

History, Practice, Identity: An Institutional Ethnography of Elephant Handlers in Chitwan, Nepal



Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Environmental Anthropology

By

Piers Locke

Department of Anthropology

University of Kent

November 2006

Abstract

This thesis comprises an ethnographic documentation of the Nepali elephant stable or *hattisar*, an institution that has not previously been subject to anthropological scrutiny. In Nepal, as in other countries in South and Southeast Asia, elephants have been kept in captivity and deployed in various work duties under state sponsorship for millennia. These practices have produced a body of expert knowledge that has been transmitted both from master to apprentice, as well as through codified treatises on captive elephant management. In recent decades this set of traditional practices and its accompanying expert knowledge has had to adapt to the circumstances of a modernising world. As previous uses have fallen into abeyance, new uses have emerged, but which still rely on the same set of skilled practices. This thesis then is concerned with tracing the way in which the Nepali *hattisar*, specifically those of the Chitwan National Park, has changed from being a royal institution maintained primarily for the purpose of facilitating hunting expeditions, to one maintained to meet the new imperatives of tourism, conservation and natural resource management. Through a mixture of archival research and participant observation, involving my own apprenticeship as an elephant handler, I trace the relationships between history, practice and identity, arguing that the *hattisar* as a state institution is becoming increasingly subject to regulatory control, that enskilment as a handler is dependent upon participation in a community of practice, and that practice within the enclaved domain of the *hattisar* engenders a distinctive professional identity. More generally, by exploring the enclaved world of the *hattisar*, the social position of handlers, their internal hierarchy, the intimate relation between man and elephant, and the process of skills acquisition, this thesis demonstrates and explains the formation of a specific professional sub-culture or occupational community, whose emergent sociality focussed on animal handling is uniquely described here.

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Acknowledgements

As one might expect, the debts of gratitude I have incurred during the course of preparing, conducting and writing this research are numerous. In expressing my thanks, I sincerely hope to do justice to all the people and organisations whose assistance has been so invaluable to me over the last five years.

Firstly, for having faith in me, my program of research, and for providing a supplementary bursary whilst I applied for full funding, I must thank the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kent. I am honoured to be a member of an academic community that takes such pride in nurturing its home-grown talent. Secondly, I must thank the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), whose award of a studentship (PTA-030-2002-00501) made it financially feasible for me to complete this program of research.

Next I must thank the principal organisations whose co-operation was so integral to this research. Without the authorisation of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) this research would not have been remotely possible. The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) and WWF-Nepal office were also supportive of my endeavours, and played an important role for which I am also eternally grateful. Sadly, some of the key facilitators from these organisations died in a helicopter accident in September 2006. This was a tragic day for Nepal in which many of its outstanding pioneers in the fields of conservation and development were lost after a ceremony to hand the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) over to local community management. My respect goes out to the late Dr Tirtha Man Maskey and Narayan Poudel, who at the time of my research held the posts respectively of Director-General and Deputy Director-General of the DNPWC. Without their interest in my proposal I would not have been able to realise my research ambitions. I would also like to honour the late Dr Chandra Gurung, the country representative for WWF-Nepal. His keen interest in my research and the allied film-project proved crucial to the success of these endeavours. These were all men of remarkable achievement, responsible for providing inspiration and leadership in the field of conservation and development. I would also like to thank Surya Pande

and Shyam Bajimaya of the DNPWC head office in Kathmandu, who played key roles in processing my application to conduct research in government elephant stables.

I also owe Basanta Mishra, trustee of the KMTNC and Chairman of Temple Tiger, a huge debt of gratitude. Basanta took a keen interest in my research from the outset, and made introductions on my behalf, enabling me to establish my work with the staff of the KMTNC's Biodiversity Conservation Center (BCC) in Chitwan. Thanks to Basanta, during my reconnaissance field trip in 2001 I met Narayan Dhakal, Director of the BCC (then named the NCRTC) and author of the Hattisare Education Program, and was also able to forge enduring relationships with KMTNC wildlife technicians and conservation researchers including Bishnu Lama, Harka Man Lama, Bhagwan Dahal, Prabesh Rana, and Yogendra Lama. I have many fond memories of the staff of the BCC, its hattisares and of course their elephants as well. A warm thanks to my *samdhi* Binod Lama for taking me to the 2003 World Elephant Polo Championships and his father Bishnu Lama, Chief Wildlife Technician, for enabling me to accompany BCC staff members on elephant-back census work in the Barandabhar Forest. I am just the most recent of many foreign researchers to be helped by Bishnu in his long and distinguished career. Thanks also to V K Sharma, who took on the role of Director of the BCC after Narayan Dhakal went to the USA in order to train for and complete post-graduate research on the Padampur Relocation Project in Chitwan.

As a foreign scholar conducting research in Nepal, it was necessary to affiliate myself with a Nepali University in order to procure a study visa. Professor Nirmal Man Tuladhar of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) at Tribhuvan University was extremely welcoming and helped facilitate my registration. I am especially grateful to Professor Krishna Shrestha of the Central Department of Botany for agreeing to act as my Nepali supervisor. His efforts on my behalf were of great use in making contact with the Department of National Parks. Both of these men showed a keen interest in my work and helped make me feel welcome in a strange and foreign place.

Before I go on to thank informants, research colleagues, members of the local community, tourist industry, and scholars of Nepal, I must reserve an especially

heartfelt thanks to my film-making colleagues and my esteemed correspondent-informant John Coapman. Now retired, the professional hunter John Coapman was the founder of the Tiger Tops Lodge, and hence the innovator of Chitwan nature tourism in the 1960s. John's support, encouragement and expert knowledge has been invaluable, and has undoubtedly enriched my research.

And then there is Mark Dugas and One World Films. When in 1999 I told my friend Mark about my ideas for doctoral research, he immediately saw its exciting potential for a documentary film, a field he was planning establishing himself in. True to his word, Mark set up One World Films, and we began discussing how my research could translate into a documentary film. In the summer of 2003, Mark and his colleagues A J Dimaculangan and Ina Poljak joined me in Nepal for a 'scout trip', during which we had meetings with the DNPWC, KMTNC, and WWF-Nepal, as well as making a brief trip to Chitwan to shoot some preliminary footage. Then in May 2004, Mark joined me in Nepal again to shoot 'Servants of Ganesh' for real. This was facilitated by Saila Tamang and Ramdung Go Treks who secured government permits on our behalf. His knowledge and support cannot go without mention.

Few people have been so intimately involved with my work as Mark. Collaborating with him has been an absolute pleasure, and I hold his opinions in high regard. Mark has solicited my advice throughout the working life of the 'Servants of Ganesh' project and has worked tirelessly on its post-production, producing work-in-progress versions that have already received public test showings to positive response. We have been in consultation with filmmakers and distributors about our film's potential for television broadcast and a final version was shown at the Himalayan Film festival in Amsterdam in February 2007. I am especially proud to have been involved in production of 'Servants of Ganesh'. Film has the potential to communicate to a far broader public than the specialised publications of anthropologists, and I am keen to communicate the topics of my academic discipline to a wider audience. Without Mark this would not be possible for me.

Throughout my time spent in Nepal, both in 2001 and then later during 2003 and 2004, I was fortunate to be accompanied by a constant companion. To Satya Lama, my research assistant and adoptive brother, I owe an especially huge vote of thanks.

Satya's natural intelligence, his utter dedication, and his phenomenal linguistic abilities all made for a remarkably endearing and effective assistant. On innumerable occasions, thanks to Satya's presence, rapport was established, challenges overcome, and the goals of my research and documentary film realised. Satya's family, friends and clansmen accepted me as one of their own, and thus it is with pride that I declare myself 'Piers Moktan'! Similarly, my family accepted Satya as one of their own, and at the end of my field research in Nepal, it was the greatest of pleasures for me to be able to host Satya in my country, just as he had done for me in his. I could not possibly hope for a better research assistant. We share so many wonderful memories of remarkable times spent together, that I can say without doubt that the hardest part of writing up my research in the UK has been being separated from my *bhai* Sati.

In Chitwan itself, I was dependent upon the co-operation of various DNPWC officials, and I am particularly grateful for the good-natured way they put up with my curious ignorance. Thanks go to Shiva Raj Bhatta, Chief Warden of the Chitwan National Park, Udhav Dhungana, the Ranger for Sauraha, Kamal Jung Kunwar, the Anti-Poaching Officer, and the Departmental Vets Kamal Gaire and Bal Krishna Giri. Thanks also go to Birendra Mahato, President of The Hariyali Youth Club and Basu Chaudhary, Headmaster of the Bacchauli School, both of whom have been closely involved with The Tharu Culture Museum.

In Sauraha, when not residing at the Khorsor *hattisar*, I was the recipient of a great deal of hospitality from members of the local community and tourist industry. They helped make Chitwan feel like home. For daily dal-bhat in their teashop, a big thank you to the *hattisare* Ram Bahadur Shrestha and especially his wife Asthamaya, who cooked such tasty food for Satya and myself. Special thanks also go to Sushma Bhandari and her husband Lal Bahadur, who rented a room to us in Sauraha and also regularly cooked excellent meals for Satya and myself. Sushma's father Gopi Krishna Shrestha, proprietor of Eden, and sometime elephant owner, also provided a great deal of help. Similar thanks also go to Dhruva and his staff at the Riverside Hotel, the staff of Rhino Lodge, as well as Saroj Singh and the staff of Gaida Wildlife Camp.

For moral support in Kathmandu, I must thank my friend and Tibet researcher Jill Sudbury, as well as the husband and wife anthropology team of Sara Schneiderman

and Mark Turin. Thanks also to the Nepal specialist Roderick Chalmers, now working for the International Crisis Group. For correspondence on the ethnography of the Tharu, I would like to thank Arjun Guneratne, Christian McDonough, Giselle Krauskopff, Joanne McLean, and Pamela Deuel Meyer. For correspondence on Nepal in general, I would like to thank Michael Hutt, John Whelpton, David Gellner, Jagannath Adhikari and Mark Liechty. For advice on *sadhus* and suggested readings on elephant revolts in Bengal and Assam, thanks to Matthew Clark, for newspaper coverage, thanks to Kunda Dixit and The Nepali Times. For their expert opinion and encouragement, I would like to thank the film-makers Gary Kildea and Denis Whyte.

With regards to elephants, I would like to thank Lynette Hart, Khyne U Mar, Hank Hammatt and Elephant Care International, Helena Telkanranta of WWF-Finland, Richard Lair, Stephen Alter, Dhriti Lahiri-Choudhury, Ruth Powys and Elephant Family, Bibhuti Prasad Lakhar, and Kushal Kunwar Sarma. For sharing their papers concerning elephants in relation to history, ethics and consciousness, I would especially like to thank the philosopher Gary Varner and the historian Nigel Rothfels. I would also like to thank Cathy Dean and Save The Rhino International and also Nick Lindsay of the UK Rhino Group.

In Canterbury I would of course like to thank my supervisor Peter Parkes, as well as Helen Newing and Raj Puri from my supervisory committee. Daniela Peluso, Cameron Adams, and Simon Platten also deserve a special thank you for their support and encouragement. Thanks also to David Zeitlyn and Dave Reason for making my photographic exhibition happen. There are many other people in the department who deserve my thanks. So many people have helped in so many little ways that I would bore you all to death just listing them all. But be assured, I haven't forgotten you, and am most appreciative!

For his professional, writerly advice a big thank you to my uncle, Philip Nutman, his wife Anya Martin, and her father, Emeritus Professor of Sociology Bill Martin. And for familial support, thanks to my parents Richard and Linda Locke, and also Chris and Liz Nutman, Jo and Brad Sailes, Lucy and Charles Zeier, and of course my wife Heather, who read so much of this thesis as I wrote it, and tolerated my frustrations

admirably. Thanks also to my friends, whose snide jokes about my interminable writing always brought a smile to my face.

Finally, and most importantly, I must thank the elephant handlers of Nepal, to whom this thesis is dedicated and whom I came to so admire and respect. There are too many to name each one, so for now, just a few names will have to suffice. Thank you to Bhagu Tharu, the legendary royal elephant driver, a fount of knowledge, but never a braggart, who always urged me not to forget his lost comrades Ram Lotan and Tupsi. His evidently enduring love for elephants was really inspiring to me. Nobody could imagine Bhagu without elephants, and it would be a crime to think of him without also thinking of them. If Bhagu was a heroic figure in my research, then Rameshwor Chaudhary, the *adikrit subba* was my patron. He took me under his wing and did his best to make sure that I learnt what it meant to be a Nepali elephant handler. Without his committed co-operation, my research would have been embarrassingly impoverished. I sincerely hope this thesis provides an honest representation of the lives of Nepal's *hattisares*, a professional group I believe deserve more respect than they typically receive.



Misty Winter Morning at The Khorsor Hattisar

Notes on Transliteration and Pronunciation

Nepali, like Hindi and Sanskrit, is written in the *Devanagari* script, which is halfway between an alphabet and a syllabary, basically meaning that characters for consonants are modified with symbols that determine with which vowel sound they are combined. In order to provide the best guide to pronunciation when transliterated into the Roman alphabet, diacritic marks should ideally be used. For example, to indicate the nasalization of a vowel sound, a tilde /~/ would be added, and to indicate a prolonged vowel sound, the following symbol would be placed above the vowel /-/ (see Adhikary 1988). However, for the sake of convenience I have chosen not to utilise diacritics in this thesis, which does mean sacrificing information that would enable a novice to accurately pronounce Nepali terms, with the knowledge of whether a consonant is retroflex, dental, palatal and so on. For a standard introduction that explains which part of the mouth the tongue should be applied to in order to make the right sounds see Hutt & Subedi 2003.

Despite the lack of diacritics, this thesis broadly follows the conventions found in Adhikary 1988, and Hutt & Subedi 2003. A few further comments about spelling and pronunciation will be useful. Words like *prasada* and *Ganesha* are written with an 'a' appended, although it is hardly pronounced (the other 'a's are long). This is in keeping with the fact that in *Devanagari* no consonant can be written without a vowel sound being implied, a short 'a' being the default if no alternative modifier is added. In *Devanagari* the enunciated difference between 'b' and 'v' is interchangeable (hence *Vikram Samvat* or *Bikram Sambat*, *aitevar* or *aitebar*). A few further indicators: A word like *baksis* is pronounced *baksheesh*. A word like *camal* is pronounced *chaamal*. A word like *jutho* is pronounced *joo-toe*. Tharu is pronounced *taa-roo*. The 'a's in *Andolan* are pronounced softly, like the first 'u' in 'undulate', as with *hattisar*, which sounds like *hut-iz-aar*. *Asrama* utilises the same soft 'a' sound, followed by a long 'a', and then a non-pronounced 'a', so that it sounds like *ashraam*. *Bida* sounds like *bee-da*, and *chiya* like *chee-ya*, whilst *gusti* uses the 'goo' in good.

1. Introduction: Researching Captive Elephant Management

Perched upon Sitasma Kali's shoulders, I shouted "Agad!" whilst pressing my toes behind her ears. And so, with her experienced phanet Ram Ekvál sitting behind me, and with Sitasma's baby Kha Prasad gambolling around and getting into mischief, we ambled off into the jungle for a day's grazing...

In this first chapter I contextualise my research within the field of social and cultural anthropology, emphasising its distinctive character, its relevance, and summarising its themes. I then detail the primary research issues of this thesis and explicate my research methodology, with particular emphasis on my highly active approach towards participant observation. Subsequently, I provide further information about the three types of elephant stable, their respective functions in and around the Chitwan National Park, and the types of experience I encountered in these differing contexts. Following this, I recount my involvement with an allied documentary film project. In the final sections, I confront the terminological dilemma elephants present with regard to their status as animals involved in intimate relationships with humans. This is then contrasted with the terms Nepali handlers themselves use, leading onto a brief exploration of elephant naming practices, which serve as preliminary indicators for the ways in which elephants are generally conceived in South Asia and in Nepal more particularly, as will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

1.1 An Ethnographically Undocumented Practice

Whilst the stereotypic notion that social and cultural anthropologists study among small-scale and typically 'exotic' communities persists, and historically with good reason, the topics of contemporary anthropological research are far less constrained than such a stereotype suggests. Not only have tendencies developed in which anthropologists study in their own societies, a practice often referred to as 'anthropology at home' (see Jackson [ed.] 1987), and also in multiple locales, mapping trans-national networks, diasporas and population flows (see Amit [ed.] 2000), but some anthropologists have also initiated a shift in the analytic gaze from communities to professions. Thus, to briefly cite a few

examples, Tanya Luhmann has conducted an ethnographic study of American Psychiatrists (2000), John van Maanen a study of an American police agency (1988), Birgitta Edelman a study of notions of skill among Swedish railway shunters (1993), Gísli Pálsson a study of agency and enskilment among Icelandic trawler men (1993, 1994), Edward Simpson a study of shipbuilders' apprenticeship in Gujurat, Western India (2006), Jean Lave a study of apprenticeship among Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia, West Africa (1977, n.d), Trevor Marchand a study of minaret building in Yemen (2001), and even Philippe Bourgois on urban crack-dealing in the US (1996). Similarly, my own research, the topic of this thesis, has also focused on a set of distinctively socialised and skilled practitioners, in this case elephant-handlers in Nepal (sometimes referred to as *hattisares* in Nepali).

Somewhat surprisingly, considering both the antiquity and continuing relevance of traditions of captive elephant management, until now such practices have not been subject to long-term, ethnographic research. The small amount of social research that has been conducted has consisted of little more than brief questionnaires and interviews guided by narrow and pre-defined research concerns, and typically conducted by researchers whose primary interest and disciplinary orientation is toward elephants rather than their handlers (such as by animal behavioural scientists as in Hart 1994, Hart 1997, Hart & Sundar 2000, Hart 2005, or vets as in Dangolla 2002, animal welfare campaigners as in Ghosh 2005, and even a survey of Sumatran mahouts by the market research company AC Nielsen 2003, commissioned by the Elephant Family organisation, see: <http://www.elephantfamily.org>)¹. To further support this contention, it is worth noting that at a recent conference on captive elephant management held in Kerala, South India in October 2002, I was the only social scientist to make a presentation, as well as the only person to be presenting on captive elephant management in Nepal.

The point is that, despite making worthy contributions, these somewhat cursory and highly focused social studies have been incidental to a broader concern with captive

¹ Of course, this should in no way be taken as derogatory condemnation. Indeed, these authors have made valuable contributions to a research topic in its infancy.

elephant management and have been guided by instrumental imperatives. By this I mean that such studies display an interest in handlers and their working practices only in as much as it bears on the challenge of developing the infrastructure and standardisation of captive elephant management regimes. Consequently, so far as I am aware, there has until now been no attempt at a comprehensive study of elephant handling practices in which broader historical, sociological and cultural issues are raised, and in which questions about processes of skills-acquisition and the dynamics of a professional subculture are broached.

Only in Richard Lair's "Gone Astray" has the need for social anthropological research into captive elephant management received acknowledgement. He writes: "The scientific and technical disciplines of biology, forestry, veterinary medicine, animal husbandry, and law are obviously essential in managing domesticated elephants. Less obviously, the crucial caretaking function performed by mahouts and owners requires the entry of humanities such as social anthropology, as well as more arcane subjects such as comparative religion, social history, linguistics, etc" (Lair 1997:1).

This lack of ethnographic documentation is also surprising since in South and Southeast Asian societies, Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) have not only served as significant symbols of status and power for landlords, princes and kings (e.g Bist 2002), but have, for more than a millennium, played a practical role in war (e.g Lahiri-Choudhary 1991), and in other ancient civilisations (see Rothfels 2007), forestry (e.g Krishnamurty and Wemmer 1995) and, later during the Indian Raj, hunting (e.g Lahiri-Choudhary 1999), uses which will receive full consideration in subsequent chapters. Even today, in an era in which the use of elephants for war and hunting has fallen into abeyance, and in which their use in forestry is on the decline, mankind continues to find new ways to deploy captive elephants such that they now play an important role in tourism, park management

and conservation². Furthermore, the utility of captive elephants has been apparent in the role of elephants in countries affected by the devastating tsunami of December 26 2004, where they were of crucial importance in rescue and clear-up operations.

1.2 The Use of Captive Elephants in Chitwan, Nepal

It is this new set of roles for captive elephants and their handlers that provide the context for this study. Across the southern flank of Nepal, bordering India, and running from east to west, is a lowland strip known as the Tarai. It is in the Tarai that the Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP), a former hunting reserve, is located (see Figure 1.1: Protected Areas of Nepal). Although officially gazetted as a national park in 1973 (Sharma 1998), and listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1984 (Majupuria and Majupuria 1998), the transition from elite hunting reserve to tourist conservation zone actually started a decade earlier in 1962 when King Mahendra authorised the designation of 544 sqkm to serve as a wildlife sanctuary for the preservation of the Asian One-Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) (Mishra 1982) and then, in 1963 also authorised the establishment of the Tiger Tops safari lodge, where elephant-back safaris provided an essential means for guests to view large mammals like rhinoceros and tiger. In that pioneering era of Chitwan nature tourism, under the auspices of the seasoned hunter and entrepreneur John Coapman, guests came from the rich and famous and included such luminaries as Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones (Coapman, *pers comm.*).

² With regard to their use in forestry, Myanmar represents an exception, since the state (Myanmar Timber Enterprise) still maintains a population of between 2700 and 2750 elephants for use in logging operations, the Forest Department another 100 and a further 3000 in private use (Mar *pers comm*, see also Mar 2007). In contrast, in neighbouring Thailand, many redundant timber elephants and their drivers have been forced into urban areas like Bangkok, where they are forced to beg for their survival (Pimmanrojngool & Wanghongsa 2002).



Figure 1.1: Protected Areas of Nepal (from KMTNC 2003)

Besides their use in nature tourism (see Hart 2005), the establishment of the RCNP has brought other working opportunities for captive elephants and their handlers (see Hart & Locke 2007). With the newly formed Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) administering the former hunting reserve, the pre-existing government elephant stables or *hattisars* (known as *pilkhana* in India) acquired a new operational rationale. Whereas previously the *hattisars* had been maintained in order to facilitate large-scale hunts sponsored by the rulers of Nepal (see Smythies 1942), a subject which will receive full treatment in chapters two and three, the establishment of the National Park inaugurated a new era of captive elephant management in which elephants and their drivers would play an essential role in patrolling the Park, monitoring large mammal populations, and facilitating conservation programmes.

1.3 Elephant-Handling Research Issues

This study of Nepali elephant handlers' practices and their role in tourism, park management and conservation, is principally concerned with:

- The specialist and environmental knowledge of Nepali elephant-handlers.
- The apprenticeship process by which novice handlers acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve elephant-handling competence.
- The Nepali practice of elephant training and its attendant rituals.
- The ways in which a distinctive professional subculture and identity are constituted.
- The nature of social relations between elephant handlers, their regulatory authorities and other outsiders of superior socio-economic status.

