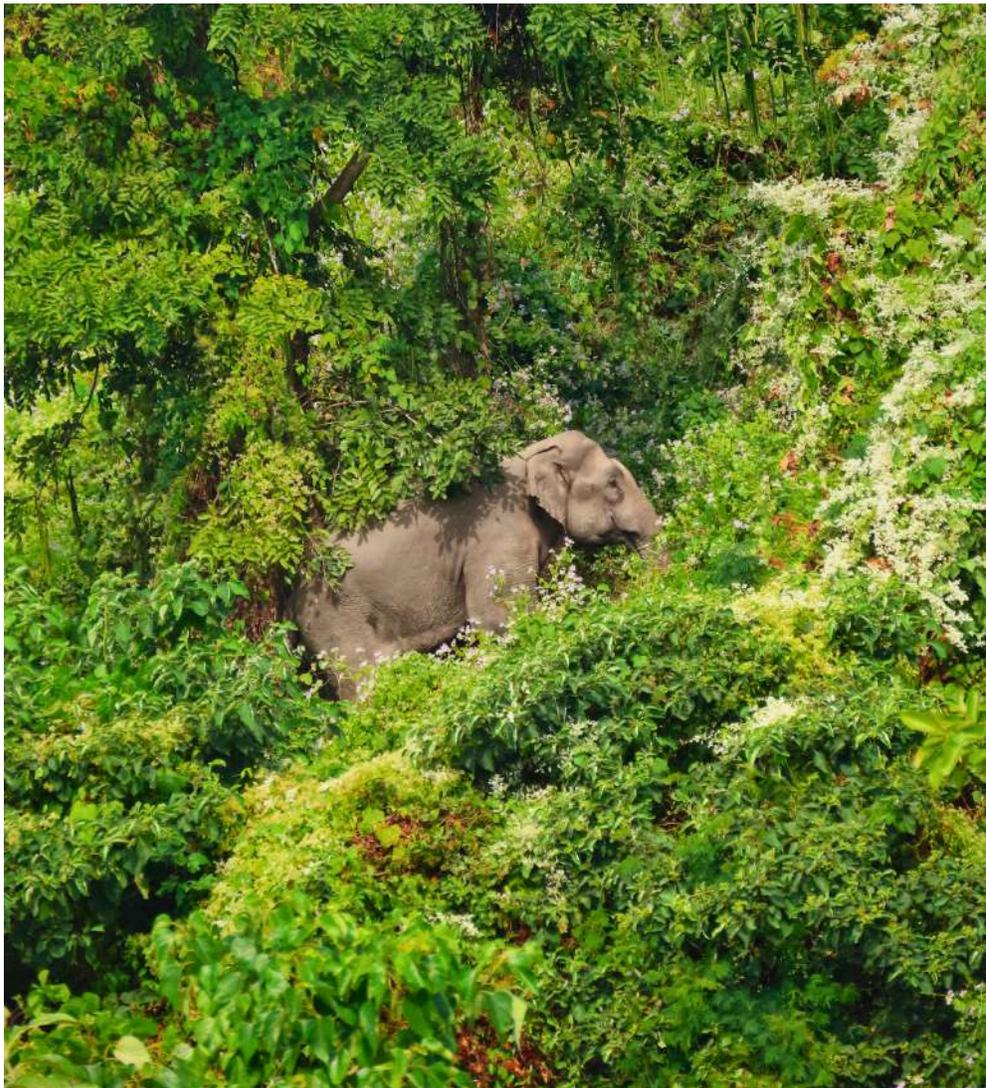
Incomes from farming rarely last the year. It's during the tea-plucking season; from March to October; that a majority turn to tea gardens for support. Women walk several kilometres to pluck leaves, earning ₹250 to ₹300 per day; the state-mandated minimum wage (Labour Department, Govt. of Assam, 2023). Yet, many of these gardens operate outside the purview of the Assam Tea Plantation Labour Act. Benefits such as provident fund, paid leave, and housing are often absent. In some cases, entire families migrate temporarily to other districts during peak seasons, leaving behind school-aged children or elderly parents.

Despite the hardship, the gardens provide crucial cash flow. For many women, it is the only direct income they earn throughout the year. This seasonal migration to tea gardens also influences community dynamics; shifting gender roles, altering school attendance, and even impacting nutrition, as earnings fluctuate.

**The shadow of migration:** As agriculture falters and garden jobs remain seasonal, many young people choose to leave. Migration is now woven into the social fabric. Some head to Guwahati or Tezpur for masonry work. Others travel farther to Kerala, Tamil Nadu, or Delhi; taking up jobs as factory workers, security guards, and domestic help. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2022–23, Assam's rural unemployment rate stood at 6.2%, with youth unemployment even higher. Migration from districts like Udalguri is both a necessity and a compromise. While remittances support families back home, they often come at the cost of disrupted education, cultural detachment, and increased vulnerability in urban settings. Women from Adivasi and Bodo communities increasingly join this flow. Many are recruited through informal networks to work as live-in domestic workers in metros. Without contracts or legal protection, they remain at risk of exploitation.



**Coexisting with giants:** Human-elephant conflict: Perhaps the most unique struggle in this landscape is the one with elephants. Udalguri and surrounding areas fall along a critical elephant corridor that connects forest patches between Assam and Bhutan. With habitat fragmentation and increasing monoculture plantations, elephants frequently enter human settlements, especially during the harvest season. Between 2010 and 2022, Assam reported over 900 human deaths due to elephant encounters, with Udalguri being one of the top five districts affected (Assam Forest Department, 2023). In the same period, around 800 elephants also died; mostly from retaliatory attacks, electrocution, or accidental poisoning. For villagers, it is not just a matter of economics but of fear. Entire paddy fields are lost in a single night. Bamboo homes are trampled. Children sleep in fear during harvesting months. Elderly men patrol the fields with flashlights and tin drums. Some use chili ropes and firecrackers, but these are temporary solutions at best. The psychological toll, though less documented, is immense. Women talk of sleepless nights, of their children's nightmares, of lost food and ruined seasons.



**Small seeds of change:** Despite the odds, the spirit of the land has not dimmed. Small interventions are beginning to sow new hope. Aaranyak have initiated capacity-building trainings in selected villages; introducing low-cost technologies like vermicompost pits, kitchen gardens, and early-warning systems for elephant movement. Aaranyak also supports community-based conflict mitigation through awareness camps and participatory planning. A few progressive farmers are experimenting with mixed cropping, local seed banks, and improved irrigation techniques. Women-led self-help groups have begun pooling savings, cultivating vegetables for market, and producing traditional snacks and pickles. The scale of these interventions remains modest, but the intent is powerful. The land still has promise. With proper support, it can yield not just crops but dignity and security.





**A future rooted in the soil:** This region; rich in flora, culture, and human endurance; stands on the edge of both opportunity and neglect. The beauty of the forest, the fertility of the land, and the strength of its people are undeniable. But so are the challenges. If the state and civil society can work in tandem; offering irrigation support, strengthening education, improving access to credit and storage, and developing a scientifically sound conflict mitigation strategy; then perhaps the cycle can begin to break. Because here, in the margins of the forest, people do not ask for luxury. They ask for safety; for livelihood ; For a way to live without fear of wild animals or forced migration. The land is listening. The people are trying. All they need is for someone to truly invest; not in charity, but in their potential.

*N.B: All photographs by the author himself*



## From the fields to the heart

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### *LIVES REVOLVING AROUND A TONGSHI*

After leaving the vehicle behind, we set off on foot through the vast expanse of paddy fields, the golden rice swaying gently in the October breeze. It was a perfect autumn afternoon in Assam, with endless Kohuwa grasses blooming along the banks of the Pagladia River. At first, we began counting the tall watchman sheds, popularly called the Tongshi, as we made our way toward the last one, hoping to get a clear view of elephants near the riverbanks. However, after just fifteen minutes, we lost track of the sheds, as there were so many of them. I was amazed. After a half-hour walk, we arrived at our destination and climbed the bamboo ladder to reach the top of the tongshi. And sure enough, there they were—an entire herd of wild elephants, playing in the water and mud. We spent nearly two hours observing them through binoculars and cameras.

We also met a few locals at the tongshi, who shared their stories of life revolving around these sheds. They explained that a sturdy, tall tongshi meant a lot to them. The best tongshi were those connected with a well-constructed aali—narrow raised lanes between fields—which made it easier to escape when elephants came too close. Inside the tongshi, there is typically a large platform hung from the ceiling, where they keep mattresses, pillows, and mosquito nets. Long spears, with one end coiled to light fires, are stored in a corner and used to ward off elephants at night. In those few days of visiting the field, I realized their mornings were slow; they spent working in the paddy fields or grazing cattle. After a long day, they return home late in the afternoon, enjoy an early dinner, and prepare themselves to spend the night in the tongshi.

Usually, 4-5 men take shelter in each tongshi, taking turns to guard the crop fields from elephant raids. This is a common practice, mostly during the October to December period when the crops mature, and they spend every night beating the cold Assam winters.

As the sky began to turn crimson with the approach of sunset, we packed up to leave. On our way back, we noticed a person running past us in a hurry, followed by a couple of men carrying long spears and sticks. We heard the loud cries Aahile, aahile. Xumai ahile khetile (They've entered the crop field). As we continued our walk, our hearts grew heavy, and the sight of so many tongshi along the way stayed with us.



## *STORIES OVER CUPS OF TEA*

It had been a long day of monitoring the elephant herd in Baksa. We rushed to a small tea stall by the riverbank, only to find it unattended. We were hungry and tired, and felt helpless. Within a minute or two, two women arrived at the stall. They were sweating and breathing heavily, clearly tired, but still managed to ask us what we wanted with our tea. We were a bit confused by what was going on but went ahead and ordered some light snacks and three cups of tea. I asked them why they had left the stall unattended. The younger woman, who was the owner's daughter, told us they had gone to the riverbank to watch the elephant herd. I was surprised by the stories she went on to share about the elephants. She described how, just a few days ago, the same herd had broken down a wall of their house, and how her father had injured his leg while being chased by the elephants in their paddy field. Her father hadn't been able to run the tea stall for a week because of the injury, and she had been missing her classes to help her mother run the stall. She also told us that her younger brother would be taking his tenth board exams in a month or two, but now he stayed up each night to guard their paddy fields because their father was unwell. As they shared these stories, they referred to the elephants as 'Gonesh baba'. Their faces looked tired, but their hearts still held warmth, love, and respect for the elephants.



*N.B: All photographs by the author herself*



Aaranyak's senior scientist, Dr Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, who heads its Elephant Research and Conservation Division, while receiving The Mark Shand Award on behalf of Aaranyak from Their Majesties King Charles and Queen Camilla, Joint Presidents of Elephant Family on May 13.