1.3.1 Practical Knowledge, Codification and Power

In the past, anthropological studies of indigenous knowledge have overwhelmingly focused on the elicitation of data amenable to lexical representation, often at the expense of a consideration of other forms of knowledge that are not so amenable to codification (this particularly applies to the ethnoscience approach in cognitive anthropology, see D'Andrade 1995). The philosopher Gilbert Ryle has made a useful distinction between *knowledge-that*, to suggest knowledge of a representational nature that can be consciously imparted, and *knowledge-how*, to refer to practical knowledge, evident as a set of skills, which is acquired through repeated experience (in Crossley 2001:102, see also Ryle 1949:26-60). Connerton provides a complementary perspective to this distinction between semantic and embodied knowledge, by encouraging us to consider the modalities by which they are transmitted. He draws a contrast between *inscribing* and *incorporating* practices, where the first relates to methods by which human knowledge is retained and imparted without the necessary presence of human activity, and the latter to the ways in which knowledge is transmitted through bodily activity (Connerton 1989:72-73).

As James Scott has made clear, the 'know-how' that Ryle refers to is only evident in incorporated practice and cannot be effectively communicated apart from it (1998:315 & 329). Furthermore, in noting how forms of practical knowledge tend to be denigrated by high-modernist schemes implemented by state or state-like agencies, Scott also reminds us that the relation between scientific and practical knowledge is; "part of a political

struggle for institutional hegemony by experts and their institutions” (1998:311), or in Connerton’s terms, between inscribing practices and incorporating practices. In contemporary captive elephant management, this is evident in the development of a set of documents (e.g Namboodiri 1997, Phuangkum, Lair & Angkawanith 2005) formulated with the express intent of enabling regulators to enforce standards upon practitioners, thereby recalling Scott’s remarks about the political struggle for hegemony and control characteristic of modern bureaucracy.

Although in Chitwan the relationship between traditionally-managed stables and their institutional employers is ostensibly characterised by mutual accommodation to respective needs, nonetheless, a political process similar to this model of co-option can be discerned in the deployment and regulation of captive elephant resources. Park managers are reliant upon the practical skills and expert knowledge of handlers, over whom they are increasingly compelled to exercise regulatory control. As we shall see, this is an ongoing trend that derives from the imperative to integrate the historically autonomous institution of the *hattisar* with the modern imperatives of protected area management.

The expert and environmental knowledge of Nepali elephant-handlers is predominantly of this latter type that is so hard to encode; not so much taking a form consciously ‘held in our heads’ as it is ‘imprinted’ in our bodies as habituated responses. The example of riding a bicycle is often cited to illustrate this point; through trial and error we learn to ride, although this acquired ‘know-how’ cannot easily be verbalised for didactic purposes. Verbal instruction in activities such as riding a bicycle or even the more complex example of controlling an elephant, with its additional variable of the human-animal relationship, is generally limited to a mentor’s ability to register disapproval and subsequently to develop a vocabulary with which to refer to bodily postures and actions performed by practitioners (Connerton 1989:73). In the case of learning to drive an elephant this takes the form of admonishments such as ‘not like that!’ and commands such as ‘press your toes firmly against the muscled backside of the elephant’s ear!’. Mentoring such as this serves then to facilitate the learning that an apprentice must ultimately accomplish for himself, through habituation to his elephant.

Indeed, it is this very interactive aspect of elephant handler knowledge that further distinguishes its characterisation from conventional presuppositions about what constitutes knowledge. Tim Ingold's discussion of why knowledge and its acquisition is so important to hunters equally applies to elephant handlers. "This is not knowledge in the natural scientific sense, of things and how they work. It is rather as we would speak of it in relation to persons: to 'know' someone is to be in a position to approach him directly with a fair expectation of the likely response, to be familiar with that person's past history and sensible to his tastes, moods and idiosyncrasies. You get to know other human persons by sharing with them, that is by experiencing their companionship" (Ingold 2000:72). So it is with successful practice as an elephant handler- one must develop a bond of trust and understanding with one's elephant, in which each is cognisant of the dispositions of the other. As I shall argue, this personal form of knowing is an absolutely crucial component of elephant handlers' practical knowledge, and its acquisition a vital part of one's apprenticeship, the mastery of which serves to induct one into a community of practice (see Lave 1993, Wenger 1998).

1.3.2 Apprenticeship

As a method of learning involving practical rather than merely theoretical experience, apprenticeship may be conceived as, "a means of imparting specialist knowledge to a new generation of practitioners" (Coy 1989:xiv). In addition, the process of apprenticeship may also be conceived as both a rite of passage that transforms novices into experts, and as a means of learning those things that are resistant to verbal articulation, in other words; the tacit or implicit skills upon which such professions depend (Coy 1989:xiv).

The process of apprenticing as an elephant handler can be seen then as situated learning in a community of practitioners (Lave and Wenger 1991, Lave 1993, Wenger 1998). As we shall see, increasing participation initiates a dual process by which one simultaneously acquires both the skills and identity of a successful practitioner, in which increasing proficiency reinforces one's identity as an elephant handler (Lave 1993:68). In Bourdieu's sense then, by living and working in a *hattisar*, over time one comes to

incorporate the schemas, competencies and dispositions of a specific group habitus (Crossley 2001, Bourdieu 1990).

Conceiving of 'apprenticeship' as a discrete topic of enquiry, for which all studies within this rubric should bear easy comparison, is highly problematic, but not impossible, as Simpson acknowledges (2006:153). This is because 'apprenticeship' can be categorically applied to such a wide diversity of human activities, with a vast array of purposes and rationales (Simpson 2006:153). Indeed, until now the anthropological literature on apprenticeship has been populated by studies of artisans, such as tailors and woodworkers, and expert workers, such as fishermen, railway-shunters, and shipbuilders.

To my knowledge though, there have been no comparable studies of animal workers, distinctively inflected by the concern with human-animal relations. Whilst there are ethnographies of human-animal relations, such as reindeer herding, these have tended to focus on such practices as a mode of subsistence (e.g Ingold 1980). Although this entails apprenticeship in the sense of skills acquisition transmitted from elders to juniors, these are practices traditionally followed by entire communities (even if they are subsumed within larger state formations-see Vitebsky 2005). This contrasts with elephant handling in Nepal, which represents the chosen salaried livelihood of individual members of a social formation characterised by a complex economy with differentiated roles.

However, in relation to his own study of shipbuilders in Gujarat, Simpson does provide a definition of a fairly generic character, one which is consonant with the concerns of my own research, and which bears the hallmark of Bourdieu, Lave, Wenger, and Herzfeld (2004): "Apprenticeship involves disciplining bodies and minds and inculcating a set of dispositions towards tradition, religion and politics, which simultaneously reproduces patterns of capital and creates a dependent constituency for the master" (Simpson 2006:153). However, in the institution of the *hattisar*, an apprentice is not explicitly paired with any one specific 'master' as Simpson's definition seems to imply.

Furthermore, for social and cultural anthropologists, apprenticeship represents not just an object of inquiry involving long-term observation and participation, but also a field method. For Maurice Bloch, studying implicit, experiential and embodied forms of knowledge demands a fieldwork methodology that emphasises participation; "...because of its long-term character, involving continuous and intimate contact with those whom we study, participant observation makes us learn procedures which these people themselves have learned and enables us to check up on whether we are learning properly by observing our improving ability to cope in the field with daily tasks, including social tasks, as fast as our informants" (1991: 194).

Tim Ingold echoes this sentiment when he argues: "The fieldworker, by becoming immersed in joint action with fellow practitioners in a shared environment is able to experience the components of the environment as they do, not because he/she has learned to construct them in his/her mind according to the same categorical conventions, but because he/she has learned to attend to them in the same way according to what those components afford in their respective situational context. Such communion of experience...is, of course, what makes fieldwork possible" (1993:222). In the case of my research, the sharing of experience and my own acquisition of skills was especially relevant and demanded a particularly active form of participant observation (as I will further explain in the account of my research methodology).

1.3.3 Professional Identity

In Chitwan, two different elephant-handling life-worlds can be identified, those with self-sustaining communities of practice and those without. On the one hand, there are *sarkari hattisars*; which are large, government-run establishments whose elephants are kept primarily for park patrolling and to support the conservation work of the BCC. This type of stable, including to some degree the BCC *hattisar* as well as some of the *hattisars* of licensed concessionary safari lodges such as Tiger Tops, and Gaida Wildlife Camp, follow a management regime specific to Nepal that was established in the previous era of *shikar* or hunting during the rule of the Ranas. The Ranas, a *Chhetri jat* or caste who came to serve as the *de facto* rulers of Nepal, having displaced the direct rule of the

Thakuri jat Shah Kings in 1846 (Thapa 2003:14, Whelpton 2005:46-47, 62, Stiller 1993:79-81), became famous for sponsoring lavish hunting trips which could last several months and involve hundreds of elephants (Smythies 1942). In these establishments, there is a system of elephant-handling ranks and roles that are unique to Nepal. Furthermore, such *hattisars* typically possess a distinct tradition of ritual sacrifice and feasting that is specifically related to the operational activities of the *hattisar*, and derives from the culture of the local indigenous ethnic group, the Tharu.

On the other hand, those hotels in *Sauraha* which either own or lease elephants, typically kept in much smaller numbers than the *hattisars* of the government, the BCC and the fully-licensed safari lodges, tend to acquire their elephants and sometimes also their handlers from India. Consequently, an Indian management regime that allocates two staff members per elephant is usually followed (a first and second mahout). Furthermore, these Indian-trained elephants usually respond to a slightly different set of command words than do Nepali-trained elephants.

In such *hattisars*, there is little evidence of a distinctive tradition; the employers rarely make provision for ritual practices concerned with the keeping of elephants, nor are staff subject to a similar degree of standardisation as found in *sarkari hattisars*. In other words, the small-scale elephant stables maintained by small hotels do not tend to provide resources adequate for their practitioners to participate in a community that can regulate practice as well as sustain and reinforce a distinct professional identity.

Finally, but of greatest significance, are the restrictions these elephants and their handlers are subject to. Prohibited from entering the park, unlike *sarkari*, BCC and licensed safari lodge *hattisars*, the hotel-owned elephants and their handlers never come into contact with the other types of elephant-handler. They ply their trade by taking tourists on elephant-back safari in the Baghmara and Kumrose Community Forests, adjacent to the National Park, which afford similar game-viewing opportunities. These two groups operate in isolation from each other, and I found them to be mutually ignorant of the specificities of each other's practices, opinions and lifeworlds.

The distinctly Nepali type of *hattisar* is then a place where its staff both live and work. They are mainly of Tharu ethnicity, and predominantly originate from other districts in Nepal's Tarai (mainly Bara, Rautahat, Sarlahi, and Mahottari, but even Morang in the far east, and Bardia in the far west-see figure 1.6 Administrative Divisions of Nepal). Recruitment of local Chitwan Tharu is more common in the stables of concession holding resorts such as Gaida Wildlife Camp. Such stables are not part of a longstanding network with an established tradition of recruitment, as is the case with the *sarkari hattisar*, which also explains why government handlers continue to be recruited from districts that no longer have their own stables. Many *sarkari hattisare* only get a few opportunities a year to visit their natal homes, although wives and children do sometimes visit and briefly reside at the government stables. It comes as no surprise then to discover that although elephant-handling is by no means a prestigious profession, being traditionally performed by low-caste and typically landless Tharu, it is one that confers upon its practitioners a distinctive identity as well as a sense of being the inheritors of an uninterrupted tradition, evident in stories which recount the lives and exploits of celebrated handlers from a few preceding generations. This sense of shared professional identity is further strengthened by the fact that until recent decades, elephant-handling in the Tarai was the exclusive preserve of the Tharu, whom it was said would accept few if any other forms of salaried employment (Krauskopff and Meyer 2000:45).



Figure 1.2: Administrative divisions of Nepal

1.3.4 Social Relations with Non Handlers

Midway through the 19th century, the customary rules and practices that regulated social interaction between the differing social groups of Nepal were standardised in a civil code called the *muluki ain*. All social groups were ascribed to one of five ranked positions in what amounted to a state-sanctioned and legally enforced caste system. The rules were primarily concerned with regulating commensality and sexual relations, dividing groups according to the principle of purity and pollution (Sharma 1977, Höfer 1979). In 1964 King Mahendra repealed the provisions that allowed for discrimination on the basis of caste (Guneratne 2001:528), and in the context of a modernising state, dependent on foreign aid, and dedicated to development, the idiom of modernity began to displace that of caste as a marker of social difference, still primarily conceived in collective rather than individual terms (Pigg 1992, 1996, Guneratne 1999, 2001).

In the context of a modernising Nepal, in which traditional conceptions of caste are becoming increasingly obsolescent, social groups are less likely to distinguish themselves from each other in terms of being 'low' or 'high', than they are in terms of being 'backwards' or 'forwards', depending on estimations of a groups' collective advancement

in relation to the national ideology of development or *bikas* (Guneratne 1999:164). Whilst the distribution of political, economic and social power and prestige amongst the various castes and ethnic groups of Nepal (*jat*) has not changed drastically, the basis for evaluating it has, making social mobility a more achievable possibility than ever before.

The primarily Tharu elephant handlers historically derive from the relatively low third rank, the *masine matwali*, or enslaveable alcohol drinkers, whilst their superiors primarily derive from the first rank, the 'twice born' castes who wore the sacred thread (*tagadhari*) (Höfer 1979:45). As a consequence, although the caste disparity is no longer legitimate, this demarcation of social inequality persists, and is further exacerbated by a legacy of distrust deriving from the history of in-migration into the Tarai, which involved the Tharu being dispossessed of their land by higher status hill people (*pahari*), often by dubious means (Guneratne 1999:160, 2001:531, see also McDonough 1997 for the experience of Tharus in the western district of Dang). This then provides the basis for understanding the dynamics of social interaction between handlers, their employers and other high status Nepali visitors (see chapters three and seven).

1.4. Research Methodology

1.4.1 Participant Observation

The methodological repertoire utilised for this research was primarily concerned with the gathering of qualitative data, to which the ethnographic method is ideally suited. Thus, as previously indicated, the central research method utilised was that of participant observation, the defining method that makes the modern discipline of social anthropology so distinctive (Jenkins 1994:433). Fortunately, the handlers concurred with this approach; they were of the opinion that I would never truly appreciate the skills and practices of their profession unless I myself became an apprentice *hattisare* and experienced elephant handling for myself. When considered in relation to the research issue of situated learning in a community of practitioners, the necessity of such a research strategy becomes especially salient.

Apprenticeship then, as already stated, was for me not merely an object, but also a means of study, an aspect of anthropological fieldwork that has been receiving increased attention in the wake of a period of reflection on the writing of ethnography. This concern with ethnographic writing as a means of producing knowledge was largely stimulated by 'Writing Culture' (Clifford and Marcus [eds] 1986), a book which forced anthropologists to confront the epistemological status of ethnographic knowledge, and the rhetorical strategies by which it had traditionally been affirmed (see also, for example; Geertz 1988, Spencer 1989)³. These critical disciplinary interrogations into the *writing* of ethnography subsequently led anthropological discourse to shift its reflexive concerns towards the *experience* of fieldwork (as implied by the participant component of 'participant observation'). As a result, the *practice* of fieldwork by participant observation has begun to attract a similar degree of critical scrutiny as the *writing* of ethnography previously did⁴.

In the course of critically rethinking the relationship between anthropological knowledge and fieldwork practice, fundamental notions about knowledge and practice also had to be reconsidered. On this issue of knowledge and practice, Jenkins cites the philosopher Richard Rorty, for whom; "knowledge...is a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality" (Rorty 1991:1 in Jenkins 1994:433), something which is common to both anthropologists conducting fieldwork, and the everyday lives of their subjects. This conception of knowledge deriving from practice is especially pertinent when one's research subjects are skilled practitioners such as elephant handlers. This renewed emphasis on practice and experience is of course, heavily indebted to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his elaboration of the notion of habitus, as initially utilised by Mauss

³ 'Writing Culture' challenged Geertz's idea of culture as a text and the anthropologist's task as one of reading that text, as propounded in his famous essays 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture' and 'Deep Play: Notes on The Balinese Cockfight' in 'The Interpretation of Cultures' (1973). By the 1980s, Clifford (1983) and others argued that Geertz was not so much reading the cultural text of his informants as constructing one for himself, a critique which coincided with other arguments that also challenged ethnographic authority (such as Fabian 1983). The consequences of the furore created by 'Writing Culture' have continued to affect disciplinary self-reflection throughout the 1990s and beyond (see James *et al* [eds] 1997).

⁴ With regard to the literature on the experience of fieldwork, including reflections on relationships with informants, see for example: Diamond 1974:49-92, Okely & Callaway (eds) 1992, Newton 1993, Kulick & Willson (eds) 1995, Moreno 1995, Bourgois 1996, Watson (ed.) 2000, and Rubenstein 2004.

in his famous essay on 'Techniques of The Body' (repr. 1979). As such, it leads anthropology away from the dualism of self and other, of the ideal of the disinterested scientist and his or her research subjects, as enshrined in the legacy of Malinowski's British School of Social Anthropology, instead positioning the anthropologist and his or her subjects as interlocutors in the same complex world of constructed, meaningful experience (Jenkins 1994:434). This epistemological precept was crucial in determining my evaluation of the role participant observation could and would have for my research.

With regard to the conduct of fieldwork, the endeavour of participant observation even extended to being allocated my own elephant to work with whilst staying at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Centre, which served as my primary research location. Her name was Sitasma Kali and with her at all times was her baby, a two year-old male called Kha Prasad (see figure 1.3). The *Subba* or chief of the *hattisar*, had chosen this 20 year-old female for me because she was known to have a calm and obedient temperament. Although I frequently involved myself with the principal driving tasks of grass cutting and grazing, I was under no obligation to sustain the disciplined regimen of an ordinary handler since it was understood that my work involved other research obligations.

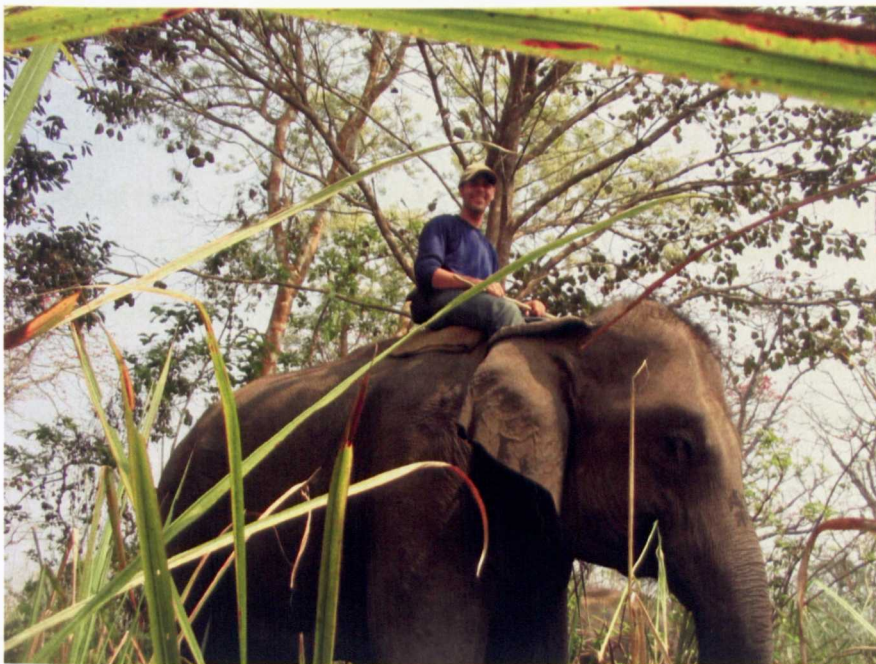


Figure 1.3: The Anthropologist on his elephant Sitasma Kali (photo by Phanet Ram Ekval Chaudhary)

By going beyond merely discursive inter-penetrations of each other's experiences, and instead immersing ourselves in joint activity, the handlers were better able to accept and incorporate me into their social world. In the handlers' prior experience, whereas other 'outsiders' typically only ever observed, instructed and asked questions, the handlers were happy that I joined in, that I was so much more dedicated to listening, and that I gave them the rare honour of expressing a desire to learn from them. This was then, the first time that the presence of an outsider was psychologically reassuring, and in which their typical defensive strategy of passive disengagement did not seem so necessary (see chapter seven).

However, as much as I considered minimisation of the differences in our respective subject positions desirable for my research, this does not mean that I ignored the handlers' own incentives for so fully cooperating with me. The immediate rewards of my presence in the *hattisar*, as well as expectations of future benefit accruing from my research and especially the documentary film has to be taken into account, for the officials of the DNPWC as well as the *hattisare*. Indeed, it became obvious to me that the patronage of Section Sahib, the government's chief elephant handler, was in part, and certainly initially, tactically determined.

Nonetheless, in summary then, my active approach towards participant observation served two principal ends. On the one hand it enabled me to go through an apprenticeship process for myself, thereby enabling me to intuitively understand those aspects of learning that are resistant to verbalisation, and thus to fulfil key research objectives. On the other, the emergent solidarity of shared skills and relations with elephants also facilitated effective rapport building with a professional group who typically maintain a relatively enclaved existence, thereby enabling me to appreciate the handlers' dispositions towards the wider institutional apparatus of which they are a part.

1.4.2 Interviewing

Besides my general involvement with the day-to-day activities of the *hattisar*, a central component of my research was the use of interviews. My interviewing strategy entailed

the use of both informal and semi-structured interviews. Informal interviewing took the form of impromptu discussions with informants that might yield useful information for understanding their life and work. Such interviewing could take place at any time or place; in the *hattisar* in between work duties, or whilst out in the jungle minding the elephants. Semi-structured interviewing by contrast, involved scheduled discussion with informants, ideally without the presence of too many curious onlookers, guided by a pre-defined set of open questions, and usually lasting for at least an hour.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit basic biographic data, elephant-handling career histories, and attitudes towards various aspects of employment as an elephant handler. Interviews were conducted with representatives from all *hattisare* ranks, primarily with handlers from the Khorsor, Sauraha and BCC *hattisars*. These *hattisars* served as my primary research locations, since I soon learnt that these were the *hattisars* at which there was a historical continuity with the Nepali tradition of captive elephant management, rather than the recently established *hattisars* of the hotels, which predominantly utilise imported, Indian-trained elephants and even handlers.

1.4.3 Documentary Resources

A pre-fieldwork scholarly review revealed a paucity of available materials on elephant handling in Nepal, a deficit that I hoped to remedy whilst conducting my research in Nepal. In both Chitwan and Kathmandu, I was able to acquire copies of rare books, translate Nepali newspaper articles about elephants, commission translations of Nepali veterinarian texts and previous government surveys of Nepal's captive elephant resources, as well as acquiring promotional materials from the Department of National Parks (DNPWC), the King Mahendra Trust (KMTNC), the WWF, and the various safari operators. An ongoing correspondence with John Coapman, the founder of Tiger Tops, also provided information useful to the task of investigating the recent history of Nepali captive elephant management, the establishment of protected areas, and the development of nature tourism in Nepal. These secondary resources complemented my primary ethnographic data by enabling me to add a richer diachronic perspective; developing an historical account of elephant management in Nepal and of the development of Chitwan.