## A dream in the mist: My unexpected encounter with White-bellied Heron

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The exact location where the first sighting of the White-bellied Heron occurred.

This is a story of wild sightings and a dream species of mine in Raimona National Park. We had the chance to work there for six months as part of our dissertation thesis from the Department of Zoology, Gauhati University. Our team included me and my seven M.Sc. Wildlife Sciences batchmates, along with our ever-reliable field assistants—Tunu Basumatary and Siyong Brahma.

The morning of February 28, 2023, in Raimona National Park began like any other. The sky was heavy with clouds, the air thick with the silence that follows a long night of rain. That day, I, Karishma Hazarika (one of my batchmates), and Siyong Da set off at 8:00 a.m. sharp. We had grown used to such overcast days in this corner of Assam, tucked against the Bhutan border, where forest and river meet the foothills of the Himalayas.

I was in Raimona for six months, documenting the park's birdlife across its many habitats. Birdwatching wasn't just a part of my research, and it was a passion that had brought me here in the first place. But even as I immersed myself in the daily rhythms of the forest, one bird remained etched in my mind like an unanswered question: the White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*).

This towering, slate-grey heron—one of the world’s rarest birds—had always fascinated me. I had seen it only once before, almost fifteen years ago in Namdapha National Park in Arunachal Pradesh. That memory had faded in clarity but not in feeling. I still remembered the awe. Only around 49 individuals are believed to survive today, mostly in remote parts of Bhutan. Before arriving at Raimona, I had read that a single White-bellied Heron had been photographed near the Bhutan border in the Zomduar region. That fleeting record rekindled a decade-old memory of my only prior sighting in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh—fifteen years ago.

When I first arrived in Raimona, I asked our field assistants—Tunu Da and Siyong Da—whether there was any real chance of seeing this bird during our stay. Their answer was disappointing: the heron, if it appeared at all, was usually sighted in August or September, during the rains. Since we were stationed there from January to July, the chances were slim to none. Still, I held onto a quiet hope. And as I explored the park, one particular place began to stir something deeper. It was a stretch along the Pekua River, close to the Bhutanese border. On one side, dense forest pressed against the water; on the other, steep hills rose like green walls. The river here was fast-flowing, its rocky bed exposed in places—a habitat that seemed tailor-made for the White-bellied Heron, which prefers undisturbed riverine forests and wetlands in hilly terrain. I mentioned this to Siyong Da once, saying the place felt right, that it somehow carried the aura of the bird. He chuckled and shook his head—no records from here, not in this season. But something in me believed otherwise.



A landscape view of the Pekua area in Raimona National Park, showcasing the heron's habitat.



With Siyong Brahman during fieldwork in Raimona National Park.

On that gray morning, bird activity was low. I still managed a few sightings, but Karishma—who was studying golden langurs—hadn't spotted a single one. By lunchtime, spirits were low. We reached our usual lunch spot by the river, near the Pekua. Just before unpacking our food, I casually suggested we walk a bit upstream, toward Bhutan. *"Who knows, we might see something interesting,"* I said, more from habit than hope. Siyong Da led the way, followed by me, with Karishma trailing behind.

About 200 meters in, I was drawn to a pair of crested kingfishers perched nearby. I veered off the path slightly, eager for a few good shots, though my camera's autofocus had been misbehaving for days. As I crouched, trying to focus manually, I heard a sharp whisper— *"Hei sorai tu ase!"* ("The bird is here!"). I turned to see Siyong Da gesturing excitedly. "Which bird?" I asked, still half-distracted. *"White-bellied Heron,"* he whispered. I didn't believe him. Surely, it was a grey heron. This place, this season—it didn't make sense.

But I followed him anyway, more to humor his excitement than out of real hope. We walked ahead, and then I saw it. From the corner of my eye, I caught a massive shape perched silently in a leafless simul tree. And then, it took flight within a second of sighting. For a second, the world stopped. I raised my camera in reflex, focused through the viewfinder—and there it was: a White-bellied Heron. No mistaking that silhouette, those enormous wings, that slow, powerful glide. But fate wasn't done teasing me. My camera blinked with an error—*"The connection between camera and lens not found."* The images didn't save. My heart sank. Within a second, I asked Karishma, *"Did you get it?"* but she hadn't even seen the bird. For a moment, I stood there, devastated.



The White-bellied Heron photographed in the Pekua region of Raimona National Park on 28 February 2023. Photo by- Imon Abedin

After all these years, I had seen the bird again—and had nothing to show for it. Siyong Da, still buzzing with adrenaline, urged us to follow the river. The heron might have landed somewhere downstream. And so, we pressed on, even crossing the river, neck-deep in water. Karishma hesitated, but I insisted, *"You can't stay behind. You have to see this bird."* I took her camera, and we trudged forward. Eventually, we saw the heron again, perched on another dry tree. It took off once more and circled above us. The autofocus failed again. Desperately, I tried to lock onto the bird. Just as it disappeared behind the trees, I managed to fire off one shot. It wasn't perfect. The heron was partly obscured. But it was enough.

Later, when we got out of the jungle, I called my supervisors—Prof. P.K. Saikia and Dr. Malabika Saikia—and shared the news. They were thrilled. So was I. This wasn't just a rare sighting. It was the first winter record of the white-bellied heron in this part of the park. A new location. A new season.

I had dreamed of this bird for so long. And when the moment came, it didn't unfold in slow motion—it happened in an adrenaline-soaked blur of camera errors, soaked clothes, and rivers crossed. But I had seen it. And in the end, that was enough. As we returned to camp, I had planned to keep the sighting quiet for a while to protect the bird and its habitat from disturbance. But Siyong was far too excited to stay silent. The moment we got back, he was already on his phone, calling friends, colleagues—just about everyone he knew—sharing the news with a voice full of joy and disbelief. His excitement was contagious, wild, and utterly genuine. After all, it wasn't just my dream bird anymore—it had become our story.

The record was later published in the *Asian Journal of Conservation Biology* (Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 336–339). And in September that same year, the heron was seen again—this time by Tunu Da.

Maybe some dreams do come true, after all. Even if they arrive late, wet, and winged in mystery.



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ভাল কাঠৰ বাবেই হওঁক বা সহজতে অধিক খৰি গোটোৱাৰ বাবেই হওঁক, যোৱা কিছুবছৰ ধৰি অৰণ্যৰ প্ৰকাণ্ড প্ৰকাণ্ড গছবোৰ ব্যাপক হাৰত কাটি উচন কৰা হৈছে। বিভিন্নজনৰপৰা শুনিবলৈ পোৱা আজিপৰা কেইবছৰমানলৈ দেখিবলৈ পোৱা প্ৰকাণ্ড প্ৰকাণ্ড গছেৰে ভৰা গভীৰ আৰু বিশাল বহু অৰণ্যৰ আজিকালি চিন-চাবেই নাই।

বৰ্তমান সময়তো ৰাস্তা-ঘাট সাজিবলৈ বা ঘৰ-দুৱাৰ নিৰ্মাণ কৰিবলৈ যাওতে বহুতে প্ৰথমে বিশাল আকৃতিৰ পুৰণি গছবোৰ কাটি লয় বা ঠাল-ঠেঙুলি কাটি লঠঙা কৰি গছবোৰক মৃত্যুৰ মুখলৈ ঠেলি দিয়ে। পিছে এনেদৰে ডাঙৰ ডাঙৰ গছৰ সংখ্যা দ্ৰুতভাৱে কমি অহাৰ বাবে পৃথিৱীখনক অচিৰেই অতিকৈ ভয়াবহ দুৰ্যোগৰ গ্ৰাসত পৰিব।

আমি যদি এডাল পঞ্চাশ বা এশবছৰীয়া গছ কাটি তাৰ ক্ষতিপূৰণ হিচাপে এহাজাৰ গছপুলি ৰোপন কৰোঁ, তথাপিও সেই গছডাল ধ্বংস কৰাৰ যি ক্ষতি, সেইবোৰ পূৰণ নহয়। অৱশ্যে ওপৰে ওপৰে ভাবি চালে সেই কথাবোৰ অনুভৱ কৰাটো সম্ভৱ নহয়। কিয়নো প্ৰকৃতিৰ নীতি নিয়মবোৰ ইমানেই সুশৃংখল আৰু গভীৰভাবে ইটোৰ সৈতে সিটো জড়িত যে কিছুকথা বুজি লৈ গভীৰ মনোযোগেৰে পৰ্যবেক্ষণ কৰিলেহে তাৰ বাস্তৱ সত্যবোৰৰ কিছু উপলব্ধি কৰাটো সম্ভৱ।



এখন ঠাইৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক ভাৰসাম্য বা সুস্থিৰতা ৰক্ষা কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এডাল পুৰণি ডাঙৰ গছে অতি গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা লৈ থাকে। যেনে-

১) ওখ ডাঙৰ গছবোৰত কিছুমান চৰাই-চিৰিকটিৰ লগতে সৰীসৃপে আশ্ৰয় লৈ থাকে, যিটো সুবিধা সিহঁতক এডাল সৰু গছে দিব নোৱাৰে,

২) নিশা চিকাৰী জন্তুৰপৰা নিজকে ৰক্ষা কৰিবলৈ কিছুমান প্ৰাণীয়ে ডাঙৰ গছৰ ওপৰত আশ্ৰয় গ্ৰহণ কৰি থাকে,

৩) গৰমৰ দিনত বৰগছবোৰৰ ডাঠ ছাঁৰ বাবে তলখন শীতল হৈ থাকে, যাৰ বাবে মানুহে তাৰ তলত জিৰণী লয়,

৪) পথাৰৰ মাজত থকা বৰগছবোৰৰ তলত দুপৰীয়া চৰণীয়া পশুখনবোৰে জিৰণী লয়,

৫) আঁহতৰ দৰে ডাঙৰ গছবোৰ আমাৰ পৰম্পৰাগত সংস্কৃতিৰো অংশ। বহাগ বিহুত আঁহতৰ তলত বিহু মৰাৰ কথাটো আমি সকলোৱেই জানোঁ,

৬) পুৰণি ডাঙৰ গছ কিছুমানৰ গাত খোৰোঙৰ সৃষ্টি হয়, যিবোৰত ধনেশ পক্ষীৰ দৰে চৰাইৰ উপৰিও নানা ধৰণৰ সৰীসৃপৰ আশ্ৰয়স্থল। শগুণ, হাড়গিলাৰ দৰে চৰাইবোৰৰ বাবে শকত ফেৰেঙণিবোৰত কণীপাৰি উমনি দিবলৈ সুবিধা হয়