1.4.4 Research Locations and Durations

Preliminary field research was conducted for two weeks in July 2001 at the Biodiversity Conservation Center, Sauraha, (called the NCRTC at that time). This brief, initial fieldwork enabled me to collect basic data, reconnoitre prospective field sites and introduce myself to future informants and research facilitators. This in turn, enabled me to develop a successful funding proposal for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

In February 2003 I returned to Nepal and stayed there for 17 months. In October 2003, with my research assistant (and adoptive brother) Satya Man Lama, I returned to the BCC and stayed there for 1 month. At this early stage of research, whilst still developing working relationships, I began a series of interviews with Nepal's most famous elephant handler, a septuagenarian man called Bhagu Tharu, who is renowned for saving the current King's grandfather, Mahendra from a tiger attack many years ago. Discussions with Bhagu provided invaluable information on the era of *shikar* or hunting, which preceded the more recent use of captive elephants in park management, conservation and tourism (see chapter three).

Later, in December 2003, I accompanied the wildlife technicians and *hattisares* of the BCC to a mobile camp close to the hamlet of Devnagar, next to the Pashupatinath Buffer Zone Community Forest in the Barandabhar Forest. There, from our campsite at the local forest ranger station, we conducted daily scout trips on elephants in order to acquire rhino census data. We took every third day off in order to rest and graze the elephants as well as to cut fodder for their sustenance when shackled.

Shortly after this, whilst beginning to make regular visits to the Sauraha *sarkari hattisar*, I met the *adikrit subba*, Mr Rameshwor Chaudhary, a man with 31 years experience working with elephants. The *adikrit subba*, or 'section officer', is the most senior elephant-handling staff member employed by the government of Nepal. Outranking the *subbas*, the officers responsible for everyday *hattisar* management, the *adikrit* is theoretically responsible for all six Nepali government *hattisars*, although he resides at,

and manages Khorsor, which houses more elephants than the other *hattisars*, and is distinctive for its programme of breeding and training.

The *adikrit*, whom we all address as ‘Section Sahib’, informed me of the imminent commencement of training for a young elephant called Narayani Kali, an activity that I was especially eager to witness, and at which I was invited to attend. Since elephant training entails evening sessions, and since Khorsor is only accessible by ferry-boat, the proper witnessing of elephant training, a process that would last at least two weeks, would require me to reside full time at Khorsor.

Welcomed by the staff, who were pleased to have a foreign researcher taking an interest in their work and lives, I soon resolved to make this my primary research location. But it was not just the congeniality of my experience at Khorsor that influenced this decision, for Khorsor is the only *hattisar* in Nepal at which elephants are bred and trained. This meant that at Khorsor I would encounter practices that could not be observed anywhere else in Nepal, making it an especially ideal location for my research interests. Although I continued to make visits to other *hattisars*, I remained at Khorsor for seven months.

1.5 Types of Elephant Stable in Chitwan

In Chitwan, different *hattisars* specialise in the various functions of tourism, park management, and conservation, and may therefore be classified according to three types:

- Government stables (*sarkari hattisar*)
- Private stables owned by hotels/safari lodges for the purposes of providing elephant-back rides for tourists (*hotelko hattisar paryatak ko lagi*)
- The unique case of the stable of the Biodiversity Conservation Centre (BCC), a facility of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC).

These three types of stable are described in further detail below, along with vignettes from my research experience, which help illustrate the differing kinds of work performed in each context. These are included because this thesis has been written according to the conviction that, besides serving as a conceptual endeavour in which case studies from the

real world are used to explore aspects of the human condition, ethnography should also be both a biographic and an autobiographic enterprise. As Judith Okely notes, Scholte (1974) was one of the first to call for a reflexive anthropology, as a critical, emancipatory exercise that could liberate the discipline from the false vestiges of a value-free scientism. According to this vision, the often-erased figure of the researcher should be re-inserted into the narrative portions of an ethnography. Noting that detractors of rhetorical strategies which foreground the role of the researcher often accuse them of being exercises in narcissistic, navel-gazing, Okely also argues: “The experience of fieldwork is totalising and draws on the whole being. It has not been theorised because it has been trivialised as the ‘collection of data’ by a dehumanised machine” (1992:3). It is not just the knowledge deriving from field research that is important, but also the practices and experiences by which it is produced. Needless to say, were I to represent my research as a mere data-collecting exercise, then I would be doing an injustice to the informants, relationships and experiences that gave me such a privileged insight into the world of Nepali elephant handling.

1.5.1 Government Stables

The government of Nepal currently manages 6 *hattisars*:

- Sauraha at Royal Chitwan National Park
- Khorsor at Royal Chitwan National Park
- Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve
- Amlekhgunj at Parsa Wildlife Reserve
- Shivapur at Royal Bardia National Park
- Kanchanpur at Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve

Chasing Crop-Raiding Rhino on Elephants

I woke up at 5.30am expecting another day of typical Khorsor routine, but soon learnt that today would offer the opportunity of an exciting excursion, by elephant of course. Local villagers had reported recent, unwelcome intrusions of a rhino upon their cropland, and we had received instructions from the Warden at Sauraha to locate the offending individual and chase him back into the jungle. All three of our adult males were

called into service; Birendra, Lambodar and Direndra Prasad, as well as the young, fast and mobile females Gandaki and Karnali Kali (upon whom I rode with her phanet Poorna Bahadur Thapa, the only handler from the Magar ethnic group).

Rigged with gada (straw-filled, sack cloth cushions), we all headed out to the village of Devnagar in the buffer-zone Barandabhar Forest, where a few of the locals who could identify the problematic rhino joined us for the hunt. There was an air of jollity among us all, happy to receive the attention of the curious onlookers from the village and to break the usual routine. After only a few minutes roaming sites of prior sightings we happened upon not one, but two males, one bearing gouges on his haunch that suggested he had been the loser in a fight for territory.

It was the loser rather than the victor who had been raiding crops and loitering in the local vicinity, and it was he that we had to remove. Now we had to co-ordinate ourselves so as to direct him in his escape. Our elephants had been trained to be fearless of rhinos, and I soon found myself clinging on tightly to Karnali Kali as we harangued the poor beast from just a few metres behind (see figure 1.4). I remarked to myself that no tourists were ever likely to find themselves in the midst of a frenzied pursuit on an elephant at full speed as I was.



Figure 1.4: In pursuit of a rogue rhino in the Barandabhar Forest

Once we had chased the poor rhino several miles deep into the jungle, far from village land, it was decided that our job was done. It occurred to me that he could easily return, and might very well be forced to once again, I noted with bemusement. Anyway, after such exertions we all needed refreshment, and so we approached the river where the elephants could take a drink. This also gave our party the opportunity to feast upon our prize of chang, a mildly intoxicating beer fermented from either rice or corn, and snack noodles, which are as popular in Nepal as crisps are in England, and are available in just as many brands. We had performed a favour for the local villagers, who were only too happy to reciprocate by providing us with beer and snacks...

Government stables come under the immediate jurisdiction of the DNPWC, and serve the primary function of providing a means of transport for the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) to

patrol Protected Areas⁵. In conjunction with the wardens of the DNPWC, the RNA is responsible for enforcing compliance with the rules and regulations of Nepal's Protected Areas. Government stables operate according to a management regime specific to Nepal, which involves three members of staff allocated to each elephant. Some government stables, such as Sauraha, also provide tourist safari facilities, whilst Khorsor, my primary field site, has the added responsibility of replenishing Nepal's dwindling captive elephant population.

The Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center, was established in 1986 with the express purpose of breeding and training elephants (practices which will be explained in full in chapters four and five). Some of these elephants are also available for patrol work (those females which are in the final stages of pregnancy or which have suckling young, are exempt) but not for tourist safaris, since no *hauda* (seats with wooden railings to house four passengers) are kept at Khorsor. Some of the elephant teams registered at either the Khorsor or Sauraha *hattisars* are often seconded to patrol posts within Chitwan National Park, such as Dhruva Post and Kasara, where the national park headquarters is located.

It is necessary to understand something about both the legal status of elephants and their distribution in the wild in order to fully appreciate the rationale for Khorsor. As a signatory to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) since 1975, the government of Nepal would seem to be prohibited from procuring elephants from foreign countries. It must be noted that CITES regulations make no specific provision for the trade in captive, tamed elephants, leaving the matter legally ambiguous (Lair 1997:4). Furthermore, although there have been occasional, special gift exchanges of endangered species between the governments of sovereign states that thereby circumvent CITES regulations (such as the exchange of 4 rhinos from Nepal in exchange for 16 elephants from Myanmar in 1984), captive elephants are still acquired from India

⁵ Subsequent to the peoples' uprising (*jana andolan*) of April 2006, which deposed King Gyanendra from his totalitarian rule, initiated a peace whereby the Maoists would cooperate with the alliance of seven political parties, to then establish an interim government with the task of holding elections for an assembly that will draft a new constitution, the Royal Nepal Army was officially renamed the Nepal Army. Similarly, this also led to the 'royal' prefix being removed from the national parks.

on a regular basis. Such transactions seem to have been exclusively private and commercial though, since the government of Nepal cannot be seen to be replenishing its elephant stocks by legally dubious means (see also section 4.10 'The Rationale of Elephant Training' in chapter four).

This legal situation, in conjunction with the lack of wild elephants available for capture, makes the necessity of the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center clear. These days, the wild elephant population that ranges through the territory of Nepal is very small, estimated at a hundred individuals in 1990 (Santiapillai & Jackson 1990:57), and in Chitwan specifically, perhaps 30-40 individuals (McLean and Straede 2003:516) making capture from the wild hardly viable, and certainly unsustainable⁶. Indeed, it is largely due to previous commercial practices concerning elephants that their numbers have so drastically diminished, an historical issue recounted by Arjun Guneratne in his monograph on the development of Tharu identity (2002:30).

Even before its unification into a single state in 1769, many of the petty kingdoms that comprise the current territory of Nepal derived considerable revenue from the capture of wild elephants, some of which had to be paid as tribute to the Mughal empire in the south (see chapter two). At this time, and afterwards, when Prithvi Narayan Shah had established Nepal as a unitary state, elephants were held as property of the king, were widely distributed through the forests of the lowland Tarai, and were a valuable commodity. During the mid-nineteenth century, captured elephants were valued at 300 rupees each, and according to Kirkpatrick (1811:17) about two to three hundred a year were being captured at the end of the eighteenth century. Similarly, Cavenagh reports a total capture of two hundred elephants in 1850 (1851:72), which Egerton (1852:249) tells us were inspected by Jang Bahadur Rana, the man who had displaced the direct rule of the Shah dynasty in the Kot Massacre of 1846 and established his own hereditary premiership (Stiller 1993:79-81, Whelpton 2005:46-47). Those that were deemed to be of inferior quality and of no use to the state (apparently on the basis of the tufts on their

⁶ The number of wild elephants ranging through Chitwan, as cited by Straede and McLean, represents the conventional wisdom of wildlife managers, and conforms to the numbers officials would cite to me during my research in 2001, 2003 and 2004.

tails), were to be sold in order to generate revenue. Guneratne (2002:30) notes that this was an unsustainable practice, and that in 1892/3 for instance, the Nepali state sought permission to carry out a *kheda* (an elephant hunt by the stockade method) in their former territory of Kumaon (now part of the Indian state of Uttarakhand). This was to the west of Nepal, and had reverted to British control as part of the Treaty of Sagauli of 1816, a peace deal brokered after the Anglo-Gorkha war (see Stiller 1973, Whelpton 2005). The British allowed the Nepalese the first 25 elephants free of royalty, and charged them 100 rupees for every additional captured elephant (Guneratne 2002:30).

It is then, as a result of the lack of availability of wild elephants in relation to the continued need for captive elephants that Khorsor was established. For the sustainable management of the Chitwan National Park and its attendant tourist economy, where captive elephants play an indispensable role, a healthy population of working age elephants must be maintained. The Khorsor *hattisar* is intended to meet this need without being forced to rely on India for the supply of tame elephants.

1.5.2 Private Stables

Participating in the Morning Elephant Bath

The town of Sauraha was full of hotels offering elephant-back safaris, organised through offices such as the Unique Elephant Booking Center, or by means of some hotels' own resident elephants. Besides the typical elephant-back safaris into the community controlled buffer zone forests of Baghmara and Kumrose, another popular event for the tourists was the daily elephant bath. Every morning, from about 10 am, on the banks of the river, beside the Riverside Hotel, privately owned elephants and their handlers would arrive for a bath.

*One could merely relax with a beverage and enjoy the sight of a handler scrubbing his elephant's skin, watching as he gave it the command to first turn this way and then that and to shower itself with its trunk (*chhop!*), or one could have a go for oneself. The handlers were always willing for foreign tourists to participate, and they would provide guidance and advice despite the language barriers. Most people realised that the handler*

would expect some baksheesh, a tip, and most would gladly give it. They would have an unforgettable experience remembered through photographs, whilst for the handlers, this play with both elephants and foreigners, some of them female and in varying degrees of drenched undress, provided additional income and maybe even some titillation...

There are seven resorts that possess concessionary licenses for operating safaris within the confines of the Park itself. These concession-holding safari resorts, which comprise Tiger Tops, Temple Tiger, Machan Wildlife Resort, Gaida Wildlife Camp, Chitwan Jungle Lodge, Island Jungle Resort, and Narayani Safari, cater to wealthy tourists who pay high premiums for luxurious accommodation and services as well as the privilege of safaris within the Park.

As already mentioned, Tiger Tops was the first such safari lodge, and was established before the establishment of Chitwan as a National Park, as a special dispensation from King Mahendra toward the professional hunter John Coapman. As such, Tiger Tops pioneered the introduction of elephant-back nature tourism in Nepal, and under the management of John Coapman's successor Jim Edwards, it continued to enrich the tourist experience. As Hart remarks, what was innovative about Tiger Tops' approach was its hiring of expert naturalists who; "sought to educate and tantalize the tourist's mind with intriguing information, viewing, and demonstrations with plants, animals, and birds" (2005), an approach which Desmond (1999) has called 'staging tourism'. However, whilst tourists at these concession-holding safari resorts usually receive some information about elephant care and handling, they are given little or no opportunity to learn about the handlers (Hart 2005). For many years now, Tiger Tops has also helped retain its prestigious profile (and that of Chitwan nature tourism more generally) by hosting the World Elephant Polo championships, which I attended in December 2003 (see figure 1.5)⁷. Attracting teams from locations as unlikely as Scotland and Iceland, this annual

⁷ More recently, the Regional Hotel Association Chitwan, taking its cue from Tiger Tops, has begun to host elephant races, aware that this will be of benefit to the profile of Chitwan as a tourist destination. The first race was held in December 2005, involved 29 elephants racing under the banners of national and international teams, and received international coverage. The organisers claim the first race festival attracted 15,000 tourists, and hope to attract 30,000 at a better-planned festival in December 2006. Besides serving as a tool to promote Chitwan tourism, the organisers also intend event revenues to be used to

event continues to be held at the Meghauli airfield, which was prepared especially for the arrival of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, when King Mahendra hosted her and her entourage for a safari experience in the renowned jungles of Chitwan in 1961 (see chapter three).



Figure 1.5: A goal about to be scored during the 2003 World Elephant Polo Championships⁸

Other hotels based in the village of Sauraha, which cater to mid-to-low budget tourists, provide elephant safaris within the community forests in the Buffer Zone surrounding the 932 sqkm of RCNP (primarily the Baghmara Community Forest, so named because it was the site where a tiger was once killed). The elephants used by these hotels, unlike the seven licensed concessionaries, have no rights to enter the Park and use its forests and grasslands for grazing. Many of these hotel-owned elephants come from India, either as

improve captive elephant resources, safeguard elephant welfare, and provide auxiliary welfare services to handlers. See: <http://www.internationalelephantrace.org/> (accessed on 07/11/06).

⁸ The young elephant in the foreground is Karnali Kali, driven by her phanet Poorna Bahadur Thapa, both of whom are based at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center. See <http://www.elephantpolo.com> (accessed 07/11/06).

permanent purchases or on the basis of temporary leasehold (to cater exclusively for the tourist high season). Very often, but not always, elephant staff will be acquired along with the elephant, such that the new owner will be obliged to provide sleeping quarters and guaranteed employment to the staff who live and work with the newly acquired elephant. It is for this reason that most typically, such elephants are managed according to the Indian elephant management regime of two members of staff per elephant, a first and second mahout.

1.5.3 The Hattisar of the Biodiversity Conservation Center (BCC)

Joining the BCC to Help Conduct a Rhino and Ungulate Census

Satya and I awoke and packed our rucksacks, excited to be leaving the stilted dorm rooms of the BCC, which the 7pm curfew, imposed as a result of the growing Maoist insurgency, had made such a lonely abode for us during our first few weeks in Sauraha. Although we had been making good progress in 'getting the lay of the land', beginning a little interview work, and building rapport with prospective informants and research facilitators, I was already restless, eager to get more involved. I was hankering for some jungle experience, and had been overjoyed when Bishnu Lama, the chief wildlife technician, had invited me to join him and his crew. Bishnu had given me the privileged opportunity of actually participating in conservation research conducted on elephants.

From today we would be participating in a rhino and ungulate census as part of the long term Tiger Rhino Conservation Project (TRCP). This was part of a three-month stint of continuous jungle work at various sites in Chitwan, and we would be joining the BCC wildlife technicians and hattisares at the Devnagar camp in the Barandabhar Forest, an important wildlife corridor (where we would later chase the crop-raiding rhino back into the jungle). Clambering into the jeep with our friends Bishnu Lama, his son Binod, Harka Man Lama and his son Tirtha, Pravesh Rana and Buddhi Ram Kumal, we began an hour-long journey over rough and dusty roads that led us to a forest ranger station where we could pitch out tents.

The five BCC elephants and their staff had set off, fully loaded, the day before. Arriving at midday, the camp was already well organised and everything was ready for the jungle work to commence the next morning. Located in the Pashupatinath Buffer Zone Community Forest, Devnagar camp was close to a small hamlet, but otherwise remote, so we would be providing some welcome company to the two rangers based there. Facilities were basic but adequate; we had running water and a shack in which to prepare dal-bhat (rice and lentils).

The next morning, rising early in the cold, damp fog of winter, we just had time for a small glass of dudh chiya (milky tea) before the elephant teams departed, with five elephants, five drivers and one or two passengers on each. Patches of forest were intersected by patches of grassland, at the edge of which we soon came upon our first herd of about 20 chittal, a species of deer. Soon after, we saw our first rhino, the distinguishing marks of which, the location of sighting, and the spotter's name all had to be recorded. The handlers and wildlife technicians had no problem in identifying particular individuals. The excitement of conducting this census on elephant-back far outweighed the inconvenience of the inclement weather (see figure 1.6).



Figure 1.6: Conducting the rhino and ungulate census in the Barandabhar Forest on a cold winter morning

After so long in Kathmandu securing research permission, I felt triumphant to be finally realising my research aims, feeling privileged to be so intimately involved with the use of elephants in conservation work, but there was more. After several hours twisting and turning over difficult terrain in pursuit of rhino, we were all tiring and yearning for our morning dal-bhat. Then, only a mile or so from base camp, the phanet Pashupat, named after the God Shiva in his form as lord of the beasts, driving Man Kali, caught a glimpse of a leopard. As he hissed the word ‘chituwa!’ (leopard), I felt a charge of adrenaline coursing through my veins, and as a result of the intimate relationship he had developed with Man Kali over the years, he was able to manoeuvre us into a position from where I was able to get a brief view of the creature in flight, an image that I was sure would be indelibly marked in my memory for years to come...

The Biodiversity Conservation Center (BCC) is a facility of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), of which a little further explanation is called for. “The KMTNC was established in 1982 by a legislative act of the parliament of Nepal, mandated as an autonomous, non-profit and non-governmental organisation, to work in the field of nature conservation in Nepal” (KMTNC: Profile of a National NGO *n.d*:4). It was named in honour of the late King Mahendra, whose intervention was responsible for the establishment of Nepal’s Protected Areas. Dedicated to promoting, managing and conserving nature in all its diversity, it works in the fields of:

- Integrated conservation and development
- Applied wildlife research and monitoring
- National capacity enhancement in Protected Area Management
- Community based tourism management
- Conservation education
- Local capacity building

As such, the KMTNC plays a key role supporting and complementing the work of the DNPWC and the Department of Forests (DoF). The KMTNC receives the royal patronage of His Majesty Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, and his son, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Paras Bir Bikram Shah Dev, acts as the Chairman of the Trust, working in unison with a Governing Board of Trustees, comprising prominent national and international personalities in the fields of nature conservation and sustainable development⁹. In addition, a network of international partners in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Japan also support the Trust (KMTNC: Profile of a National NGO *n.d*: 4).

The BCC was originally established as the Nepal Conservation Research and Training Center (NCRTC) in 1989, but was renamed the Biodiversity Conservation Center in

⁹ In February 2005, King Gyanendra, in response to the intensifying Maoist insurgency, dismissed the government of prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, and assumed absolute rule. In April 2006, by now deeply unpopular and judged to have failed in his promise to quash the Maoists, Gyanendra was deposed after a month of mainly peaceful popular protests. Although the Royal Chitwan National Park, along with other Royal institutions such as the army, has now lost its royal designation as previously mentioned, the status of Gyanendra as patron and his son Paras as chairman of the KMTNC as yet remains uncertain.

January 2002 (KMTNC: Profile of a National NGO *n.d:15*). Its *hattisar* and buildings were established earlier however, in 1973, shortly after the establishment of Chitwan as a national park, when The Smithsonian Institution, under the auspices of John Seidensticker, began its 'Tiger Ecology Project' for which it required its own stable of captive elephants to be specially trained in conservation research duties. The five elephants originally recruited for the Smithsonian-sponsored project (Jun Kali, Mel Kali, Kriti Kali, Chanchal Kali and Man Kali) still work there today, as do the wildlife technicians Bishnu Lama and Harka Man Lama, both of whom have received numerous accolades at home and internationally, for their longstanding service, knowledge and expertise in the field of conservation research.

The primary function of the elephants of the BCC *hattisar* is in facilitating the long-term project; 'Landscape Scale Conservation of Endangered Tiger and Rhinoceros Population in and around RCNP, Nepal', which is commonly referred to as the 'Tiger/Rhino Conservation Project' (TRCP). In terms of the use of captive elephants, this primarily entails large-mammal population census-survey work as well as a central role in the capture of Greater One-Horned Asian Rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) for translocation to Royal Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in the west of Nepal's Tarai.