৭) ডাঙৰ গছবোৰক আশ্ৰয় কৰি কিছুমান লতাজাতীয় উদ্ভিদ জীয়াই থাকে,

৮) অৰ্কিডৰ বাবে বৰগছবোৰ হৈছে অতিকৈ উপযুক্ত আশ্ৰয়স্থল,

৯) ধুমুহাৰ খুন্দাৰপৰা বৰগছবোৰে কলগছ, তামোলগছৰ দৰে আন বহুতো গছক বচাই ৰাখে,

১০) ডাঙৰ গছবোৰৰপৰা সৰিপৰা ব্যাপক পৰিমাণৰ ডাল-পাত, ফল-মূল, ফুলৰ পাহিৰ বাবে বহুবি মাটিত অধিক পৰিমাণৰ জৈৱিক উপাদান যোগ হয়,

১১) কিছুমান গছৰ গুটি আৰু ফলমূল চৰাই-চিৰিকটিৰ প্ৰিয় তথা প্ৰধান খাদ্য,

১২) পুৰণি গছবোৰৰ ডাঠ ছালৰ তলত বহুতো সৰু সৰু কীটে আশ্ৰয় লৈ থাকে। এই সৰু সৰু কীটবোৰৰো পৰিৱেশৰ ভাৰসাম্য ৰক্ষাত গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা আছে,

১৩) ডাঙৰ গছবোৰৰ শিপাবোৰ মাটিৰ তললৈ সোমাই যোৱাৰ বাবে মাটিখিনিত অধিক পৰিমাণত আৰু গভীৰতালৈ সুৰুঙাৰ সৃষ্টি হয়, যিবোৰেদি তললৈ পানী সোমাই যোৱাৰ সুবিধা হয়,

১৪) বাৰিষা শিলাবৃষ্টিৰ সময়ত ডাঙৰ জোপোহা গছবোৰৰ ডাল আৰু পাতবোৰৰ বাবে শিলবোৰে পোনে পোনে মাটিত খুন্দা মাৰিব নোৱাৰে। ফলত তাৰ তলত আশ্ৰয় লৈ বনৰীয়া পশু-পক্ষীয়ে কিছু নিৰাপত্তা লাভ কৰিব পাৰে,

১৫) খৰালি কালত সৃষ্টি হোৱা ধূলিৰ ধুমুহাক ডাঙৰ গছবোৰে বেছি ওপৰলৈ উৰি যাবলৈ সুবিধা নিদিয়োগতিকে আমাক ধূলিৰ প্ৰবল ধুমুহাৰপৰা ৰক্ষা কৰে,

১৬) নগৰতেই হওঁক বা গাঁৱলীয়া এলেকাতেই হওঁক, কল-কাৰখানা, যান-বাহন আদিৰপৰা ওলাই বতাহত উৰি ফুৰা দূষিত ধোৱা, পদাৰ্থকণাৰ বহুখিনি ডাঙৰ জোপোহা গছৰ পাতে ধৰি ৰাখে। এনেদৰে ডাঙৰ গছবোৰে বায়ুমণ্ডল নিকা হৈ থাকাত সহায় কৰে,

১৭) প্রবল বৰষুণৰ সময়ত বৰষুণৰ ডাঙৰ টোপালবোৰে ডাঙৰ গছৰ তলৰ মাটি পোনেই খুন্দা খান্দিব নোৱাৰে। গতিকে ভূমি সংৰক্ষণত সহায় কৰে,

১৮) ডাঙৰ গছবোৰৰ শিপাই তলত সৃষ্টি কৰা জালিকা বাবে গছৰ তলেৰে বৈ যোৱা পানীৰ সোঁতক মাটি খান্দি নিয়াত বাধা দিয়ে,

১৯) নৈৰ পাৰ ভাঙি সোমোৱা পানীৰ প্ৰবল সোঁতেও ডাঙৰ গছ ভৰি থকা অৰণ্যত বাধা পাই লাহে লাহে বৈ যাবলৈ বাধ্য হয়,

২০) অৰণ্য বা আমাৰ ঘৰুৱা বাৰীবোৰতো এনে বহুতো গছবন আছে, যিবোৰে সূৰ্য্যৰ অধিক পোহৰ বা পোনপটীয়া ৰ'দৰ পৰা ৰক্ষা পাবলৈ বিচাৰে। তেনেবোৰ গছক ডাঙৰ ডাঙৰ গছবোৰে জীয়াই থাকিবলৈ সুবিধা দিয়ে,

২১) ডাঙৰ গছবোৰে যিদৰে বায়ুৰপৰা অধিক পৰিমাণৰ এণ্ডাৰ গেছ শোষণ কৰিব পাৰে সেইদৰে অধিক পৰিমাণৰ অক্সিজেনো বায়ুলৈ যোগান ধৰিব পাৰে,

২২) প্ৰস্বেদন কাৰ্য্যৰ জৰিয়তে ডাঙৰ গছবোৰে অধিক পৰিমাণৰ জলীয় বাষ্প বায়ুমণ্ডললৈ এৰি দিয়ে। গতিকে ডাঙৰ গছৰ সংখ্যাধিকাই বায়ুমণ্ডল শীতল হৈ থকাত আৰু বৰষুণ নিয়মীয়া হৈ থকাত সহায় কৰে,

২৩) ৫০বছৰ বা ততোধিক পুৰণি ডাঙৰ ডাঙৰ গছবোৰৰ এটা অতিকৈ গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা হৈছে যে এইবোৰ উদ্ভিদে বায়ুৰ কাৰ্বন জমা কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰে, যিটো আন কুমলীয়া বয়সৰ গছৰ বাবে সম্ভৱ নহয়। সেয়েহে, অধিক বয়সীয়া গছ এডাল কাটি তাৰ ঠাইত একলাখ গছপুলি ৰোপন কৰিলেও সেই ক্ষতি পূৰণ নহয়। কিয়নো আমি কাৰ্বন জমা কৰা প্ৰক্ৰিয়াটোৰ বাবে কমেও পঞ্চাছ বছৰ অপেক্ষা কৰিব লাগিব।

এনেবোৰ কাৰণতেই আমি এখন ঠাইত থকা ডাঙৰ ডাঙৰ গছবোৰ সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখা উচিত। কোনো কাৰণতেই যাতে গছবোৰ কাটিবলগীয়া নহয় বা কাটিব নোৱাৰে তাৰবাবে চৰকাৰে বা স্থানীয় ৰাইজে অতি কঠোৰ নীতি প্ৰৱৰ্তন কৰা উচিত।

সাধাৰণতে দেখা যায় যে ৰাস্তা-ঘাট নিৰ্মাণ কৰিবলৈ বা ঘৰ-দুৱাৰ সাজিবলৈ বিচাৰি বহুতে ডাঙৰ ডাঙৰ গছবোৰ কাটে। কিছুমানে আকৌ উভালি পৰি ঘৰ বা চৌহদৰ দেৱাল ভঙাৰ ভয়ত ডাঙৰ গছবোৰ কটা দেখা যায়। এনে পৰিস্থিতিয়ে দেখা দিলে গছবোৰৰ তলত সুৰক্ষা ৰিং বা খুটা আদি লগাই বিপদৰপৰা ৰক্ষা পৰাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগে।



প্ৰয়োজন সাপেক্ষে চৰকাৰে এনেবোৰ গছৰ সুৰক্ষা ৰিং বা খুটা আদি চৰকাৰে বিনামূলীয়াকৈ লগাই দিয়াৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা উচিত। একেদৰে ৰাস্তা বা ঘৰদুৱাৰ আদি নিৰ্মাণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতো পুৰণি ডাঙৰ গছবোৰক সুৰক্ষিত কৰি ৰাখিব পৰা আহিহে চৰকাৰী কৰ্তৃপক্ষই অনুমোদন কৰিব লাগে। নিৰ্মাণকাৰী সংস্থাবোৰকো এই ক্ষেত্ৰত বাধ্য কৰাৰ লাগে। এনে নীতি উলংঘা কৰা নিৰ্মাণ সংস্থাৰ অনুজ্ঞাপত্ৰ বাতিল কৰাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা উচিত।

মুঠতে আমি এইটো সকলোৱে অনুভৱ কৰা উচিত যে পুৰণি বৰ বৰ গছবোৰ ধ্বংস কৰা মানেই আমি আমাৰ পৃথিৱীখনত ধ্বংসৰ মুখলৈ অধিক বেগেৰে আগুৱাই দিয়া। এনে দিশৰপৰা বিচাৰ কৰিলে বৰ বৰ গছবোৰ ধ্বংস কৰাসকল নিজৰেই সন্তানৰ হত্যাকাৰীৰ দৰে। কিয়নো আজি গছডাল কাটি ধন উপাৰ্জন কৰিলেও তাৰ কুফল আমাৰ পৰৱৰ্তী প্ৰজন্মই তিলতিলকৈ ভোগ কৰিবই লাগিব।

সেয়েহে, আহক আমি সকলোৱে মিলি এতিয়াও জীয়াই থকা ডাঙৰ ডাঙৰ বয়সীয়া গছবোৰ ৰক্ষা কৰাৰ বাবে ব্যাপক সজাগতা গঢ়ি তোলা। আনকি পৰাপক্ষত ডালবোৰ কটাৰপৰাও বিৰত থাকিবলৈ সকলোকে আহ্বান জনাওঁ।



## পক্ষী উদ্ধাৰ আৰু পুনৰ সংস্থাপন

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Chestnut-headed bee-eater. Photo by- Imon Abedin

চৰাই হৈছে ডেউকা থকা, কণী পৰা, উষ্ণৰক্তী, এবিধ মেৰুদণ্ডী প্ৰাণী। চৰাইৰ প্ৰধান বৈশিষ্ট্য হ'ল- ডেউকা, ঠোঁট, টান-খোলাৰ কণী পৰা, চাৰি-কোঠালিৰ হৃদযন্ত্ৰ তথা উচ্চ পাচন হাৰ।

এটা চৰাইৰ আকাৰ ২ ইঞ্চিৰ পৰা ৯ ফুটলৈ হ'ব পাৰে। বৰ্তমান পৃথিৱীত প্ৰায় ১০০০০ টাৰো অধিক প্ৰজাতিৰ চৰাই পোৱা যায়। ইয়াৰ ভিতৰত প্ৰায় ১৩১৭ টা প্ৰজাতিৰ চৰাই ভাৰতত পোৱা যায়।