The annual programme of translocations, initiated in 1986, but unfortunately disrupted in 2004 and 2005 due to the ongoing Maoist insurgency, has been indicative of Nepal's conservation success in bringing the rhino back from the brink of local extinction. In the 1960s, the Chitwan population had dwindled to a mere 67 individuals, but by the 1990s the population numbered close to 500 individuals, enough to try to reintroduce the rhino to the western regions of Nepal, thereby creating additional breeding populations in previously inhabited areas (Maskey 2002:202, Dinerstein 2003). However, it is also disappointing to note that the results of the 2005 rhino census indicate a large drop in the previously prospering rhino population. This has been attributed to both a reduction in the military presence in Chitwan (the logistical demands of fighting the insurgency had necessitated a reduction in the number of manned army posts from 32 to 8), as well as to

greater incentives to engage in poaching as a result of the economic strictures of the insurgency (Kunwar 2005, *pers comm*)¹⁰.

1.6. My Research and One World Films' Documentary Film Project

In addition to conducting research, I was also closely involved in a documentary film project on the same theme, which was crucial in securing official permission to work in the *hattisars* of Chitwan. Whilst contemplating Nepali elephant handling as a PhD research topic in 1999, a friend, Mark Dugas, with aspirations to become a documentary filmmaker, recognised the potential of my work for an allied film project. Soon after this, One World Films (<http://www.oneworldfilms.com>) was established and plans for a film now titled “Servants of Ganesh” were initiated.

In June 2003, with our project already endorsed by WWF-UK, three of my colleagues from the One World Films collective joined me in Nepal for a brief ‘scout trip’. During this visit, we met with officials from the DNPWC and WWF in Kathmandu, and then, in Chitwan, with staff from the KMTNC. Visiting the BCC and Khorsor *hattisars*, footage for a short promotional film was shot. Then in May 2004, Mark Dugas, the founder of One World Films, joined me at Khorsor for a one-month film shoot, during which the training of a young male elephant called Paras Gaj was filmed. “Servants of Ganesh” has now received selected premier showings, and One World Films is currently in negotiation with prospective distributors.

1.7. Tamed or Domesticated- Terminological Problems in Classifying Elephants that Live with Humans

The definition of domestication itself is far more problematic than might at first be assumed, and the status of elephants poses a particular problem. As Ingold remarks: “The precise meaning of domestication has remained a topic of scholarly debate for well over a century” (2000:62), but there is at least one common denominator to all proposed

¹⁰ A considerable market for powdered rhino horn still exists, both for treatment of fever, for which scientific research has confirmed its medicinal efficacy, and for its purported qualities as an aphrodisiac, for which scientific research provides no support (see Dinerstein 2003, and also Morris 1964:79).

definitions: “Every one of the competing definitions introduces some notion of human control over the growth and reproduction of animals and plants” (2000:62)¹¹.

In an attempt to bring some clarity to this ongoing discussion, Ingold distinguishes two approaches to the definition of domestication, one as a biological intervention, and the other as a social appropriation. However, both approaches presuppose humanity’s transcendence over nature, and hence a dualist metaphysic that opposes *humanity*, in the guise of persons with minds, against *animality*, in the guise of organisms with bodies (Ingold 2000:63). It should be evident that both of these approaches emerge from an epistemology that can, for the sake of convenience, be termed ‘western’, even if such a designation resists definitive mapping (see Bowman 1997:47 fn. 1).

As Ingold remarks: “To the extent that the human condition transcends nature, so nature herself comes to stand as raw material to human projects of construction” (2000:63). Thus we can see how domestication has been conceived as a mode of production, and as such might also concomitantly be considered a feat of engineering, designed according to the intentions of man. Yet this is despite the fact, as Darwin pointed out, that until very recently mankind has only been able to select retroactively from variants that arise spontaneously. And so controlled breeding has falsely served as an analogue for planned modification, which has come to comprise a defining feature for the biological understanding of domestication¹². To husband animals was then to breed them, and where

¹¹ Sandor Bökönyi also notes the longstanding nature of the debate over domestication (1989:22) and along with Pierre Ducos, has been a key figure in an ongoing dispute characterised by rather terse exchanges (for example Bökönyi 1989 and Ducos 1989). Bökönyi’s approach is concerned with domestication as a pivotal moment in the evolution of human-animal relationships and is both essentialist and authoritatively prescriptive. By contrast, Ducos’ definition is logically possibilist and outlines a methodological approach. Both Bökönyi and Clutton-Brock are keen to restrict the term to animals kept under conditions of controlled breeding, and to emphasise its cultural and biological aspects (Clutton-Brock 1994:26-27), whereas Ducos considers this but one possible outcome of a process which need not logically entail both behavioural and morphological change as a result of controlled breeding over successive generations (see definition in Ducos 1978:54, also cited in Bökönyi 1989:23, and his refutation of the osteological method for distinguishing domesticated and wild animals 1989:29). Ducos’ definition can be seen to both encompass and transcend Bökönyi’s definition, and has been utilised by Ingold to develop his account of domestication as social appropriation.

¹² The preoccupation with human control over breeding as a criterion for domestication may be traced back to Darwin, whose conclusions about the origin of species by natural selection owed much to his observations of the breeding of domestic animals, as Clutton-Brock remarks (1989:7).

one occurred without the other, as with the keeping of reindeer by northern Eurasian pastoralists, then they had to be dismissed as animals in an unstable, transitional state of 'semi-domestication' (Ingold 2000:63-64)¹³. Similarly, elephants have traditionally been kept without mankind playing a consistent and decisive role in their breeding until very recently, and even then without overt control over selection (although this is not to deny mankind a more subtle role in affecting elephant reproductive patterns)¹⁴.

An alternative definition of domestication emphasises its social rather than biological aspect. According to Ducos, "domestication can be said to exist when living animals are integrated as objects into the socio-economic organisation of the human group" (1978:54, in Bökönyi 1989:23, and in Ingold 2000:64, see also Ingold 1986:113, 168 & 233). This implies that they become a form of property that can be owned, inherited and exchanged. Tuan (1984) even explains the human propensity for animal domestication in terms of the pleasure derived from initiating a process, the outcome of which signifies the human mastery of nature. From this perspective the taming of a being as powerful and intelligent as an elephant could be taken as the greatest of domesticating achievements, as Shelton (2001:1) acknowledges in a discussion of the voyeuristic pleasure Roman audiences took in observing the subjugated performances of elephants in the arena.

Incidentally, this social definition need not be limited to livestock, but can also include animals in the category of 'pet', which Darwin's cousin Francis Galton first suggested as the antecedent for the development of increasingly large-scale animal husbandry (in Serpell 1989:10)¹⁵. Whereas the former definition sees domestication as an intervention in nature, this definition sees domestication as an appropriation of nature, since humans as

¹³ According to the logic of Bökönyi, this could be taken to imply an incompleting process of domestication, whilst also reflecting the ethnocentric limitations of his zooarchaeological concern with the role of domestication in the rise of classical civilisation. Indeed, as the participants in the discourse on domestication themselves concede, definitions have been shaped by their varying disciplinary concerns.

¹⁴ Hecker (1982) avoids the problematic criterion of modification through breeding by providing a category supplementary to that of domestication, speaking of 'cultural control' in order to refer to those cases where humans appropriate animals without exerting significant and successive control over their breeding (in Bökönyi 1989:22).

¹⁵ With regard to elephants, considering the inapplicability of the category of livestock, one should not assume that the category of 'pet' might present any less difficulty. Contrary to the dominant connotations of 'pet', elephants are kept for both utilitarian and symbolic reasons, are of economic utility, yet can also be companions (for an historical and cross-cultural study of pet-keeping, see Serpell 1996).

subjects can own animals as objects. And again we can see that this too presupposes nature as a realm extraneous to humanity since one can logically only appropriate that which is not contained by one's self (Ingold 2000:64).

Juliet Clutton-Brock (1981) incorporates both biological intervention and social appropriation in her two fold typology, which distinguishes animals utilised by humans into two primary groups: 'man-made animals' and, rather evocatively, 'exploited captives'. In the former case, livelihood and breeding is entirely under human control, and may have been exercised to such a degree that domesticated forms have altered almost out of recognition from their wild progenitors, as is the case with some breeds of dog (the animal that demonstrates the greatest plasticity in its range of domesticate forms). In the latter case, wild animals after capture are tamed or trained to some degree (in Lair 1997:3)¹⁶. Whilst elephants might seem like more obvious contenders for the category of 'exploited captive' than 'man-made animal', it does raise the question as to why, when the livelihood and breeding of elephants has potentially been under total human control, has mankind so rarely exercised any significant control over breeding over successive generations. As we shall see, despite these qualifications, terms such as 'domesticated' and 'tame' still prove highly problematic when applied to elephants.

And so a discussion of appropriate nomenclature for referring to 'non-wild' elephants is required, to clarify the status of elephants if nothing else. A variety of differing terminological conventions have been utilised, and these all betray the evaluative perspective or those who use them, and/or the specific contexts of utility from which they arise. All have differing connotations, and none are entirely unproblematic. Richard Lair cites the following terms for *Elephas maximus* in a state of domesticity: 'tame elephant', 'work (or working) elephant', 'timber elephant', 'domestic elephant', 'domesticated elephant' and most lately in vogue; 'captive elephant' (1997:3).

¹⁶ Clutton-Brock is keen to note the resemblance between the husbanding of livestock and the keeping of slaves (1994:31), a point not lost on animal welfare campaigners (see Singer 1985, Kete 2002).

Firstly, with regard to the category 'tame', it should be noted that not all elephants held in domesticity, such as many that reside in zoos, have been subject to a process of taming/training (or even derisively termed 'breaking'), thereby limiting the applicability of the term¹⁷. 'Tame elephant' may also be deemed problematic since understandings of it might be taken to conflate processes of domestication with those of training. The former suggests an animal that has been genetically modified over time (hence effecting inhering physiological and behavioural changes) by means of humanly controlled selective breeding (Clutton-Brock 1987:1), while the latter suggests a process of externally imposed, conditioned behavioural modification¹⁸. However, the most salient associations evoked by the term 'animal training' tend to be applied to animals that have already been subject to modification through selective breeding (the training of domesticated species such as dogs as pets being more widespread and typical than cases of training wild primates in order to answer longstanding anthropological speculations about the purported uniqueness of the human capacity for language, for example).

It should be noted that although elephants are being bred at Khorsor, pairing and mating are not under explicit human control (and result from impregnations from both wild and captive males). More generally, in all Asian cultures with traditions of using elephants,

¹⁷ This is despite recommendations for captive elephants to be trained for the sake of their own well being (to ease the problem of boredom), as well as for ease of maintenance and safety of care staff (Moore & Doyle 1986, Dudley 1986). Elephant keepers at Port Lympne Zoo in Kent, UK, interviewed by myself in December 2002, were frustrated by regulations laid down by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which almost entirely prevented them from physical contact with their elephants, thereby denying them the crucial pleasures of their job as well as depriving the elephants of social contact with humans. The situation of elephants subject to confinement in western zoos and safari parks is considerably different from that of elephants kept for traditional purposes in Asian countries however, so management strategies appropriate in one context may not translate effectively to another. An approach of hands-free contact is now becoming the predominant approach to captive elephant management in the west, especially in the context of zoos, although the issue remains contested and controversial (Hammatt, *pers comm*), and cannot be understood outside of the context of concerns for the welfare of ostensibly 'wild' elephants confined in zoos, for which both the RSPCA and European Elephant Group recently commissioned reports (see Clubb & Mason 2002a and 2002b, and Endres *et al* 2003).

¹⁸ In a discussion of reindeer domestication, Vitebsky reminds us however that domestication as entailing selective breeding is a relatively modern understanding of the term, which might more generally be defined according to the following: "Domestication involves appropriating a wild animal's behaviour, bending it to human purposes, and continuing this relationship down through generations of animals" (Vitebsky 2005:25).

there has been reluctance to control breeding over successive generations¹⁹. A case can be made that in some cultures the temperament of wild-sired elephants is preferred, alongside a belief that captive-sired elephants will somehow be weaker. However, rather than invoking some putative cultural prohibition, this can be best explained as due to a lack of incentive. The capture of adults or juveniles from the wild has been an easier mode of procurement in terms of resource input than the lengthy process of breeding babies which will not be of profitable utility until they reach adulthood (Lair 1997: 269). Furthermore, 'tame', associated as it is with animals in the category of 'pet', might also be taken to connote 'harmless', which any elephant handler can tell you is a very foolish working assumption, and is surely a result of the binary conceptual opposition of 'wild' with 'tame'²⁰. Nepali elephant handlers repeatedly invoke the goodwill of the Hindu elephant-headed god Ganesha precisely because they recognise that the 'wild' element of an elephant's nature can never be fully eradicated (they say it always retains a yearning to return to its own life in its own habitat); the elephant is capricious in that experience has taught that it can pose a danger even to its own handlers and at almost any time.

Many people might also assume that 'tame' suggests a relatively permanent if not irrevocable condition, and although the phenomenon of 'tamed animals' surviving or returning to a feral state is well known (for example rabbits in Spain and France, see Bökönyi 1989:25, and sheep, goats, pigs and cats on Mediterranean islands, see Groves 1989), elephants are peculiarly well-suited to the reclamation of a 'wild state' (Lair,

¹⁹ Interestingly, in western classical sources, the elephant was credited with a refusal to reproduce in captivity and thereby perpetuate its state of slavery. It was thought that an elephant could accept captivity for itself but not for its offspring, a belief supported by elephants' supposed need for utmost privacy in order to mate (Rothfels 2007). The great 18th century naturalist Buffon echoed these sentiments. Regarding the elephant as a being of the finest distinction, and writing in the context of pre-revolutionary France when issues of slavery and subjugation were becoming significant, it made perfect sense to him "that they would deny themselves their deepest desires in order not to perpetuate the slavery of their kind" (Rothfels 2007). At the same time though, he considered them wise and moderate enough to accept their captivity and to comport themselves as 'model citizens', capable of enthusiastically obeying instructions (Rothfels 2007).

²⁰ In the 1950s, the American TV personality Arthur Godfrey was determined to keep an elephant as a pet. Ignoring the advice of the hunter and safari pioneer John Coapman, this ultimately led to the elephant breaking free, running amok, and having to be destroyed (Coapman, *pers comm.*).

1997:6)²¹. These objections should then convince us that ‘tame’ is a misleading category when applied to elephants in a state of domesticity.

‘Work (or working) elephant’ clearly excludes animals kept in zoos, whilst ‘timber elephant’ obviously only refers to animals kept for specific purposes. Some of the problems of classifying elephants as ‘domestic’ or ‘domesticated’ have already been indicated, in that we know that elephants have not been subject to genetic modification through controlled breeding over successive generations. Two points arising from this need to be stressed- elephants have neither been subject to morphological or behavioural modification (neither being taught to respond to commands nor adapting to human-imposed routines fulfil the cross-generational permanency implied by behavioural modification).

However, in keeping with the understanding of domestication as social appropriation, we must remember that ‘domestication’ need not only imply this relatively modern, scientific sense of the term. In its etymological sense of the ancient Greek for, ‘in or belonging to the home’ it is perhaps less objectionable, but the problem of potential ambiguity of meaning remains (or indeed of pedantic academics!) This also raises the issue of how culturally inflected ethical differences influence nomenclatural distinctions (just as Ducos similarly concedes that all proposed definitions for domestication reflect the approach chosen to study the topic rather than an objective reality, 1989:30).

Whilst in Asian cultures a ‘household elephant’ might be a source of pride for its positive regal and sacred associations, in Western culture, by contrast, it might be an object of pity as an abused captive. It is this western bias with its implications of unjust exploitation, thereby excluding the possibility of human-elephant relations as one of mutually-

²¹ And elephants are not unique in the provisionality of their relationship to humans, as Vitebsky makes clear in his discussion of reindeer domestication, where some members of the herd are tamer than others. “Apart from the males trained for carrying baggage, riding, and pulling sledges, and some females when lactating, most of the animals in a herd never become very tame, in the sense of having an intimate emotional and physical contact with their human carers. Even transport reindeer may become uncooperative and recalcitrant if left unattended for a few days, and any domestic reindeer may revert to the wild if left unattended for longer. The domestication of the reindeer is a hard-earned and provisional achievement” (2005:25).

beneficial symbiosis, which also makes the final term in our available repertoire problematic.

‘Captive elephant’ can therefore be seen to prejudge the relationship between human and elephant. However, there is now an emerging field dedicated to issues concerning the care and welfare of non-wild elephants, and this has acquired the designation of ‘captive elephant management’. In conceiving of this research as a contribution to the field of captive elephant management, I will then most frequently defer to the increasingly consensual terminology of ‘captive elephants’.

1.8 Nepali Elephant Designations and Naming Practices

It will though come as no surprise to hear that these terminological problems are of little concern to Nepali elephant handlers. They refer to elephants simply as *hatti*, utilising the Nepali and Hindi word, only finding cause to distinguish the elephants of the stable from the elephants of the jungle by adding the qualifier *jangali* for those whose lives are free of human subjugation. In addition, the majority of handlers appreciate that the word *gaj*, which is frequently given as the latter of a male elephant’s official two-part name, is derived from the Sanskrit word for elephant (*gaja*), as in Erawat Gaj or Paras Gaj.

If not given the name ‘gaj’, then male elephants alternatively bear the second name of ‘prasad’, as in Birendra Prasad or Kha Prasad. This obviously relates to the Nepali and Hindi word *prasada*, which refers to the consecrated remains of a sacrificial gift given during a *puja*. As such, it suggests something infused with divine power, and thus in the context of elephant names, serves to remind one of the sacred status of elephants as divine beings. Female elephants, historically of lesser prestige in both kingly and religious contexts, bear the latter name of either ‘kali’ (most frequently), or ‘mala’ (less frequently), as in Sitasma Kali and Aiswarya Mala. Kali is of course, the Hindu goddess of death, serving to remind one of the awesome power which resides within the elephant, and which is deserving of veneration, whilst *mala* is a word for rosary beads, an instrument of religious devotion, thereby reminding one of the elephant’s association with ritual purity.

In the past, with elephants designated the legal property of rulers, their naming was always the prerogative of the king, and typically the choice of names has reflected both their regal and sacred value. These South Asian conventions have persisted into the contemporary period, even though the status of elephants as regal property has largely become merely a symbolic legacy. In the *sarkari hattisar* of Nepal, official naming is delayed until a baby elephant has survived its first year, and whilst the monarchy's actual responsibility for naming has been devolved to the Department of National Parks, the choices of names still acknowledge the strong historical association between elephants, kingship and divinity.

1.9 Conclusion

The pertinence of the preceding discussion of domestication should be clear since it is by virtue of this very peculiar relationship between man and elephant that this research derives its rationale. Furthermore, this research demonstrates that the human-elephant relationship is not everywhere the same. Even though historically the elephant has been inflected with similar values and deployed in similar ways, at least in South and Southeast Asian countries, with continuities in knowledge and practice, this thesis argues for the specificity of the role of elephants in Nepali society. This thesis is concerned with demonstrating that the institution of the elephant stable and the practices and identity of the Nepali elephant handler have been constituted by a historically specific process. In sum, Nepal has its own story of captive elephant management, finding its own means of utilising an age-old relationship to meet its own modern needs. The following chapters in this thesis is an attempt to tell that story.

2. The History of Human-Elephant Relations

“The man-elephant relationship is quite strange. While most of the domestic animals now most highly attuned to man (the dog, the cat, the water buffalo etc.) have wild forbears which are largely untameable, many wild-caught elephants quickly and easily form intimate bonds with their keepers even though their wild temperament has never been modified through selective breeding. Some elephants form such warm and affectionate bonds with man as to deceive the observer into thinking that this animal must have been made truly domestic. Many other elephants in domesticity however, remain unremittingly wild, hostile to man and ready to kill him at every chance. Clearly, a domesticated elephant is simply a wild animal in chains- but a wild animal frequently gentle and intelligent enough to serve as a totally trustworthy baby-sitter to watch over human infants (Lair 1997: back cover).

2.1 Introduction

The unusual and categorically ambiguous relationship between man and elephant that Lair remarks upon also makes the history of human-elephant relations particularly distinctive. These millennia-old relationships, made possible by the particularly suitable qualities of the elephant (as indicated in the quote above), include a unique set of skills, knowledge and practices that have been transmitted directly to practitioners as well as being encoded in literary treatises. To understand the history of human-elephant relations in Asia, one must also consider the elaborate sets of mythic accounts and symbolic significances accorded to the elephant. Without an appreciation of the longstanding social and symbolic salience of the elephant, one cannot fully understand indigenous perspectives on contemporary captive elephant management, such as that practiced in Nepal, which are heavily inflected by symbolic meaning and ritual practice.

In this chapter, despite the prevalence of elephant management throughout many parts of Asia, and latterly other parts of the world as well (even including recent pioneering efforts to train African Elephants in Botswana), I will primarily limit my historical

interest to the region of South Asia¹. Firstly, I focus on the significance of the elephant in Hindu and Buddhist culture before considering what is known about the antiquity of elephant management through extant Sanskrit literature, as well as the deployment of elephants attested in classical Hellenic and Roman sources, which record military encounters with war elephants. From these scant ancient records, I move on to consider the role of elephants in both Mughal and British India, noting parallels with contemporary Nepal. Then, I begin to consider the specifically Nepali history of elephant management, for which sources are limited.

Besides establishing continuities in the knowledge and practice of elephant management throughout South Asia, the most crucial historical issue for this thesis, in exploring Nepali elephant management, is in understanding the rationale for maintaining elephant stables. Therefore, in this chapter, having explored the significance of the elephant in South Asian society, both in practice and as encoded knowledge, I go on to specifically focus on captive elephant management in the Nepal Tarai. Knowledge of the contemporary *hattisar* in conjunction with state-issued documents from the 19th century enables me to reconstruct the role of elephants as a nexus point between state and society. Having established the pre-modern scenario of captive elephant management in this chapter, the subsequent chapter then takes the story into the modern, late 20th century era of the National Park, conservation and development.

2.2 The Mythic Significance of The Elephant in South Asia

Numerous commentators have remarked upon the image of the elephant as being absolutely intrinsic to the cultural heritage of India (and adjacent locales within the same cultural arc). The mount or *vahana* of *Indra*, a deity of the sky, and the King of the Gods,

¹ A Sri Lankan man rescued four orphaned, and traumatised elephants from culling operations in The Kruger National Park in 1994. They have been named Shaka, Thandi, Seena and Sukiri. They have been trained to lift and carry logs, to kneel on command (in the ancient Sri Lankan elephant command language which is comprised of Pali and Sanskrit words), and to accept their owner riding them bareback. Tourists can safely stroke the elephants and accompany them on a walk in the bush. By successfully training African Elephants, Uttum Corea has proven the conventional claim that African Elephants cannot be tamed to be a fallacy. According to him, they are in fact easier to train than Asian Elephants, although their temperament is apparently rather more sensitive and unpredictable (see:

<http://www.africanconservation.org/dcf/forum/DCForumID16/12.htm> accessed on 09/09/06).

is the celestial elephant *Airavata* (a Nepali vernacular derivation of which; Erawat, still provides an appropriately prestigious name to be bestowed upon an elephant). Indeed, as Lahiri-Choudhary remarks, so significant is the notion of *Airavata* that in many Indian languages his name serves as a standard simile for something huge. Furthermore, in stories told to children, it is said that rain is the result of water poured from the trunk of *Airavata* (1989:301).