সকলো প্ৰজাতিৰ চৰাইৰ ডেউকা থাকে, কিন্তু সকলো প্ৰজাতিৰ চৰাইয়ে উৰিব নোৱাৰে। চৰাইৰ ডেউকা প্ৰকৃততে ইয়াৰ আগঠেঙৰ ৰূপান্তৰিত ৰূপ।

চৰাই প্ৰকৃতিৰ এক অবিচ্ছেদ্য উপাদান। চৰাই অবিহনে প্ৰকৃতিৰ ভাৰসাম্যতা বজাই ৰখিব নোৱাৰিব।

মানৱ সভ্যতাৰ উন্নতিৰ লগে লগে, মানুহে চৰাইৰ প্ৰকৃত বাসস্থান গছ-গছনি তথা হাবি জংঘল আদি ধংস কৰি ঘৰ-দুৱাৰ, দোকান-পোহাৰ, ৰাস্তা-পদূলি আদি নিৰ্মাণ কৰাৰ লগে লগে চৰাইৰ সংখ্যাৰ ওপৰত ইয়াৰ প্ৰত্যক্ষ প্ৰভাৱ দেখা যায়। তদুপৰিও বিভিন্ন সময়ত চৰাইবোৰ দুৰ্ঘটনাত পতিত হোৱা দেখা যায়, উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে- চৰাই এটা গাড়ী এখনৰ লগত হোৱা সংঘৰ্ষ, ঘৰৰ গ্লাচৰ লগত হোৱা সংঘৰ্ষ, গছ কতাৰ পিছত ধংস হোৱা চৰাইৰ বাহত থকা পোৱালি আদি। এনে ক্ষেত্ৰত পক্ষী উদ্ধাৰ আৰু পুনৰ সংস্থাপনৰ গুৰুত্বতা বহুগুণে বৃদ্ধি পায়।

পক্ষী উদ্ধাৰ আৰু পুনৰ সংস্থাপন এক জটিল আৰু সংবেদনশীল প্ৰক্ৰিয়া। চৰাইৰ এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰিবৰ যোৱাৰ আগতে এইটো জানি লোৱা উচিত যে চৰাইটোক প্ৰকৃততে উদ্ধাৰৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আছে নে নাই।

এটা আঘাতপ্ৰাপ্ত বা বেমাৰী চৰাইক উদ্ধাৰৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আছে যদিহে-

- চৰাইটোৱে পাখি মেলিব পৰা নাই।
- চৰাইটোৰ ডেউকা দুখন অনিয়মিত ভাবে মাতিত পৰি আছে
- চৰাইটো দুৰ্বল বা কপি আছে
- চৰাইটো অন্য চৰাইৰ দ্বাৰা আঘাতপ্ৰাপ্ত হৈছে
- অন্য চৰাই বা জন্তুৰ পৰা চৰাইটো বিপদাপন্ন অৱস্থাত থাকে।
- চৰাইটোৰ অভিভাৱক অৰ্থাৎ মাক/দেউতাক চৰাইটোৰ ওচৰত নাধাকিলে অথবা চৰাইটোক আধাৰ নুখুৱালে।

চৰাই এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰাৰ সময়ত বিভিন্ন ধৰনৰ সাভধানতা অৱলম্বন কৰা উচিত। অন্যথা চৰাইটোক জীৱনৰ প্ৰতি ভাবুকি অহাৰো সম্ভাৱনা থাকে। চৰাই এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰিব আগবঢ়া উচিত যদিহে-

- চৰাই এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰিবলৈ উপযুক্ত উপকৰণৰ প্ৰয়োজন। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে-পৰিষ্কাৰ কাপোৰ বা টাৱল, কম্বল, ডাথ কাগজৰ বাকচ, খৰাহী, দীঘল হেণ্ডেলৰ জাল, হাত মুজা ইত্যাদি।

চৰাই এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰিব যোৱাৰ লগে লগে চৰাইটোক লগতে নিজৰো নিৰাপত্তা সুনিশ্চিত কৰা উচিত। কিছুমান চৰায়ে ঠোটেৰে আক্ৰমণ কৰিব পাৰে। সাধাৰণতে চৰাইবোৰৰ দেহত বিভিন্ন ধৰণৰ পৰজীৱী অনুজীৱ পোৱা যায়। ফলত চৰাইটোৱে আক্ৰমণ কৰিলে মানুহজন অণুজীৱৰ দ্বাৰা সংক্ৰমিত হোৱাৰ সম্ভাৱনা বাঢ়ি যায়। সেয়ে সুৰক্ষাৰ বাবে উপযুক্ত উপকৰণৰ ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা উচিত।

উদ্ধাৰৰ সময়ত চৰাইটোক টনা আজোৰা কৰিব নালাগে। উদ্ধাৰৰ পিছত চৰাইটো থোৱা বাকচটোত যাতে লৰচৰ কৰিব উপযুক্ত ঠাই পাই সেইটো সুনিশ্চিত কৰা প্ৰয়োজন।

চৰাই এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰাৰ পিছত আমাৰ দায়িত্ব দুগুণে বৃদ্ধি পায়। চৰাই এটা উদ্ধাৰ কৰাৰ পিছত চৰাইটোৰ উপযুক্ত পৰিচৰ্যা কৰা উচিত। তাৰ বাবে আমি কিছুমান নিয়মাৱলী মানি চলা উচিত।

- উদ্ধাৰৰ পিছত চৰাইটোৰ দেহত আঘাত বা আঘাতৰ চিহ্নৰ পৰীক্ষা কৰিব লাগে।
- আঘাতপ্ৰাপ্ত চৰাই এটাক বেছিসময় ভিৰ বা সমাগমত ৰাখিব নালাগে।
- চৰাইটোৰ দেহত আঘাত থাকিলে, যাতে চৰাইটো আৰু আঘাতপ্ৰাপ্ত নহয় সুনিশ্চিত কৰি চৰাইটোক পক্ষী বিশেষজ্ঞৰ বা পশু চিকিৎসকৰ ওচৰলৈ পঠিওৱা ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগে।
- উদ্ধাৰ কৰা চৰাই এটাক বিশেষজ্ঞৰ পৰামৰ্শ অবিহনে খাদ্য খুৱাব নালাগে।

উদ্ধাৰ প্ৰক্ৰিয়া সুচাৰুৰূপে পৰিচালনা কৰাৰ পিছত চৰাইটো যাতে অতি শীঘ্ৰে চিকিৎসা আৰু পুনৰ সংস্থাপন কৰিব পাৰি তাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগে। চৰাইটো উদ্ধাৰ কৰাৰ পিছত প্ৰথমতে চৰাইটোক উদ্ধাৰ স্থলীৰ পৰা নিকতৱৰ্তী পুনৰ সংস্থাপন কেন্দ্ৰ বা পশু চিকিৎসালয়লৈ নিয়াৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগে। যদিহে উদ্ধাৰ স্থলীৰ নিকতৱৰ্তী কোনো চিকিৎসালয় বা পুনৰ সংস্থাপন কেন্দ্ৰ নাথাকে তেতিয়া সৰ্বশ্ৰেষ্ঠ বন বিষয়াৰ লগত যোগাযোগ কৰি চৰাইটোক বন বিভাগক অৰ্পন কৰাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগে।



সৰু চৰাই উদ্ধাৰ কৰাৰ দৃশ্য।



ডাঙৰ চৰাই উদ্ধাৰ কৰাৰ দৃশ্য।



পক্ষী উদ্ধাৰৰ সময়ত লৰ লগা সারধানতা।



পক্ষী উদ্ধাৰৰ সময়ত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা বাকচ।



## Wings of the wild

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It was one of those golden, sun-drenched days when the city noise seemed just a little louder than usual, and the air felt thick with routine. Driven by a spontaneous craving for the wild and a deeper pull toward something ancient, I boarded a bus heading toward a remote village—quietly known for hosting one of nature’s scavenger-vultures.

These majestic scavengers, often vilified in myths and ignored in admiration, had lured a small group of us nature lovers to a land where the sky whispers old secrets and the earth moves at its own, deliberate rhythm.

Among us was Hiren Dutta, a soft-spoken man, a passionate naturalist and our guide for the day, he didn’t just promise us a sighting—he promised us a moment.

As the bus moved through curling village roads and sleepy hamlets, the urban grey dissolved into layers of green. We passed under archways of banyan trees, past grazing cows, and watched as villagers moved about their lives with a grace that only comes from being truly in tune with nature. It felt like stepping into a living, breathing memory.



Slender-billed vulture. Photo by- Krunal Desai

When we finally arrived and began walking down a narrow trail, the air shifted. There was a hush, not of silence, but of reverence—like the earth was holding its breath. And then, with a knowing smile, Hiren da pointed upward.

*“Look up,” he said.*

We did.

Above us, wings wide as windows and steady as time itself, a vulture soared—its shadow drifting over us like a brushstroke across the sky. My friend Riddhima, visiting from Dehradun, stood beside me, breath caught in her throat. Neither of us said a word. We didn't need to.

That single bird, gliding effortlessly across the open sky, was more than just a scavenger. It was grace in motion, a reminder that beauty doesn't always come wrapped in bright colors or songs. Sometimes, it soars silently overhead, reminding us of the delicate balance that keeps the wild world turning.

At that moment, I realized something: vultures are not just part of nature—they are its keepers. Cleaning what others leave behind, they protect us from disease, decay and imbalance. They are quiet sentinels for our survival.

But their story, like all important stories, has heroes.

In this small village, there lives a man named Jiten Deuri—a farmer, a father, and a proud friend of vultures. Unlike many who saw vultures as pests or their nesting trees as firewood, Jiten saw guardianship as his responsibility. When asked to cut down trees on his land, he refused—not out of stubbornness, but out of love. Those trees are home to the vultures. Cutting them down would mean losing not just birds, but balance.



And he didn't stop there.

Armed with little more than conviction and kindness, Jiten went door to door in his village, spreading awareness about the importance of trees and wildlife. He spoke not like an activist, but like a neighbour—passionate, grounded, and persuasive. Under his influence, many villagers began to see vultures not as a nuisance, but as neighbours. Deforestation slowed. Trees stood tall. Nests remained undisturbed.

In a world that too often forgets to look up, Jiten reminds us of what it means to care deeply—for the skies, the trees and the quiet lives that depend on both.

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That day, in a village wrapped in green and grace, we came searching for vultures and found something greater. We witnessed the interconnectedness of life—between bird and branch, between human and habitat. We saw a community quietly practicing conservation, not with slogans, but with actions.

Because true nature lovers don't see borders or barriers. They see connection. They live with responsibility. And in people like Jiten Deuri, the earth finds its best allies—watchful, respectful, and always willing to look up.



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