In traditional Hindu cosmological conceptions, eight celestial elephants (*diggaja*) guard the eight points of the firmament. *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth, is typically portrayed with an elephant either side of her, sometimes emitting a shower of gold coins from their trunks, whilst sculptures of elephants adorn the walls of many Hindu temples. We can conclude then that the elephant is not only implicated with the workings of the cosmos, but is more generally associated with wealth and power, specifically that of the polity. For the traditional Indian polity justified itself as a guarantor of the cosmic order, and hence sought legitimation by recourse to symbols infused with divine significance, including that of the elephant. As we shall see, the elephant has been considered not only symbolically, but also logistically, crucial for the welfare of the traditional Indian polity. The elephant seems to have been considered an auspicious being essential for guaranteeing the stable rule of Kings, an idea that has persisted in Nepal right into the 20th century, as we shall see.

This by no means exhausts the symbolic significance of the elephant, a topic deserving of its own treatise, and to which I must limit myself to a mere indication. However, there are two other symbolic saliences that cannot go unmentioned. Firstly, there is *Ganesha*, the much loved elephant-headed son of Shiva, worshipped in his own right, subject of his own religious festival, associated with knowledge and good fortune, and about whom there are many mythic stories (see figure 2.1). Every year, during *Ganesha Chaturthi*, a much loved and widely celebrated Hindu festival, clay models of *Ganesha* are constructed, worshipped for 10 days before being processed through the local community, after which the images (*murti*) are immersed in the sea or river. The dissipation of the figurines signifies the journey of the elephant lord (*ganapati*) back to

his celestial abode on Mount Kailash, and also symbolises the taking away of the misfortunes of man². In Hindu thought the divine substance of *Ganesha* is thought to inhere within all elephants (just as the crafting of *Ganesha murti* attracts his spirit-substance), making each one a living embodiment of a powerful deity. Hence the elephant is a sacred creature, an idea that informs the values and practices of elephant handlers even today, and which consequently cannot be disregarded in an ethnographic account of Nepali *hattisares*.



Figure 2.1: Generic Image of Ganesh

² During the summer of 2006, as a means of educating the British public about Hindu cultural practices, the British Museum played host to Indian artisans crafting temporary statues of Ganesh that would subsequently be immersed in the River Thames.

Secondly, of less significance for this study, but crucial for understanding the sacred significance of elephants in Buddhist Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, is the appearance of the elephant in the Jataka stories. These are accounts of the lives of the Buddha in different incarnations, in one of which he is born as a king-elephant, or alternately as Vessantara, the son of a mighty king who derived his omnipotence from a miraculous elephant who granted him his every wish. In another story Queen Sirimahamaya, an undefiled virgin, was said to have been impregnated by the trunk of an elephant. Furthermore, as the mother of Prince Gautama, who would become the Buddha, she also dreamed of being transported to a palace on top of the Himalayas, whereupon a silvery-white elephant descended, bowed down before her, and presented her with a lotus flower, after which she gave birth painlessly (Delort 1992:46-47). This is typically understood as a symbolic indication of the great birth for which she would be the vehicle (a birth that is claimed to have occurred on Nepali soil at Lumbini in the district of Kapilvastu). Consequently, this also provides the rationale for the Buddhist veneration of white elephants (see Delort 1992:47-48), even appearing in the iconography of Tibetan Buddhism, a variant practiced in a physical environment where elephants are not even found (but where Mount Kailash is located, which is also recognised by Hindus as the celestial abode of *Shiva* as well as his son *Ganesh*). In Buddhist and Hindu lore, it is said that if a king dies without an heir, then the royal white elephant should be let loose in order to find the right person to fulfil the vacant regal position (Lahiri-Choudhary 1989:302).

2.3 On The Ancient Tradition of Captive Elephant Management in South Asia

2.3.1 The Textual Tradition of the Gaja Sastra

Since it is well known that elephants have been used by Indian kings since ancient times, in both ceremonial display and war, and that elephants comprised one of the four recognised military divisions (the others being infantry, cavalry, and chariots), it is unsurprising that what we might call 'elephantology' became an integral component of Hindu treatises on statecraft, in both Sanskrit and other Indian languages³. The oldest

³ A notable example is the 'Hastividyanarva' in the Tai-Ahom language, which was recomposed in Assamese in the 16th century under the sponsorship of the Ahom King Siva Singha and his queen Ambika

such *sastra* containing the evidence of a nascent elephant science is the *Arthasastra*, accredited to *Kautilya*, and variously dated from ca. 300 BCE to ca. 300 CE, which includes a section that chiefly takes the form of a dissertation on the duties of the Overseer of Elephants, a recognised official of Indian kings. We can be sure then that the practice of capturing, taming and keeping elephants is a venerable tradition dating back several millennia.

All the known texts agree in attributing the founding of elephantology to a mythical sage *Palakapya*, who reveals his elephant knowledge to *Romapada*, King of *Anga*, whose name is not otherwise known from ancient literature. The *Kautilya Arthasastra*, as well as the other primary Sanskrit texts, the *Hastayurveda* ('Treatise on the Treatment of Elephants'), and the *Matanga-Lila* ('Elephant Sport') of *Nilakantha*, all take the form of a dialogue between the sage *Palakapya* and the king *Romapada* (Edgerton 1931:vii-xi & 1-5, see also Lahiri-Choudhary 1989:302). Taken together, these texts comprise a body of work typically referred to as *Gaja Sastra*.

The American born Indologist and comparative philologist Franklin Edgerton (1885-1963), author of treatises on Sanskrit grammar and translations of key Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, provides one of the few key texts about the *gaja sastras*. In his 1931 book, "The Elephant Lore of The Hindus", Edgerton reminds us that references to elephants abound throughout the whole range of Sanskrit literature, and he argues that these references would not have been understood if a general acquaintance with elephant lore were not a part of literate men's education. Although this technical knowledge concerning elephants was once surely widespread, it seems to have fallen into neglect. It seems that Indian scholars have lost touch with this field of knowledge during the last few centuries, and at the time Edgerton translated the *Matanga-Lila* and surveyed the existing evidence on Hindu elephantology, it was clear that the topic had also been almost entirely ignored by Western Indologists. Edgerton supports this assertion by informing us that the *Matanga-Lila* contains over 130 words which do not appear in the best Sanskrit

Devi. The Ahom Kings of Assam so highly prized their captive elephant resources, that the officials who managed their elephants received honorary royal titles such as 'Hati Kakati' and 'Hati Barua' (Gogoi 1983:21).

lexicons of his day, which he takes as indicative of the state of ignorance that has come to characterise this literary tradition.

It is Edgerton's conviction that the various Sanskrit texts which are taken to comprise the *Gaja-Sastra* or 'Hindu elephant science', were almost certainly derived from the practical experience of those who managed elephant stables on behalf of their regal masters (1931:6). Edgerton concedes that the literary devices utilised indicate the authorship of *pandits* (scholars), but he considers these to be merely rhetorical adornments to what are surely documents of encoded practical knowledge. This is contrary to Zimmer, who translated one such text, the *Matanga Lila*, into German, and chose to emphasise the mythical rather than practical aspects of elephant lore and its origins (Edgerton 1931:xii).

In support of his argument, Edgerton also remarks on the jargon found in texts such as the *Matanga Lila*, noting that there are no clear etymologies for the terms applied to elephants in each decade of the second to fifth decades of their lives (when elephants are of healthy, working age), which he takes as indicative of their colloquial origins among the speakers of those who actually looked after elephants. For Edgerton, detailed descriptions of *musth* (a hormonal state during which elephants' behaviour becomes dangerously unpredictable), methods of catching wild elephants, of feeding and tending to them, of the use of voice, hook and stick, of elephant castes, and of favourable and unfavourable marks, all suggest their derivation from genuine traditions of elephant management, rather than merely the speculative musings of *pandits*. This same array of topics appears in a Nepali language veterinarian treatise I encountered during the course of my fieldwork, which dates to around 1930.

Furthermore, Edgerton found that G P Sanderson's renowned "Thirteen Years Among the Wild Beasts of India" (1878), details a modern elephant lore that bears significant resemblance to that found in Sanskrit literature (1931:9-11). And yet Sanderson was ignorant of this literature. Edgerton concludes therefore, that much of the knowledge encoded in the *Gaja-Sastras* has persisted in the practical tradition of elephant keeping, despite the fact that knowledge of the technical literature had largely fallen into abeyance,

at least in India. In independent Nepal by contrast, my own archival research suggests that this technical literature retained at least some of its influence in the state's understanding of its captive elephant resources, as is evident from the aforementioned veterinarian treatise.

2.3.2 Historical References

A survey of the textual tradition of encoded elephant knowledge provides but a sketch from which to make vague inferences about the elephant in ancient Indian society, albeit one that is reinforced by archaeological finds of steatite seals of elephants in the cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa from the Indus Valley Civilisation of 2500 to 1700 BCE (Delort 1992:42-44). Although Indian sources can tell us little in this regard, the records of other ancient civilisations serve to compliment this technical knowledge by recounting historical incidents pertaining to encounters with war elephants. Furthermore, this sketch can be elaborated by reference to the elephant in later medieval and colonial South Asia, about which there are considerably more sources. Records from both the eras of Mughal and British rule, not only provide further systematised treatises on elephant management, but also insights into the social and practical role of elephants in society.

2.3.2.1 Ancient Encounters With War Elephants

The first records confirming the role of captive elephants in war, and incidentally the first known western encounters with captive elephants, are those of the Macedonian Alexander and his army. In 331 BCE Alexander's forces confronted those of Darius III of Persia at the battle of Gaugamela, most likely somewhere northeast of Mosul in contemporary Iraq. Amongst Darius' forces were 15 war elephants, which it is believed would have been procured from India. This was nothing though compared to the 326 BCE Battle of the Hydraspes River, now the Jhelum in contemporary Punjab. On this occasion Alexander and his troops were engaging the forces of the Indian King Purushottama, as he was known in Sanskrit, or Porus as he was known in the Hellenic sources. This time they faced off against a force that included 200 war elephants. Although Alexander's troops far outnumbered those of Porus and secured victory, they were unwilling to venture further into India and mutinied (see Lane Fox 2004).

It is believed that at this time the Magadha Empire in eastern India and Bengal possessed perhaps as many as 6000 war elephants, whilst the Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta (313-289 BCE) is reputed to have possessed 9000 elephants. The military significance of the elephant is suggested by its image being emblazoned on his coins, perhaps in commemoration of the 500 elephants he provided for the coalition that defeated Antigonus I in 301 BCE (Delort 1992:44). Whilst India may have pioneered the use of elephants in war, it was not only the Persians that began to develop this type of fear inducing war resource. The successors of Alexander, the Diadochi, also began using Asian elephants, whilst the Egyptians and Carthaginians began taming relic populations of the small African forest elephant (see Keegan 1993). And it was during the Second Punic War that the Carthaginian general Hannibal famously marched 37 surviving elephants over the Alps in order to terrify the Roman legions (see Goldsworthy 2003).

There are even some western references that acknowledge the economic importance of captive elephants in ancient Sri Lanka. The great Roman Historian Pliny The Elder, in book 6 of his 37-volume history, tells us that Megasthenes had recorded the opinion of one Onesicritus that the Sri Lankan elephants are larger, fiercer and better for war than others. This reason, in addition to the proximity of elephants close to seaports made Sri Lanka's elephants a lucrative trading commodity. In peacetime, the most ignoble death by elephant was reserved for traitors and other offenders against royalty and the state, again reminding us that the elephant was both an instrument as well as a potent symbol of state power.

2.3.2.2 The Mughals and Elephants

However, the tradition of keeping elephants in service of the state is far more comprehensively attested during the eras of Mughal and British rule in India. Furthermore, the Mughal captive elephant apparatus also impinged upon elephant capturing practices in what is now Nepal, from where some of its elephants were supplied (Wessels 1924:165), an arrangement also replicated by the British, who negotiated an annual supply of seven captured elephants in exchange for returning Tarai land to the new, expanded Gorkha state founded by Prithvi Narayan Shah (Shrestha et al 1985).

The most exemplary Mughal textual source for its elephant management practices is contained within the *A'in-i Akbari*, written during 1596 and 1597 CE. Abu'l-Fazl Allami (1551-1602), the court historian of Akbar (1542-1605), was the author of this Mughal imperial history, and he dedicates nine complete sections and several subsections to elephant lore and management in the imperial stables. According to Abu'l-Fazl, Akbar even encouraged the captive breeding of elephants (Lahiri-Choudhary 1989:303), making him a pioneer in an endeavour that has typically made little economic sense until recent years, by which time wild stocks and habitat had dwindled (in Nepal, capture from the wild continued until 1970, and a captive breeding centre was only established as recently as 1986). However, for a wealthy empire keen to display its might, the prospect of expending resources on young elephants yet to be of serviceable value may not have been considered a problem. In terms of logistics, captive breeding has the advantage of being safer and less arduous, since the training of captive born juveniles is much easier and less risky than the capture of wild adults, for which the mortality rate of both elephants and handlers tends to be higher.

The numbers of elephants maintained by the Mughal emperors seems to be truly formidable. According to Jahangir (1569-1637), Akbar's son and heir, Akbar had 12,000 fighting elephants of the largest and finest type, with another 20,000 of lesser size to provide back-up and supply fodder (Lahiri-Choudhary 1989:304). This would seem to be the peak of Mughal elephant possessions, since Jahangir only claims to have 1,000 elephants supplying fodder to his 12,000 elephants in active army service. There were also claims that there were another 100,000 elephants kept to carry male and female courtiers, their attendants and baggage. The credibility of this number has generally been doubted, with many commentators explaining it by reference to scribal error (Lahiri-Choudhary 1989:303). By way of contrast, when one reads of the use of several hundred elephants in Nepal in the early to mid 20th century, as in Smythies' account of accompanying one of Nepal's Rana rulers on hunting trips (1942), or from the recollections of the retired handler Bhagu, even this number seems astonishing by contemporary standards.

2.3.2.3 The British Raj and Elephants

With the place of the elephant in state rule firmly established by the time the Mughal Empire was displaced, Lahiri-Choudhary remarks: “When the British took over from the Mughals, they accepted the place of the elephant in state pomp, the army, and the civil administration and tried to codify the existing practices of elephant management” (1989:304). The British understood that the number and quality of elephants kept by Indian princes and land-holding gentry (zamindars) was an important means of signifying their high status (evident also in Nepal as late as 1975 when King Birendra and his Queen Aiswarya attended their coronation procession on elephant back, see figure 2.2). Consequently, the officers and dignitaries of the British Raj also adopted the elephant as a mode of transport befitting their position, knowing that being seen astride an elephant would help convey their suzerainty to the subordinate natives.

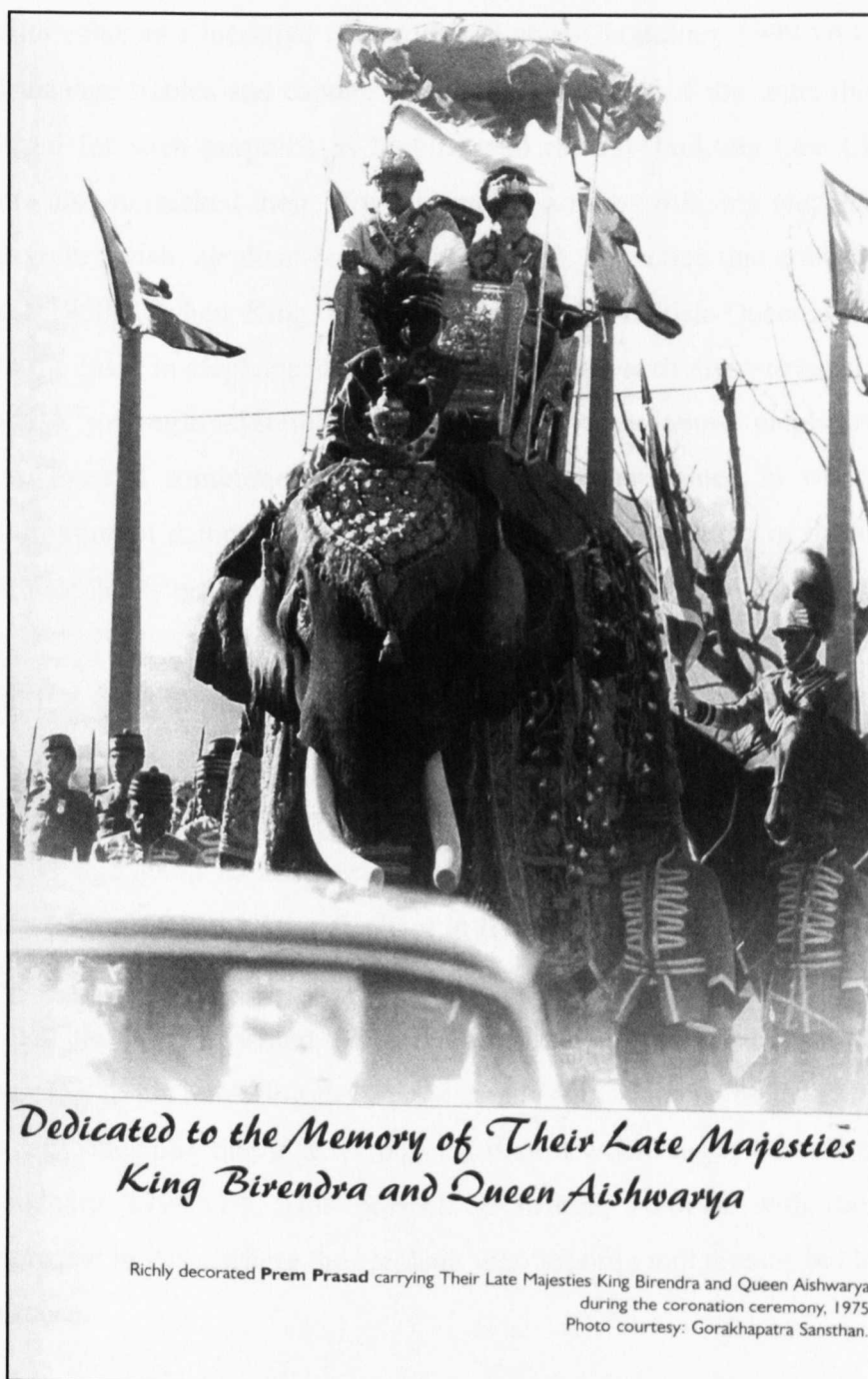


Figure 2.2: Coronation of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, 1975 (from WWF-Nepal 2003:iii)

In the early days of the Raj, when parts of India were administered by the British East India Company, Company officers, permitted to augment their official income by private enterprise, also became involved in the capture and trade in elephants, since they

appreciated its value as a lucrative commodity (Lahiri-Choudhary 1999:xiv). Later, such men would manage stables and capture operations on behalf of the state, their elephants being deployed for such purposes as logging and railway building (see Clarke 1878). Such officers also mimicked their Mughal predecessors by utilising elephants and their staff to engage in lavish, elephant-back hunts (*shikar*), a practice that continued in Nepal until at least 1960/1, when King Mahendra hosted the British Queen for a ‘hunting’ safari⁴. Both the trade in elephants and their use in leisure activities provided the impetus for the British to begin systematising their knowledge about elephants and their management, even if sometimes this information was contained in works that were ostensibly a mixture of naturalist account and memoir, most typically of lives spent either working with elephants or using them in hunting⁵.

The colonial life spent in proximity to elephants and the jungle afforded the opportunity to dispel the many myths and falsehoods pertaining to the elephant. Previously, in Europe the image of the elephant was known from classical sources and medieval bestiaries, but accurate knowledge about its habits and morphology were sorely lacking (for the more recent history of perceptions of the elephant in Europe, see Rothfels 2007). For example, Matthew Parris (c. 1200-59), had drawn an elephant kept in an enclosure at the Tower of London, which had been presented to Henry III of England as a present from Louis IX of France. However, in his rendering the animal stands stiff, since he believed it to lack any joints in its legs, meaning that if it were to sit, then it would never be able to rise again (Lahiri-Choudhary 1999:xvi). This presents a striking contrast with the elaborated knowledge present in Asia, where the elephant was not only indigenous, but also served a practical purpose.

By 1800 British enthusiasts began to learn about elephants through direct observation (and not of a poor, marooned single individual!), although it took some time before all the

⁴ Whilst the retired handler Bhagu claims that the Queen took down a tiger in one shot, the professional hunter and safari pioneer John Coapman claims she did not shoot any game as it was by then considered inappropriate and liable to incense conservationists and animal lovers. However, in relation to the game shot on previous safaris with King Mahendra, Bhagu’s testimony is probably more reliable.

⁵ See for example Tennent 1867, Sanderson 1878, Clarke 1878, Steel 1885, Pollok and Thom 1900, Evans 1910, Milroy 1922, and on Milroy see also Wemmer 1995.

misunderstandings about topics such as lifespan, intelligence, obedience and tusk growth would be dispelled. 19th century commentators such as Captain Thomas Williamson (1807), Sir Samuel White Baker (1854, 1855, 1890), J Emerson Tennent (1867) and G P Sanderson (1878) frequently contradicted each other (Lahiri-Choudhary 1999:xiv-xix). It is only by the time of Sanderson's 'Thirteen Years Among The Wild Beasts of India' (1878) that there is any noticeable attempt to pay attention to indigenous understandings (Lahiri-Choudhary 1999:xix). Sanderson was extremely well placed to write about elephant management since he was, for many years, in charge of elephant catching operations in Mysore and Bengal, which included the use of the *kheddah* (now more typically transcribed as *kheda*), or fenced enclosure into which wild elephants were herded before being subjected to training. As such, he had ample opportunity to observe indigenous practices and to get to know the skilled practitioners upon whom his department's activities depended.

Much of what Sanderson reports from the 19th century not only coincides with Edgerton's findings concerning his translations of the ancient *Gaja Sastras*, but also with contemporary practices in 21st century Nepal. Confirming Edgerton's conviction in the practical basis for the knowledge presented in the *Gaja Sastras*, Sanderson declares: "Natives alone have fully studied his peculiarities and classified him into castes; his capture, training and keeping, are in native hands, as well as the trade; and the native standard of merit regulates the market" (1878:83). As we shall see, this also applies to the exclusively Tharu expertise that facilitated the captive elephant business in 19th century Nepal, and upon which the *Chhetri* and *Bahun* state establishment relied.

Perhaps the most significant continuity between the indigenous elephant knowledge reported by Sanderson and that of contemporary Nepal, is in the threefold typology of elephant physical types. Sanderson writes: "Elephants are divided by natives into three castes or breeds, distinguished by their physical conformation; these are termed in Bengal *Koomeriah*, *Dwásala*, and *Meerga*, which terms may be considered to signify thorough-bred, half-bred, and third rates. The term *Koomeriah* signifies royal or princely. *Meerga* is probably a corruption of the Sanscrit (sic) *mriga*, a deer; the light build and length of

leg of this class of elephants suggest the comparison. *Dwásala* in Persian means two things or originals, and in reference to the elephant, signifies the blending of the first and third castes into the intermediate one” (1878:83). This self-same typology is reported in the WWF Nepal programme report on hattisars (2003:10), was familiar to my informants in the Sauraha and Khorsor hattisars, and similarly reported by John Coapman, the founder of the Tiger Tops safari lodge in Chitwan, who himself had cause to identify elephants desirable for purchase (*pers comm.*). Furthermore, elements from this typology are also evident in a more elaborate, eight-fold scheme of elephant types or castes (*jat*) in the Nepali veterinarian treatise that I have already referred to in my discussion of Edgerton’s work on the *Gaja Sastra* literature.

Whilst consideration of indigenous understandings paid dividends in terms of enriching elephant knowledge, even laying the foundations for a modern elephant behavioural science, the impenetrability of the handlers’ working culture led to some persisting confusion. For example, although Sanderson’s own experience correctly taught him that an elephant’s lifespan was about 70 years (the significance of molar replacement and wear for estimating the age of elephants was yet to be realised), he was familiar with a report from Sri Lanka that seemed to attest to an elephant living 150 years, and so he amended his estimate accordingly. As Lahiri-Choudhary notes however, it seems likely that the colonial record keepers had confused at least two elephants bearing the same name, a suggestion made by Nuttall (as cited by Pollok and Thom 1900), and somehow overlooked by Sanderson who was his successor at the Government Kheddah Establishment (Lahiri-Choudhary 1999:xviii). After all, in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, elephants are given names from a limited range, and according to long established conventions.

This elementary confusion resulting from ignorance about names is also indicative of just how much of a private and closed world elephant handling was (and still is to some extent). Even when authority figures like Sanderson began to take an interest in the handlers’ own system of knowledge and skills, much of it remained exclusive to the handlers. In fact this is very much the case today in Nepal, where authorities like the

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, who keep detailed records about their elephants, must rely on handlers' of a different caste, ethnicity and socio-economic status, whose systems of apprenticeship, training practices, and elephant lore are only known to them in rudimentary form. Even one of the vets responsible for the medical care of government owned elephants at the Sauraha and Khorsor stables admitted to me that he considered himself ignorant about captive elephant management.

2.4 On The Specifically Nepali History of Elephant Management

It would seem that elephant keeping practices in Nepal were fully established by at least the 6th century CE. A report from 1985 (2042 BS) concerned with elephant management planning, commissioned by the Nepali Royal Palace, also includes a brief history indicative of the antiquity of elephant keeping in Nepal. Although it admits that its historical account is far from exhaustive, since opportunities for historical research were limited due to the project's urgent logistical priorities, it does cite records which state that the Lichchhavi King Mandev (521-562 *bikram samvat*) built a bridge across the Gandaki River in order for him to transport hundreds of his war elephants (Shrestha et 1985)⁶. The architectural edifices of the Malla dynasty, which superseded the Lichchhavis in the Kathmandu Valley, testify to the longstanding significance of the elephant in state ceremonial display (see figure 2.3).

⁶ Bikram or Vikram Samvat (BS or VS) is the name of the Nepali calendar. Like the Gregorian, it is a solar calendar with 12 months, but is 56.7 years ahead. The New Year begins in the month of Baisakh, equivalent to 13/14 April.



Figure 2.3: Sculpture of King Pratap Malla riding upon an elephant (from WWF-Nepal 2003:22)⁷

It seems very likely that the Sanskrit *gaja sastras* also made their way into circulation in ancient Nepal from a similarly early date, but to my knowledge, no evidence that might attest to this has been found and cited. However, during the course of my research I was

⁷ King Pratap Malla was one of the later Kings of the Malla dynasties, ruling during the 17th century CE.

able to commission the translation of a portion of a veterinarian treatise said to be about 70 years old. The contents of this veterinarian treatise replicate both the rhetorical forms and the topics of elephant knowledge articulated in texts like the *Matanga-Lila* and *Hastayurveda*.

The same ordered information about elephant types or castes, elephant anatomy, elephant capture, elephant ailments and treatments as well as other topics Edgerton considered normative, appear in this modern text as if plagiarised from the contents of the *Gaja-Sastras*. The similarities are striking, and despite its putative borrowings from canonical Sanskrit sources, translated into Nepali, and then again into English, at times the manner of expression seems to have been borrowed verbatim. Furthermore, the aforementioned document commissioned by the Nepali Royal Palace also mentions a book from about the same time, the described content of which sounds strikingly similar to both the veterinarian treatise and its Sanskrit precursors. This is *Gaja Bibaran Sangrah* or 'Collection of The Description of Elephants' by Major Colonel Indra Bahadur Chhetri Karki, written in 1979 BS, or around 1923 AD (Shrestha et al 1985). Karki's book further supports the contention that there has been a tradition of texts encoding an elephant lore that has proven consistent, durable and useful over hundreds, if not thousands of years.

According to the implicit assumptions of a western, modernist epistemology, one might expect a veterinarian treatise to be reasonably divorced from the symbolic values and mythic ideas pertaining to the animal in question, and to only deal with observed and verified facts. However, as with most Hindu texts, the typically western distinctions between domains such as science and religion are not separated in the same way⁸. Thus it comes as no surprise, and is entirely consistent with Edgerton's presentation of the *Gaja Sastras*, to find that this Nepali text begins with some remarks about the cultural significance of the elephant, as follows:

⁸ However, this should not be taken to imply that Hindu thought lacks systematised rigour. Indeed, within Hindu philosophy, there are distinctions between logic (*nyaya*), analytic investigation (*anviksiki*), and metaphysical perspective (*darsana*), as well as categorisations that distinguish the orthodox (*astika*) from the heterodox (*nastika*) (see Flood 1996:224).

“In other words, God the Creator made the first Erawat (Indra’s Elephant in its Nepali vernacular version) and other elephants of great influence for the welfare of human beings. The king who is for the welfare and wellbeing of the elephant will be victorious everywhere. The elephant is equivalent to the soul of the king, and so the elephant is to be protected. There is no other thing in this earthly world besides the elephant, which has a greater power. To be without elephants is like a night without the moon, or the earth without sun-fed paddy. Likewise, if there is a huge army without any elephants, then it cannot be one of any great importance and grandeur.”

This statement then, serves to affirm the persisting sacred status of elephants, their auspicious qualities for the welfare of the king and his polity, as well as their importance for military success, just as in the ancient literature Edgerton describes. Although a thorough exploration of this text, and its parallels with the *Gaja Sastras* cannot be conducted here, one further, indicative parallel that supports this contention deserves comment. In Edgerton’s translation of the *Matanga Lila*, one particular section deals with the origins of elephants, and includes an interpretation of elephant types in terms of the three *gunas*, or qualities, of *rajas*, *tamas*, and *satvas*, an interpretive system widely used in many subjects of Hindu scholarship (Edgerton 1931:48-50)⁹.

In the Nepali veterinarian text, we are told about the characteristics of the *rajo guni* elephant, which is angry, impatient and restless, yet strong and powerful, the *tamo guni* elephant, which is disobedient, fearful and weak, and the *satva guni* elephant, which is of good temperament, beautiful appearance, and quick to learn. Although more detailed than I have presented it, the qualities ascribed to elephants of these types are virtually identical in both the ancient Sanskrit and the more recent Nepali texts.

2.4.1 Textual Sources For Constructing a History of Nepali Elephant Management

Locating sources with which to construct a history of elephant management in Nepal has not been easy, as they seem to be few and far between. The two most crucial published

⁹ The three *gunas* are integral to the cosmological scheme of the Hindu *Samkhya* system, which provides the basis for the practice of *yoga*, and which alongside *Vedanta*, represents one of the key metaphysical positions (or *darsana*) within Hinduism (see Flood 1996:234-235, and Brockington 1996:101).

sources are Krauskopff and Meyer's "The Kings of Nepal and the Tharu of the Tarai" (2000), and Smythies' "Big Game Shooting in Nepal" (1942). Smythies was Chief Conservator of Forests for Uttar Pradesh in British India, and also served as a forest advisor to the government of Nepal. His book is primarily a rather hagiographic account of the hunting exploits of the Nepali ruler of the time, Sri Tin Maharaja Juddha Shamshe Jung Bahadur Rana, said to have killed over 550 tigers during a period of 33 years (Smythies 1942:38).

Smythies recounts the hunting trip attended by King George V of Britain in 1911, for which 600 elephants were assembled, roads built, a special camp constructed at Kasara (which now serves as the headquarters of the national park), and during which 39 tigers, 18 rhinos, two bears and several leopards were shot over the course of 11 days. This was far surpassed though by the hunt of 1938, at which the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow was the guest of honour, and during which 120 tigers, 38 rhino, 27 leopard, and 15 bears were shot, the majority of them from elephant back (in Muller-Böker 1999:37). On this latter occasion a wild tusker persistently caused trouble until he was eventually captured and presumably subjected to training (Smythies 1942:94).

Smythies' book is particularly notable for its descriptions of the ring technique of hunting, which is considered unique to Nepal, and which was most likely inspired by the elephant capturing method called *Khor Kheda*, in which elephants would be herded into a specially prepared enclosure¹⁰. In the ring method, the enclosure was substituted by an almost impenetrable circle of about 300 elephants, thereby providing a limited space with which to fix and shoot prey from the back of an elephant chosen for its fearlessness. A further innovation, which Bhagu also recalls from his hunting expeditions with King Mahendra, is the application of white cloths to further secure the sealing of the ring. According to the memories of the retired handler Bhagu, even as late as 1960, as many as

¹⁰ The Ranas, who established themselves as hereditary prime-ministers took the title of '*sri tin maharaja*', where '*sri*' is an honorific term used to address someone of great status, a term also used to address deities. Therefore, '*sri tin maharaja*' translates as something like 'three times honourable great king'. The Shah kings who had established the state of Nepal, but who had been deposed by the Ranas, retained precedence only at the symbolic level, and thus continued to be addressed as '*sri panch maharaja*' or 'five times honourable great king'.

335 elephants were being assembled for regal hunts¹¹. Whilst this ring technique has subsequently been adopted for the purposes of the Chitwan rhino translocations, far fewer elephants must have been used owing to the decreasing numbers of available captive elephants in Nepal (WWF-Nepal recently reported 85 government owned elephants and 89 private elephants [2003:11]).

Wessels' "Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia" includes a reference from 1672 CE to either the kingdom of Morang or Makwanpur paying an annual tribute of seven elephants to the Great Mughal (1924:165), the same number Prithvi Narayan Shah later agreed to supply the British, as mentioned in Shrestha et al 1985, perhaps suggesting that it was merely a perpetuation of the prior convention. At this time, Nepal consisted of a multitude of minor kingdoms, and almost all of the lowland Tarai was under the jurisdiction of these primarily hill-based polities (Ojha 1983:21), some of which were subject to payments of tribute to the great Mughal Empire of India, and elephants represented one of several currencies of exchange¹².

It is almost certain that these elephants would have been captured by the Tharu, who are the largest indigenous ethnic group of the Tarai, and whom to this day remain very closely associated with captive elephant management in Nepal. Furthermore, this early reference serves to support Giselle Krauskopff's claim that the Tharu have been involved with the capture, taming and keeping of elephants for at least 300 years (and Shrestha et al's rather more conservative claim of 150 years). It is also consistent with their general predilection for animal capture, contrary to the false stereotype of the Tharu as savage, forest-dwelling hunters (Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:42). In fact, the Tharu were primarily agriculturalists who cleared the forest, lived in close proximity to it,

¹¹ For more on big game hunting in Chitwan, see Oldfield 1880 (1974):201ff, Kinloch 1885, Landon 1928 (1976), II:150f, Shaha 1970:2ff, Raj 1995:3, and Muller-Böker 1999:37.

¹² As Ojha remarks, little is known of the Tarai before unification in 1769, and although it provided sizeable revenue to the hill-states, it was sparsely populated. Despite bearing fertile land, the endemic malaria and low population pressure meant that significant rates of settlement did not occur until relatively recently. Furthermore, when population pressure to settle the region did become significant, it came from the Indo-Gangetic plain earlier than from the Nepali hills (1983:21).

rather than actually dwelling within it, who captured, tamed and raised boar rather than merely hunting them, and who primarily supplemented their agricultural diet with fish.

2.4.2 What The Panjiar Documents Reveal About Elephant Management in The Nepal Tarai

The Panjiar Documents were all recovered from Tharu families by a Tharu man named Tej Narayan Panjiar over a period of 20 years, and provide valuable evidence in reconstructing the relationship between the state and the Tarai-dwelling Tharu. The compilation of this collection is a remarkable achievement not only due to the long term dedication of its collector, Tej Narayan Panjiar, but also because the documents have remained intact despite the humid, tropical climate of the Tarai- the oldest document was issued by the King of Makwanpur in 1726 CE, before the unification of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

The Panjiar collection comprises 50 documents, of which 7 pertain to matters of elephant management. The other documents concern the topics of land grants and other state ordained privileges such as the rights to timber; the import of settlers from, and the fleeing of peasants to India (*Muglan*); taxes, pensions and also legal issues such as fines, pardons and the adjudication of traditional rights. The elephant related documents were recovered from the Tarai districts of Saptari, Mahottari, Bara, and Nawalparasi, all districts in which *sarkari hattisars* can no longer be found, but which still supply recruits for the remaining stables at Sauraha and Khorsor in Chitwan, Amlekhgunj in Parsa, Koshi Tappu on the Saptari/Sunsari border, Shivapur in Bardia, and Piparia in Kanchanpur.

2.4.2.1 Elephants As Royal Property

The oldest of the Panjiar Documents relating to elephants dates to 1783 CE, shortly after the *Gorkhali Raja*, Prithvi Narayan Shah had succeeded in 'unifying' Nepal in 1769. In this early document from the district of Saptari, issued by the court of the King Rana Bahadur Shah, a baby elephant captured in 1782 by Madharam Chaudhari, son of one Hem Chaudhari, was granted to the father to train and ride. This serves to remind us that

all elephants were the property of the King, and that their capture, training and use was subject to state regulation. However, this also suggests that not all elephants were necessarily kept in state *hattisars*, indicating that they were utilised to meet the needs of locals as well as the state. Furthermore, Shrestha and Krauskopff claim that the gift of an elephant was probably not an uncommon form of compensation for services rendered (*jagir*) (in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:121).

2.4.2.2 The Hattisar as an Institution of The State

The second and third of the elephant related documents, were issued in Mahottari in 1867 and 1877, under the seal of Surendra Bir Bikram Shah, even though by now government was being administered by the hereditary Rana prime ministers, whilst the Shah Kings were kept under virtual house arrest, retaining their supremacy only at the symbolic level (having been ousted in the wake of The Kot Massacre of 1846, see Stiller 1993:79-81, Whelpton 2005:46-47). The third document seems to be a replication of the second document issued a decade earlier, but this time is addressed to the stable manager by name; Subba Dewal (where *subba* indicates the managerial role). Here the state acknowledges its concern about serious reports of financial mismanagement at the *hattisar*.

Fraud is implied, since it claims that despite the *hattisar* presumably receiving its annual dispensation of state funds, the elephants had not been properly fed, which resulted in them starving, eating earth and becoming sick (in contemporary government stables, the *hattisar* receives funds which are used to procure the supplementary diet for the elephants as well as rations for the men, supplied by a contractor or *tekhdar*). In addition, the stable employees had not received their wages (presumably dispensed then as now by the administrative officer or *khardar*). To prevent further incidents of financial mismanagement, the document stipulates that all future receipts and issued salaries should be checked by both the Military and Audit offices, thereby curtailing the administrative autonomy of the *hattisar*. This might also be taken as indicative of the state's unwillingness to place its trust in exclusively Tharu institutions (as the *hattisar* and elephant capturing operations seemed to be), preferring instead to administer through

an additional bureaucratic level of accountability, staffed by intermediaries of a caste and ethnicity whose interests were less likely to diverge from its own. After all, the Tharu were not bound by a sense of citizenship, and if tax demands were too high, then they could always migrate elsewhere and begin agricultural production anew.

Although records do attest to the use of some occasional forced labour for elephant management in the Tarai (Narharinath 1966:433, 494, Regmi 1984:198-199 in Krauskopf & Meyer [eds] 2000:144), this document also reveals that stables were generally staffed by paid employees. For captive elephants played an important role in the local economy, both for facilitating regal hunting expeditions and as a source of transport and haulage. This is quite a contrast to the case of captive elephants in Bengal and Assam under Mughal and British rule, where locals' primary role was as forced labour in the capture and trade in elephants (as I subsequently discuss, see Schendel 1985, Bhadra 1983).

Nonetheless, in the Nepal Tarai the elephant was a lucrative trading commodity. With the assistance of captive elephants, wild elephants were captured from the jungle by the professional capturers, the *phanets*, under the supervision of the *raut*, the overseer of capturing operations. Once caught and possibly subjected to training at the stable, managed by the *subba* and the *daroga*, they could serve as appropriate gifts of royal largesse for the kings and courtiers of neighbouring kingdoms, as well as compensation for the services of loyal subjects, or even exchanged for horses from India (Shrestha and Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:144). These records then, also provide insight into the origin and development of the system of ranks that continues to organise labour in the contemporary *hattisar* (as outlined in chapter 4).

2.4.2.3 The Rewards Available to The Overseer of Elephant Capture and Training

Like the previous documents from Mahottari, the fourth and fifth Panjiar documents are also related, coming from Bara, issued in 1820 and 1827 CE, and concern the father and son Daya and Kokil Raut. In the first of these pair of documents, King Rajendra Bikram Shah bestows upon Daya Raut the land previously given to a Bandhu Raut, and a turban

of honour (*pagari*) in reward for his service to the state in capturing and training elephants. The *pagari* was a headdress, most usually a turban, typically adorned with silver ornaments, worn by high officials, and even if made of simple cloth, an indication of the receipt of royal favour. He is urged to continue capture operations by both the *jaghiya* and/or *khori kheda* methods (the former entails a wild elephant being chased, lassoed and then tethered, whilst the latter is the previously mentioned method of herding elephants into a prepared enclosure), to obey the instructions of the elephant stable manager (*daroga*), and to continue to enjoy the customary taxes and income from performing the elephant training function (*sidhali rautai*) (Shrestha and Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:149).

In the second of these documents, from 1827, and issued to Daya's son Kokil Raut, we learn that Daya Raut was given Babhani village in Cherwant *praganna* (an administrative district comprising several villages, under the revenue-collecting responsibility of a *chaudhari*, not dissimilar to the bureaucratic structure of the VDC or Village Development Committee of contemporary Nepal). This gift was again *jagir*, a reward specifically for his presentation of a one-tusked elephant (*ek danta hatti*) to the King during a royal visit at Hariharpur (Shrestha and Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:150).

The particular reason why a one-tusked elephant would be presented to the King (suggesting that he would want to retain it for himself rather than dispense it to someone else as an act of beneficence) must surely lie in its relevance to the lore of *Ganesha*. Renowned for his gluttony, it is said that on one occasion *Ganesha* tripped over a log and split open his gut, spilling his internal organs. Amused by his clumsy misfortune, the moon (*Chandra*) supposedly laughed at *Ganesha*, who out of anger snapped off a tusk and hurled it at the moon. This is the reason why *Ganesha* is typically depicted with only one tusk. Consequently, the striking similarity between a one-tusked elephant and the god *Ganesha* would mean that such an individual would be considered especially auspicious and divine.

The significance of the one-tusked (*ek danta*) elephant is also attested in the Nepali veterinarian treatise, where it is listed as the greatest of the eight types of elephant, about which it declares: “The one-tusked elephant is called the king of all the elephants...The heart of the king is fascinated by the sight of such an elephant. There is no other elephant equal to this one in this world. All problems will disappear in the presence of such an animal. Wherever the one-tusked elephant stays there will always be pleasure and prosperity”.

Shrestha and Krauskopff also tell us that in his renowned wise sermons, *Dibya Upadesh*, the founder of the Shah dynasty and ‘unifier’ of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah mentioned his desire to procure a one-tusked elephant from Digbhandan Sen, ruler of the kingdom of Makwanpur (in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:150). The wild elephant Daya Raut had caught, and for which he was awarded the ‘turban of honour’ (*pagari*) was given the name Jala Prasad, and was captured by means of a famous trained elephant called Sri Prasad. This elephant even warrants mention in Pandit Sundarananda’s history. Said to command great respect, he was praised as one who could trap freely walking elephants as easily as Rahu (‘the eclipse’) traps the moon and the sun, and as easily as a wrestler traps a weak person (Vajracharya, 1962:222-226 in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:150). Similarly, in the contemporary era, in the course of my ethnographic research, I found that valued elephants can acquire a considerable reputation throughout the community of *hattisares*, and to be associated with celebrated elephant individuals as part of its working team can confer a modicum of prestige upon a handler.

So, Daya Raut had the good fortune to capture a one-tusked elephant, for which he was generously rewarded. However, Kokil Raut also benefited from his (presumably) inherited role as an overseer of elephant capture and training. In the same document that reminds him of the rewards his father received, he too is given an area of land toward the nearby village of Naraulkos. Kokil Raut’s *jagir* was part of the same reward as that given to his father, and as such, this indicates the prestigious value with which the state held the finding of such a special elephant. The document additionally informs us that this land had only been recently registered in 1813/4.

Two key conclusions may be drawn from these documents. Firstly, this hints at the pattern of land settlement that revenue-collectors like the *chaudhari* had every incentive to encourage on behalf of the state. They profited as a kind of sub-contractor for the King- the higher the harvest yielded by the land, the greater their share of the profits. This they achieved by increasing cultivation through encouraging settlement to maximise agricultural labour. In effect then, the *chaudhari* and his lower level minions the *mahato*, a village headman, and the *kanugoye*, who kept the records of cadastral surveys (a map showing the extent, value and ownership of land), were given the incentive by the state to entice peasants to clear forested land and colonise it for agricultural production. Secondly, even if the hard work of capturing, driving and maintaining elephants performed by the junior ranks of cleaner, driver (*mahautya*), and capturer (*phanet*) was apparently of low status, even sometimes requiring forced labour, evidence suggests that the positions of *raut*, and surely also *daroga* and *subba* were quite different- after all such personages received royal recognition and favour, and more importantly were able to establish themselves as landlords.

2.4.3.4 From Profession To Caste

The sixth of the Panjiar Documents relating to elephants was issued in 1884 and concerns Anup Raut, probably a descendent of Daya and Kokil Raut, since he too is concerned with Cherwant *praganna* in Bara. Issued for the Rana prime minister by King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, then only 9 years old, Anup Raut is given the title deeds to the village of Thaksaul in Cherwant *praganna* after capturing an elephant named Ranagambhir Gajahatti whilst participating in the royal elephant hunt at Khurahariya camp, Chitwan District, which was hosted by the Rana ruler Maharaja Ranuddip Singh. This was a *birta* land grant, meaning that it was given by the state to an individual, usually on a tax-free and inheritable basis, and could be subdivided, sold or mortgaged (Shrestha and Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:151).

This further instance of the elephant business providing opportunities to accrue wealth and to become a person of independent means raises a significant issue about the transformation of professional practice into a familial designation. Since the *raut* could

acquire and profit from land on which tenants (*raiti*) and bonded labourers (*kamaiya*) might work, one must consider how, over time, the incentive to practice the profession of one's forefathers might lessen. We have seen that these beneficiaries of royal largesse were addressed according to their professional designation. After all, this was an era preceding that of the modern nation-state, with its concept of citizenship and the need to formalise family names (*thar*).

Those that do bear the Raut *thar* today are, I'm told, considered to be of Chhetri status, which traditionally ranks considerably higher than that of the Tharu (*Adhikari pers comm.*). This raises the question as to whether the original *raut* overseers might have been Tharu whose status over time was converted to Chhetri, or whether the overseers were never actually Tharu themselves (although few non-Tharu people were able to endure living in the malarial-infested Tarai all year round until after the USAID eradication programme of the 1950s)¹³. On this point we should remember that in Nepal, unlike most parts of India, there has historically been a relatively permeable division between 'tribals' and caste Hindus, such that the origins of the Khas (from whence the Gorkhali Shah Kings originate) interweaves tribal and *Chhetri*, just as portions of the

¹³ This royal reward of heritable land grants for success in elephant capture, which may have led to the transformation of accredited caste ranking, recalls Connerton's discussion of nobility in 17th century France. Nobility was considered a quality inherent in the person, the result of hereditary transmission, in other words of a descendent being able to lay claim to status by virtue of the former glories of his ancestors, with whom he shared substance, often expressed through the idiom of blood. In France at this time, irrespective of its actual veracity, a genealogy of considerable depth that linked one to a group recognised as noble was necessary to participate in the life of the court. Consanguinity then, as Foucault noted, served as a vehicle of power, a reality with a symbolic function (Connerton 1989:86). So it was in Nepal with the 'twice born' castes, such as the *Chhetri*- these were people who could lay claim to a noble ancestry, to belong to a lineage of repute that had once distinguished itself. That a Tharu might become Chhetri is all the more remarkable then because the Tharu were *janajati*, a 'tribe'- the type of people on the fringes of the state and its ceremonial court, whose lineage ancestry was of little significance except to themselves. By contrast Chhetri were people recognised by the state as possessing a lineage, or *gotra*, of significance to the life of the court. However, in the recently unified Nepal of the Shahs and the Ranas, we find that many groups fabricated noble lineages for themselves in order to claim greater legitimacy, just as they mimicked the ceremonial practices associated with such groups, in a process Srinivas (1962) called sanskritisation. Similarly, Connerton's discussion ranges from the putative essence of nobility to the ceremonial practices that signified and reinforced it. These practices of privilege were inextricably bound up with the claimed history of their acquisition (1989:87). Again, the Nepali case presents a parallel, in that this new Chhetri *thar* of Raut, would admit its members to ritual privileges reserved for the 'twice born' castes, such as the wearing of the sacred thread or *tagadhari*. If these people had been Tharu then they could be so no longer- they were now of a qualitatively superior substance.

Magar ethnic group were conferred *Chhetri* status (see Sharma, 1978)¹⁴. Certainly, the *rauts* serving in contemporary *sarkari hattisar* do not bear the name *Raut* as their *thar*, and if they were endowed with land would be unlikely to take a salary to live and work in a stable away from one's family¹⁵.

2.4.2.5 Assisting The Annual Elephant Hunt in Lieu of Tax Payments

In the final elephant-related document from the Panjiar collection, from 1828 CE in the district of Nawalparasi, the court of King Rajendra Bikram Shah issues a response to a plea made by the *jimidar*, *chaudari*, *kanugoye*, and subjects of Nawalpur. When an elephant hunt (*hatti kheda*) occurred, then the local people were obliged to provide their labour by way of assistance (*jhara*), but if one did not take place then they were instead obliged to pay 600 rupees tax. This led to some villagers fleeing to Ramnagar in British controlled India and also Latthepar. With fewer people working the land, governmental revenue was reduced and therefore also the income of the *jimidar*, the *chaudhari* and the *kanugoye*. In response, the royal court agreed to an exemption of the tax in return for bringing subjects back to cultivate the land and thereby raise taxable revenue (Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:167).

According to Shrestha and Krauskopff, this was the latest in a succession of complaints by headmen and tenants about excessive tax. Considering the abundance of land and the scarcity of labour, the government had to be mindful of peasants fleeing. The logic behind taxing them in non-hunt years was that they would be free to use the elephants for their own needs (as a means of transport and to assist with agricultural activities), but clearly this privilege was insufficient and this taxation strategy resulted only in unbearable hardship. The loss of revenue to the Nepali government was enough for them to cancel this tax obligation (in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:167).

¹⁴ Similarly, it is believed that in the area between Bengal and Assam, the Kuch principality was originally composed of Mech or Bodo tribal groups who over time transformed themselves into a dominant caste by a Sanskritising process in which temples to the goddess Kamakhya were re-established and patronised and in which Sanskrit scholars established familial connections on their behalf with the mythical exploits of Parashurama's exploits against the Kshatriyas, and which led to their subsequent adoption of the appellation Rajbanshi (Bhadra, 1983:56).

¹⁵ Regarding this thesis about the Tharu *raut* eventually becoming a *Chhetri thar*, I have received a favourable response from other scholars of Nepal, but nothing with which to substantiate my suspicion.

If the locals were free to utilise the elephants when they were not required for royal hunts as Shrestha and Krauskopff suggest, then it implies a degree of harmonious mutuality between the *hattisar* and the local villages that is not found today. During my research I was told of prior times when elephants were used to plough fields, but by the time I came to Chitwan it was only cattle and buffalo, or even motorised tractors that were used for these tasks. Similarly, I was told of how elephants were once used to haul timber from the forests. Nowadays villagers live in close proximity to elephants, but are not so closely involved with them. Instead, villagers are primarily only indirectly dependent on elephants as a key attraction for facilitating tourists' desires to view jungle wildlife, which fuels the local cash economy.

This document also illustrates the hardships Tharu farmers were subject to, but at least there was always the option of fleeing elsewhere, rebuilding communities and clearing forest for cultivation. In the 20th century, with available land becoming scarce, immigration increasing and government restrictions on freedom of movement, the economic condition of the Tharu worsened. This also serves as an indication of the conditions of poverty that continue to provide Tharu men with the incentive to become elephant handlers, even if it isn't a job they wish their sons to follow them into.

The role of elephants in the social and economic life of the Tharu presents a sharp contrast to the elephant catching revolts of Mughal and British India in the Bengal-Assam hinterland, as discussed in the following section. Whereas in the Nepali Tarai the local populace seemed willing to bear their labour obligations during *shikar*, but not the tax obligations in the absence of these royal hunts, in the weakly controlled Bengali frontier districts, the imposition of compulsory labour on hill tribes like the Hajong for catching wild elephants, not infrequently resulted in revolt against the imperial administration. Of course, in the Tharu case, compulsory labour (*jhara*) was in the service of royal elephant-back hunts, events of pomp and circumstance affording opportunities for tips (*baksis*), whilst in the latter, locals were forced into even more dangerous activities from which they benefited very little.

2.5 Comparative Cases of Elephant-Catching Revolts in The Bengal-Assam Hinterlands

Here I examine two papers dealing with peasant insurgencies in order to examine what they reveal about state demands on local labour for the provision of elephant related services, and make comparisons with historical materials gathered from my Nepali researches. These case studies from the recent historical school of Subaltern Studies, help make clear the subservient position of those either compelled or given incentive by the state to fulfil its need for elephants. Even in the modern era in which elephant handlers have become salaried employees, and have secured varying degrees of employment rights, most handlers, certainly Nepali *hattisares*, continue to feel like an under-valued, exploited labour force.

2.5.1 Elephant Catching and Social Unrest in 19th Century Mymensingh

Mymensingh is a Bengal district that had been formally acquired by the British in 1765 (formally a Mughal possession), but which proved troublesome for them to effectuate their rule (as it had for the Mughals). During this unsettled time in which the British slowly began to exert a ruling influence, there were sporadic explosions of collective violence, but “the rebellion of 1824-1833 marked the peasantry’s final collective stand against the expanding colonial state” (Schendel 1985:140). Now part of Bangladesh, the geographically distinct area of Mymensingh is bordered by the Garo Hills in the north, an area outside what was then the territory of British Bengal. Difficult to invade and occupy, its inhabitants had also acquired their own distinctive identity (Schendel 1985:140).

For the previous four centuries this frontier land had alternated between regional independence and absorption into larger states, and had been variously established as a principality headed by a diversity of political adventurers, including Garos, Koches, Afghans, North-Indian Brahmins and breakaway Mughal officers (1985:140). Mughal sovereignty had been tenuous and intermittent (Schendel 1985:142). In the British era, colonial power was also weak due to the presence of religious ascetics, both samnyasis (Hindu) and fakirs (Muslim) whose militant money-lending activities and armed raids threatened the colonially legitimated authority of the local zamindars. Their ability to

collect revenues and maintain order was thus negatively affected, thereby undermining colonial authority. The 'god-men', whose presence added extra complications to the already tenuous colonial hold on power, had originally been attracted by the pilgrimage places of Jamalpur (Singiani) and Begunbari on the banks of the Brahmaputra (Schendel 1985:143)¹⁶.

This was an area where local *zamindars* encouraged settlement in order to augment their revenue collections (just like the Nepali *jimindar*). Attracting new tenants was not easy though since there was already an abundant supply of high quality farming land, and to expand tracts of cultivated land was often to do so at the expense of neighbouring estates or even land utilised by inhabitants of the independent Garo Hills (Schendel 1985:144). The ethnic Garo inhabited the hills and adjacent plains between Bengal and Assam, and were traditionally renowned as capturers of wild elephants. They used to come down to the rural markets (*hats, kotes*) of northern Mymensingh to trade hill products, including cotton, elephants, musk and aloe wood for salt, cloth and dogs (Schendel 1985:145).

In the *pargana* (division) of Sherpur, the trade in elephants with Dhaka, Murshidabad, and also Delhi, was both profitable and prestigious for the local *zamindars*¹⁷. In 1820, they had made elephant catching a compulsory form of unpaid labour (*begar*). This activity was carried out by the local *Hajong*, an ethnic group who may have settled in the hills of the northern rim of Sherpur precisely because of their traditional aptitude and proclivity for this practice (Schendel 1985:149). By contrast, the Panjiar documents suggest that elephant catching in the Nepal Tarai was primarily conducted by paid employees, assisted perhaps by some non-*hattisare* locals fulfilling their labour obligations.

¹⁶ In contemporary India, sadhus' relationship to elephants no longer includes that of the elephant as an economic commodity, but is rather restricted to the elephant as a sacred animal, imbued with symbolic significance and prestige. As such, during pilgrimage events like the Kumbh Mela, at which millions of Indians congregate to bathe in the waters of one of the sacred rivers of Hindu Dharma, the *mahants*, or leaders of the regiments (*akhara*) of the various sadhu orders, will often ride in on an elephant, their elevated position signifying their high status (Clark 2006:288).

¹⁷ Terminological similarities are evident in this comparative exercise and are indicative of pan-cultural, shared historical roots. In Nepal for instance the *pargana* is known as a *praganna*.

It is obvious then that the *Hajong* people had to exert themselves in a difficult and dangerous activity, whilst the *zamindars* who demanded the capture of this prized commodity, who were of a different caste and ethnicity, took none of the risks and all of the profits. By comparison, in the Nepali case, just as the revenue collecting *jiimidar* was of the same ethnic groups as his tenants, it seems unlikely that the *raut*, as the chief of elephant capturing operations, would have been of a different caste and ethnicity to his elephant capturers (*phanet*). As such, the putative sense of shared communal identity that traversed the vertical linkages of the operational hierarchy in the Nepali case, but lacking in the Bengal/Assam case, would have provided less incentive for rebellion.

Clearly such brazen exploitation in Mymensingh became intolerable: “When the villagers resisted, their leader Mona Sarkar was captured by the *zamindars* who had him trampled to death by an elephant. In reprisal the villagers attacked a group of *zamindari borkondazes* in the village of Baromari and the mahouts drove all the elephants in the hands of the *zamindars* to a state of frenzy” (Schendel 1985:149). (A *borkondaz* is an armed policeman). Other peasants joined the revolt, including members of the other local elephant-catching group, the Garo, and at one point the *zamindars* of Shushong and Durgapur *parganas* were forced to take refuge in the town of Netrakona (Schendel 1985:149)¹⁸.

“The Elephant-Catching Revolt (*hatikhedar bidroho*) lasted several years and resulted in the destruction of all *khedas* (enclosures for catching elephants) and the abolition of elephant-catching as corvée” (Schendel 1985:149). Destroyed *khedas* included those at Farangpara, Bijoypur, Chengni, Dhenki, Arapara and Bhorotpur (now in the *thanas* of Durgapur and Kalmakanda (Schendel 1985:149). The Shushong Elephant Catching Revolt of 1820 significantly contributed to the unrest that would ultimately manifest in the general insurgency of 1824-1833 (Schendel 1985:163).

¹⁸ The other main ethnic groups resident in this heterogenous area were the *Dalu*, *Hodi*, *Razbangshi* [*rajbangshi*] as well as Bengalis, inhabiting separate but interspersed villages. They were either adherents of their ‘tribal’ religious practices, or converts to Hinduism and Islam, or even to the syncretic *Pagolpanth*, or sect of ‘madmen’, founded by an immigrant fakir called Karam Shah, which became a focal point for the peasant insurgency (Schendel 1985:151-2). It should also be noted that the Bangla-speaking *Rajbangshi* also live in the eastern Nepali Tarai districts of Morang and Jhapa, (Guneratne 2002:41).

2.5.2 Elephant Catching and Social Unrest in 17th Century Northeastern India

Bhadra examines two cases of peasant uprisings in the Kamrup-Goalpara region of northeastern India, both of which illustrate problems of integration and dominance for the evolving Mughal polity. The first of these is the revolt of Sanatan Sardar during the reign of Jehangir, which began at Khuntaghat on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river in 1614 CE. It spread to Kamrup where the headman (*sardar*) Sanatan, emerged as the leader of the *paiks* (peasants who worked as armed retainers for the nobles, receiving arable land free of revenue charges in return) in 1615 CE, who collectively attacked the revenue collectors (*karori*) and revenue farmers (*mustajir*) who were seen to be complicit in the undue exploitation of the revenue-paying peasants (*raiyat*) (Bhadra 1983:46). The surveillance (*nazr band*) and subsequent deportation of the Kings of Kuch Bihar, Lakshminarayan and of Kamrup, Parakshitnarayan, in contravention of Mughal promises to respect their dignity, exacerbated tensions, leading the local nobles to join the revolt (Bhadra 1983:47). However, for my purposes it is the second documented uprising that is of most interest- the *Hathikheda* (elephant capture) uprising of 1621 CE, which was again centred on Khuntaghat on the banks of the Brahmaputra.

At this time elephants were an indispensable resource for the army's efforts in expanding Mughal influence, being used to carry war materials into the jungles of Assam and assisting in the seizure of forts in the hill tracts. The ryots or peasants (*raiyat*) were obliged to assist the Mughal army in the capture of elephants (Bhadra 1983:49)¹⁹. The service of the *paiks* were necessary to keep the elephants confined within the enclosure (*qamargah* in Urdu, *kheda* from Sanskrit and in local vernaculars), while the *gharduwari paiks* or auxiliary footmen, were required to drive the elephants into the enclosures. Government officers would be sent with the duty to recruit ryots for these duties, which they resented since it disrupted their subsistence and revenue-generating work on the land (Bhadra 1983:50).

The immediate catalyst for this revolt was an instance in which captured elephants escaped while being put into chains. A Mughal officer called Baqir Khan took retribution

¹⁹ Again, the Nepali version of *raiyat* is *ratti*.

against those responsible for this negligence, sentencing to death the leading elephant drivers from among the *paik* and *gharduwari paiks*, and ordering the others to be whipped. He further ordered; "Either bring the escaped elephants here or pay rupees one thousand for each elephant". Later that night the locals captured Baqir Khan and cut him into two pieces. They also killed and imprisoned the soldiers as well as confiscating all the government elephants. This situation of open revolt was then symbolically confirmed by their proclamation of one of the elephant driving headmen as king (Bhadra 1983:50).

The Mughals were operating within the ambit of a pre-established system. It was the Ahom kings of Assam and Kuch Bihar that had established the *paikan* land system, wherein a peasant would become a *paik* in rotation, performing service (*gote*), which could include the capturing and driving of elephants. Whilst providing service to the king, the lands of a *paik* would be managed by his relatives, and upon completion of his term of service he would receive land as compensation (*jagir*) (Bhadra 1983:51-52). This system is not unlike that of the Nepali kings, who would reward the overseers of elephant capture operations (*raut*) with land as compensation (*jagir*), usually of *birta* status, meaning that it too was heritable and exempt from tax obligations. However, the key difference is that in the Nepali case the actual capturers (*phanet*) and drivers (*mahautya*) were not eligible for this level of compensation for their labour (*jagir*). Very often their work would be forced labour (*begar*) and only if they distinguished themselves might they receive some other, lesser reward (*baksis*), more akin to a tip (Krausskopf and Meyer [eds] 2000).

In comparing the two revolts, Bhadra notes that the *Hathikheda* Uprising, differed from the earlier revolt led by Sanatan Sardar in several respects. Whilst both revolts resulted from excessive demands being put upon the working classes, the *Hathikheda* Uprising was instigated by a specialist group charged with specialist duties. In the revolt led by Sanatan Sardar, the disenfranchised local nobility joined the peasants, initially defeating and expelling thousands of Mughal troops (Bhadra, 1983:47-48), but by comparison, the *Hathikheda* attracted few nobles and was directed by a leadership they themselves elected.

The specialisation in chasing, capturing, driving and training elephants was that of a low status group, and the uprising was hence the work of a comparatively lower and poorer section of the peasantry than in the uprising of Sanatan Sardar, in which the humiliation of the traditional rulers played a far more significant role. Sharing in a specialised profession, we can assume that the main protagonists of the *Hathikheda* were a cohesive group, and we know that, unlike in the other case, it was they who took the initiative in mobilising the common people (Bhadra 1983:55). So, in its broadest sense, we can characterise the uprising of Sanatan Sardar as comprising vertical linkages in contrast to the predominantly horizontal linkages of the *Hathikheda*, making the former seem more like a concerted indigenous resistance to imperialism, and the latter more like the defiant strike actions of a trade union. Again, the key difference from the Nepali situation was that local Tharu occupied both the administrative and labouring segments of the elephant management bureaucracy (on the ground at least), thereby diminishing the possibility of divisions of caste/ethnicity being exploited to foment socio-economic tensions that could lead to rebellion. And rather than rebel, the Tharu, living in a context of scarce labour and plentiful land, could simply migrate. Furthermore, it would seem that it was not so much the labour requirements as the tax obligations that were likely to cause consternation.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, firstly I have shown that the myth and symbolism concerning the elephant in South Asia is extremely important for understanding its continuing social and cultural significance, especially as a symbol connecting the state with the cosmos. Secondly, I have argued that the importance of the elephant also extends towards its practical utility in the life of the state and as a status symbol more generally. This includes its use in war, ceremonial display, hunting and industry. Thirdly, I have surveyed the specialist technical literature (*Gaja Sastra*) that emerged to facilitate the keeping of elephants in captivity, arguing specifically that these were documents of encoded practical knowledge that derived from the expertise of the men who actually captured, trained, drove and cared for elephants.

From here, I have postulated that the primarily Sanskrit *Gaja Sastra* literature has also been in circulation in Nepal for a long time, most likely for more than a millennium. Subsequent to this, I have gone on to examine the socio-political conditions under which the Tharu institution of the *hattisar* operated in the 19th century, drawing parallels with incidents relating to elephant management in Bengal and Assam. Most importantly, this has involved tracing the precedents for, and development of, the institution of the *hattisar* as it functions in Nepal today. I have also intimated changes in the rationale for maintaining *hattisars*, from a relatively autonomous institution, primarily utilised to facilitate large-scale, regal hunting safaris, towards its contemporary, and rather more integrated function of facilitating the management of protected areas and providing resources for tourism activities. It is this use, and the transition from the preceding function, which forms the key concern of the next chapter.

3. Chitwan, The Tharu and Elephant Stables

“Round about 1960, King Mahendra and Queen Elizabeth came to Megauli Camp (in Chitwan)... Ram Lotan Subba drove the Queen's elephant and I drove King Mahendra's elephant. It was a lot of fun. There were so many people watching. When people heard about the Queen's visit, there was a band and music and there were helicopters, lots of dancing, and then we went hunting. We surrounded the tigers. There were 335 elephants staying at Megauli camp... We surrounded the area with lots of cloths. So, after we had surrounded the tigers, not letting them go anywhere, we then took the Royalty to hunt. And the Queen was able to shoot at once...She shot with a gun. She wasn't afraid-she got it in one shot-the Queen...At that time we made the Queen and King very happy. She also hunted other animals- deer and leopards. There were lots of wild animals then. Later they were happy and gave us awards, titles. Some got gold, others got money. Nowadays there's no hunting. No Kings come. Otherwise there would be royalty from all over coming here for hunting”- Bhagu Subba recollecting the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Chitwan in 1961

3.1 Introduction

This brief account represents an elephant handler's fond nostalgia for his experience at the end of a previous era of captive elephant utilisation, one that he perceives as affording greater opportunity to profit from his profession. The recollections of Bhagu, as one of the last remaining handlers to have worked in both the hunting and conservation eras of elephant handling, represent a valuable resource with which to understand the *hattisar's* transition from an institution maintained at the whim of a pre-modern, autocratic regime, towards one maintained for the modern purpose of managing protected areas. It is this change that represents the key concern of this chapter, since it is necessary to understand how the traditionally evolved institution of the elephant stable, with its own largely self-regulating community of skilled practitioners, has been made to adapt to the modern imperatives of park management, conservation research, and tourism. Besides the noted lost privilege of receiving complementary gifts, this transition has also led to a

diminution in the autonomy of the institution of the *hattisar*, and in the responsibilities of its chief handlers (as further explained in sub-section 4.9.7 in chapter four and also in chapter seven).

To understand this altered rationale for utilising captive elephants, it is necessary first to trace the broader political, social and environmental changes that have occurred in the Tarai during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. This entails consideration of land tenure, settlement policies and the malarial eradication programme of the 1950s that further facilitated the migration of people from the hills, which led to rapid deforestation, as well as the legislation that increasingly sequestered land for biodiversity preservation, and the bureaucratic apparatus that developed to administer it. As we shall see, these broad developments were crucial in determining changes to both the distribution of *sarkari hattisars*, and the uses to which they were put, even if internally, the culture and practice of the *hattisar* retained much of its original character.

3.2 Cultivation, In-Migration and Malarial Eradication

3.2.1 The Tarai as a Forested and Malarial Barrier

The Tarai was perhaps the most prized acquisition of the unified Nepal created by Prithvi Narayan Shah and his conquering Gorkhali forces. Besides the existing land revenues, it enabled levies to be collected on pastures as well as royalties from the export of timber and elephants (Olyphant 1852:52 in Ojha 1983:23). However, the Tarai, and Chitwan especially, remained sparsely populated until relatively recently, and it was as a hunting reserve for the various ruling elites that it was most highly prized (Guneratne 2002:107). This is evident in Smythies' account of the hunting exploits of Juddha Shamsheer Rana, in which Chitwan seems to have been the most highly favoured location for hunting (*shikar*) (1942). A further significance of the Tarai in general, and Chitwan in particular, was its strategic role as a forested barrier to help dissuade further attempts at territorial incursion by the British¹. The efficacy of this barrier was improved yet further by the prevalence of malaria, for which the Tarai was notorious. Fear of malaria also made Nepali people from

¹ As noted by Kirkpatrick when he passed through the area in 1793 on behalf of the British East India Company after a 1792 trade agreement and before the Anglo-Gorkha War of 1814-1816, see Kirkpatrick 1811 (1969):16-19, Hamilton 1819 (1971):51-52, Ojha 1983:23, Dahal 1983:3 and Muller-Böker 1999:32.

the hills reluctant to settle in the area, limiting contact to the winter months when incidence of the disease was at its lowest (Guneratne 2002:107)².

In the 19th century, the British commentator Brian Hodgson remarked upon this malarial barrier, which besides its tactical value for state security, had also helped ensure that the autochthonous Tharu maintained control of the elephant stables of the Tarai, at least in terms of day-to-day management. For many years, commencing in 1832, Hodgson served as the British Resident in Kathmandu, a position stipulated by the terms of peace in the treaty of Sagauli, signed between the British East India Company and the state of Nepal in 1816 (Whelpton 2005:42, and for its implications for the Tarai see Stiller 1973:247, and for the subsequent treaty of 1860 in which further Tarai land reverted to Nepali control, see Ojha 1983:39). Although his movements were restricted, he was nonetheless able to occupy himself documenting the culture, geography and wildlife of Nepal, mainly through the employment of informants. On the malarial qualities of the Tarai, Hodgson remarks: “A country is also characterised by its unique environment (*havapani*, literally, ‘air’ and ‘water’) that sustains the physical constitution of the native. For example, the various tribal peoples of the Plains Country within the Hills (*bhitri mades*), such as Tharu and Chepang, were collectively known to the hill people as *avaliya*, or ‘the malarial ones,’ because they seemed to be inured to the malarial air of their country” (Hodgson 1874:2, 11, 14 in Burghart 1984:106, and see also Muller-Böker 1999:59).

This even helped sustain a persistent and ultimately fallacious belief that the Tharu possessed an inherent immunity to malaria. Scientific studies during the 1940s suggested that although blood analysis was indicative of resistance, this was most likely acquired in the course of growing up in an environment in which malaria was both endemic and virulent. After all, the adult population was composed of individuals who most likely would have already survived previous bouts of malaria during childhood, thereby

² For the Tharu this situation led to a very high incidence of ghostly activity, since in the interests of being recognised as Nepali and Hindu (*Hinwani* in the local vernacular), they began to require Brahman priests to perform the last rights for their dead, without which a spirit would be condemned to haunt its living relatives, a frequent occurrence since the Brahman only came to perform ritual services in the winter time when the chances of catching malaria were minimal (see Guneratne 1999b).

reducing their likelihood of contracting a further fatal instance of malarial fever (see Muller-Böker 1999:27-28).

3.2.2 Land Tenure and Incentives to Cultivation

In this malarial era of extensive forestation and low population density, Chitwan was divided into 5 revenue collecting districts or *praganna*, each further divided into *mauja*, consisting of one or more villages and hamlets, and each under the authority of a *jimidar*, usually a Tharu, who took the name *Chaudhari*. In Dang, by contrast, most *jimidar* were high-caste, non-Tharu, a situation of domination that later provided the conditions for the emergence of BASE (Backwards Society Education), an organisation dedicated to the uplift of disadvantaged groups such as the Tharu (see also chapter seven). Besides his juridical and revenue-collecting functions, a *jimidar* in Chitwan was also very much involved in the rituals of community life (Guneratne 2002:107, Guneratne 1996).

The Rana state had introduced the *jimidari* system in 1861, effectively 'grafting' it onto the Tharu's pre-existing hierarchy of administrative authority, as represented by the *chautariya*, or village head, *mahato*, or head of a *mauja*, and most significantly the *chaudhari* or head of a *praganna*, to which the *jimidar* was analogous. So initially, this middleman between the state and civil society was a part of the autochthonous social hierarchy, although as a position with the in-built opportunity to garner wealth, it soon attracted hardy, profiteering outsiders, as in Dang to the west, where the incidence of malaria was less rampant (Muller-Böker 1999:35). In establishing its very own elite in peripheral zones, the Rana regime intended the *jimidar* to serve as much as an agricultural entrepreneur as a revenue-collector, responsible for recruiting settlers or tenants (known as *raiti*) to cultivate the land and thereby produce agricultural surplus for state revenues. To do this, he had the power not only to grant subsidies in the form of temporary suspension of revenue commitments whilst the land was converted to agricultural production, but also to supply seeds for planting (Dahal 1983:2).

This initiative built upon the concerted attempt at reclamation and settlement that the Shah kings had previously pursued between the period of unification and the Anglo-

Gorkha war (1769-1815). In 1798 for example, King Rana Bahadur Shah issued an official decree to send people to cultivate Tarai land in the districts of Saptari, Mahottari, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat and Morang (Dahal 1983:2). After the relative failure of such programmes of compulsion however, the Shah kings pursued an alternative policy of incentivisation. The state began to issue dispensations to civil and military officials, members of nobility, and chieftains of vanquished principalities. Issued with legal rights to their own land (*birta* proprietary tenure) and/or to manage land on behalf of the state in lieu of salary (*jagir* service tenure), they would attract settlers to cultivate wasteland and virgin forests, from which both the state and their proxy agents would derive revenue (Ojha 1983:24)³. The outbreak of famine in Bengal and Bihar during 1769 and 1770 had forced many subsistence cultivators to become migrant refugees, which helped rectify the Tarai's manpower shortage, making it easier for *jagirdars* (the holders of *jagir* tenure) to attract settlers (Dahal 1983:2).

The *jimidar*, as the new functionary of the Ranas, had greater powers to advance their economic ambitions than his *chaudhari* predecessor. He had the additional authority to extend credit to settlers who had to expend labour on clearing the land before they could reap a harvest⁴. In the inner-Tarai district of Chitwan however, sheltered by the Churiya Hills and reputed for its particularly high degree of malarial contagion, especially low population density and the lack of immigration precluded the formation of new *mauja*, thereby limiting the entrepreneurial function of the *jimidar* (Guneratne 2002:107). However, we must not ignore the enticing privileges available to the *jimidar*. He was allowed to retain a percentage of taxes in compensation for his revenue collecting activities, and he had his own dispensation to land (*jirayat*), for which he could summon all able-bodied persons to work during planting and harvesting. This compulsory or corvée labour was called *begari*, although in the local vernacular of the Chitwan Tharu it

³ A third form of land tenure was also found in the Tarai, as well as other parts of Nepal. This was *guthi*, which was essentially a permanent and tax-free tenure typically given to religious institutions.

⁴ In Bengal, the Islamic-infused version of this term was *zamindar*, and is typically glossed as land-owning, money-lender (see chapter two on elephant handling peasants' revolts against *zamindars* in Bengal and Assam).

was referred to as *jharahi saghauni*, or 'to stop work' since one could not work on one's own fields until work on the *jimidar's* had been completed (Muller-Böcker 1999:36)⁵.

Elsewhere in the outer Tarai districts, especially in the East, and particularly after the Shah kings were displaced, the central government policy of advancing its economic interests by opening up virgin land was pursued much more assiduously. Land was key to implementing the political aims of the Rana rulers. Distinction in the service of the state, as before, could still be rewarded with heritable grants of tax-free land (*birta*), for which it was possible to recruit agricultural tenants from India, or alternatively rights to taxable shares at harvest time in lieu of a salary (*jagir*), a reward given to state functionaries, such as the chief of elephant catching operations, as we saw in chapter two.

The reason why agricultural tenants were recruited from India rather than the hills of Nepal, was not just due to the prevalence of malaria, but also due to the fact that the Nepali military absorbed much of the excess labour force, with yet more hill men going to Lahore as mercenaries to join the army of the Sikh ruler of the Punjab, Ranjit Singh, and then later on, the British army (Ojha 1983:26-27)⁶. The ordinary land tenure system in which tenants (*raiti*) worked state-owned land under the authority of the *mahato* and

⁵ It should be remembered that as an ethnic group, the Tharu are far from homogenous, recognising among themselves a host of variants, including from west to east; Rana Tharu from Kanchanpur and Naini Tal, Dangaura Tharu from Dang and Deokhuri, the Tharu of Chitwan and Nawalparasi, the Kathariya Tharu from Sarlahi and surrounding districts, and the Kochila Tharu from Morang. These sub-groups claim different ancestries, which form the basis for evaluations of status pre-eminence. Just as there are numerous Tharu sub-groups found all across the Nepali and Indian Tarai, so too their languages differ, with western variants displaying greatest similarities to Awadhi, central variants to Bhojpuri, and eastern variants to Maithili. In Nepal, the issue of whether this is a case of several languages or merely one language with multiple dialects is of strategic political significance (for the Tharu situation in particular see Guneratne 2002, and for the language issue in general see Sonntag 1995).

⁶ Ojha adds that after the 1816 treaty of Sagauli, opportunities to enrol in the British Army opened up, thereby increasing the hillmen's economic options (on the 'Lahures' see also Caplan 1995). Furthermore, Ojha argues that the inhibiting role of malaria must have been misattributed or over-emphasised (as in Dahal 1983:1), since many Nepalis from the hills migrated to Assam and other northeastern districts of India with malarial climates, and did so to fulfil the same opportunities as those available in the Tarai, namely land reclamation. Ojha suggests that the reason why India was preferable to Nepal for migration, must lie with the oppression of Nepali peasants, which often drove them out of Nepal, as attested in the Panjiar documents discussed in chapter two. India then would have seemed like a more preferable option (Ojha 1983:27). It would seem then that the malarial barrier was more significant for keeping the British out, than dissuading Nepalis from migrating in.

chaudhari, who collected shares of the harvest on behalf of the state, was called *raikar*, and it was this form of land right that was predominant in Chitwan.

3.2.3 The Anthropogenic Tarai, Development and Malarial Eradication

As a consequence of the Rana's Tarai land policy (an area which by 1950 was producing 50% of Nepal's income, see Regmi 1958:20), the natural landscape of the Tarai came to bear an increasingly anthropogenic imprint. Forests were being cleared, river courses altered, and new settlements established (Muller-Böker 1999:33-34). Chitwan however represented something of an exception, and as already mentioned, was especially valued by the Rana regime as a hunting reserve. Relatively undesirable and inhospitable for increased habitation and agricultural production, Chitwan had even deliberately been allowed to revert to a more forested state so as to maintain the seclusion of Nepal (Oldfield 1880 in Muller-Böker 1999:34), and probably also to improve its habitat for the megafauna so valued as hunter's prey. By the twentieth century, the policy of encouraging cultivation in most lowland areas whilst maintaining a forested barrier at certain key strategic places, was one of several key factors influencing the changing distribution of *sarkari hattisar* (especially those located in Tarai locations other than Chitwan).

By the 1950s, the Ranas had been deposed and King Tribhuvan reclaimed power with the help of the Nepali Congress, a political party that had been illegal under autocratic Rana rule, but which had received clandestine support and inspiration from the neighbouring Indian Congress Party that had formed India's first post-colonial, independent government under Nehru (see Whelpton 2005:67-79, Thapa 2003:14-16). Whilst this political change did not bring about either political stability or an effective electoral democracy, it did set Nepal on the path towards embracing foreign aid and development. Furthermore, Chitwan's function as a buffer protecting Kathmandu from a topographically convenient entry route from India lost its strategic relevance, and the new government began to promote resettlement (Muller-Böker 1999:39).

This entailed land reforms that improved the peasants' condition, giving them less incentive to migrate out of Nepal in order to escape excessive exploitation, as they had done in the past. For example, in 1951 *jagir* tenure was abolished, and government employees instead began to receive cash salaries. Then in 1959, the exclusive and heritable land rights enshrined in *birta* tenure were also abolished, reverting to state *raikar* land. This meant that peasants were no longer so beholden to either landowners who had previously been able to manage land and labour as their own private fiefdoms, or to government functionaries whose privileges enabled them to profit so easily from the labour of others (Ojha 1983:27). Also during this period, in order to alleviate a food deficit in the Kathmandu Valley, and to accommodate flood refugees, the government specifically promoted settlement of the Rapti Valley in Chitwan, an opportunity primarily exploited by canny government functionaries and affluent entrepreneurial types rather than the intended landless and flood affected hill people (Ojha 1983:28).

Previously the state had only been interested in people as a means to generate revenue, and the enforcement of law and order was merely an adjunct to the state safeguarding its economic interests. With the demise of the patrimonial Rana regime, a new set of aspirations manifested themselves. These were for a democratic society composed of citizens rather than mere subjects, and thus the state's interests shifted towards the proclaimed goal of national development. The land reforms and Tarai settlement programmes represented some of the earliest initiatives in this drive towards modernity and development (or *bikas* in the Nepali vernacular).

As a result of this shift, in line with a strategy devised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and with the financial and logistical assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a programme of insecticide spraying was also initiated in order to eradicate malaria and thereby further facilitate economic development in the Tarai region. The application of the now banned insecticide DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane) was intended to ensure that only a small percentage of the anopheles mosquito would reach a potentially infectious age. The incidence of malaria fell dramatically, and the project was considered a success, although a further

control spraying was required again in 1974 (Muller-Böker 1999:28-29, see also Ojha 1983:28).

Nonetheless, with the completion of the initial malarial eradication programme, further development became feasible and in-migration a more appealing prospect. By 1959 a gravelled road bisected the Chitwan valley from east to west. This was the Mahendra Rajmarg, one of Nepal's first national highways, named after the new King, who had succeeded his father Tribhuvan after his death in 1955, and which connects Chitwan's Rapti Valley to the nearby market town of Narayanghat, as well as to the key towns of Hetauda, Butwal and Mugling on the route from Kathmandu (Muller-Böker 1999:42). Where road construction cut through forest, the incentive to encroach upon it came too. This resulted in an efflorescence of spontaneous and uncontrolled settlements that contributed significantly to deforestation. The government was sufficiently alarmed that it felt compelled to implement forest protection measures. Limited to the 'delineation of forest boundaries' and 'vigilance', these were however wholly inadequate and ineffective (Ojha 1983:35).

During the next two decades, Chitwan received an influx of Bahun, Chhetri, Tamang, Newar, Gurung and Magar settlers (Nepalis from the hills instead of Indians from the plains, as had previously been the case, as with the migrants from the Yadav caste of Bihar), at first in the sparsely populated west, where there were few Tharu, and then, by the 1970s, in the Tharu-populated east (where the Sauraha and Khorsor *hattisars* came to be established). Villages previously singularly populated by Tharu acquired an ethnically plural demography, relegating the Tharu to a *tol* or neighbourhood within a village (Guneratne 2002:108). Whereas the Rapti resettlement project of the 1950s had been regulated, with land being officially allocated, this new surge was largely spontaneous, overwhelming a government apparatus ill-prepared to regulate the sudden influx of settlers (Ojha 1983:28), and jeopardising habitats that would be deemed important for biodiversity conservation.

3.2.4 Changing Patterns of Recruitment in The Hattisar

These changes also began to affect the geographic distribution (see table 1) and demographic composition of the government *hattisars*. Increasing numbers of non-Tharu *janajati* migrants began to take up elephant handling, even reaching the highest managerial positions within the *hattisare* hierarchy. Amongst the non-Tharu elephant handlers, Newars of the Shrestha trading caste have been particularly well represented, and their involvement with elephant handling even likely predates the Rapti settlement programme of the 1950s.

This is most probably due to their role in managing the trading post at Thori (the destination of the motorable road built for the Prince of Wales' *shikar* in 1921) and in establishing the trading centre of Narayanghat, a day's walk from the Indian border, and not far from Chitwan. Before malarial eradication, Bandipur Shresthas temporarily resided at Thori and Narayanghat during the cool winter months, in order to manage the export of ghee, woollen clothes and herbs to India, and the import of batteries, matches, sugar and other commodities from India. Until a road was cut through the jungle, this was a trade route that relied upon the use of elephants for transport. As a result, the managerial role of the traders would have entailed regular contact with elephants and their handlers (just as the administrative role of Newars as functionaries involved with Rana *shikar* may have done). Over time this may have even led to an interest in elephants and the acquisition of handling skills (*Adhikhari pers comm.*). The subsequent malarial eradication and settlement programme may have brought even more Newar people into a situation of proximity to captive elephant management, and hence eventual uptake of the profession.

During the Rapti Resettlement Programme, well-situated families who wished to expand their money-making activities exploited the opportunities presented by the government's drive to open up Chitwan. This included Shresthas from Bandipur in the hill district of Tanahu (northwest of Chitwan and south of Gorkha), who sent family members as 'dispatched migrants' to take advantage of the new opportunities that their established north-south trade route between India and Nepal now provided (Muller-Böker 1999:40).

The *bhupu adikrit* or retired section officer Kale Shrestha (see figure 3.1), his *bhupu phanet* younger brother, Lakshmi Lal Shrestha and his *hattisare* son, Ram Bahadur Shrestha all have family connections to Narayanghat (and I even attended Ram Bahadur's younger brother's wedding to a local girl there)⁷. *Phanet* Dil Bahadur Shrestha however, is from Gorkha, but had also come to Chitwan to exploit new economic opportunities. The ancillary role of *khardar*, which does not require direct involvement with elephants, has frequently been occupied by Newars (perhaps deriving from their administrative role in Rana *shikar*). The current *khardar* for Khorsor and Sauraha, Babu Ram Titaju is also a Shrestha, and unlike the Shrestha *hattisare*, is from Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu valley. With a background as a civil servant, he also has other family members working in the DNPWC.

⁷ The issue of how Shresthas came to be involved in elephant handling is a topic for further investigation, raising the question of why some Shresthas abandoned commercial activity in favour of elephant handling, and what their fellow Shresthas' opinion has been regarding the uptake of a livelihood that is presumably considered less prestigious and less appropriate for their particular social group.



Figure 3.1: Aajivan Subba, Kale Shrestha taking dal bhat at the Sauraha Hattisar during the new mahut induction programme

Besides Shrestha involvement with elephant handling, which clearly has some historical depth, Tamang are currently the next best-represented non-Tharu *hattisare*, with two currently serving at Khorsor, as well as the new *subba* of Sauraha, just transferred from Bardia (and again it is worth remembering that subjugated *janajati* groups may have had prior experience with elephants through their role in providing corvée labour for Rana *shikar*-Adikhari *pers comm.*). Phanet Poorna Bahadur Thapa is the only Magar *hattisare* in living memory, and is therefore somewhat anomalous, as he himself acknowledges, being proud of his own personal initiative in pursuing a profession entirely novel for his *jat*⁸. In terms of other *janajati* involvement, John Coapman employed Rai and Limbu

⁸ Unlike the *masine matwali* Tamang, as a 'martial' Magar with the traditionally Chhetri *thar* of Thapa, he is from a group that in the *Muluki Ain* had the higher designation of *namasine matwali*, or non-enslaveable alcohol drinker, who would therefore not have been conscripted to provide corvée or *begari* labour (see Höfer 1979:45).

men in elephant handling and tracking (*shikari*) operations at Tiger Tops, and these men were also involved in assisting John in elephant purchasing decisions⁹.

Table 1: Nepali Government Hattisars 1897-2002 (table from WWF-Nepal 2003:25, from data in Shrestha et al 1985)

Hattisar Name	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1914	1930	1933	1947	1955	1961	1962	1970	1977	1985	2002
Jhapa, Panch Gachi	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*				
Morang, Haraincha	*	*	*	*			*	*		*	*	*	*			
Morang, Taturtuwa			*	*												
Morang, Ratuwa	*															
Koshi Tappu														*	*	*
Saptari, Bagadi		*														
Saptari, Marewa	*	*		*			*	*								
Saptari, Sakhuwani	*	*														
Saptari, Bergana				*												
Maryadpur, Gotha			*	*												
Sariahi, Haripur		*	*	*		*		*		*	*	*				
Mahottari, Dholwaja		*	*	*												
Mahottari, Rupaul						*										
Mahottari, Badoia								*								
Mahottari, Bhutaha								*		*	*	*				
Rautahat, Motipur							*	*		*	*	*				
Rautahat, Phatthar Katta	*		*		*											
Rautahat, Bainiya						*										
Bara, Jhangalpaiya	*		*	*	*					*	*	*				
Bara, Dumrawana		*					*	*		*	*	*	*		*	
Parsa, Amlekhgunj																*

⁹ Although John Coapman visited the Sonepur Mela in Bihar in order to purchase elephants, he never found a specimen that he or his specialist advisors considered desirable. He was well aware that traders would try to sell dangerous, unhealthy or immature elephants, and that in most years at Sonepur there would be an elephant-related fatality (*pers comm.*).

Hattisar Name	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1914	1930	1933	1947	1955	1961	1962	1970	1977	1985	2002
Parsa, Lagauna					*											
Parsa, Rambhori	*		*	*		*										
Chitwan, Sonbarsa	*	*				*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Chitwan, Sauraha															*	*
Chitwan, Khorsor																*
Kapilvastu, Jhanda Manoharpur					*	*			*	*	*	*	*			
Butwal, Pahlj Khola	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*				
Dang, Bankatuwa					*											
Banke, Sindhia			*				*	*								
Banke, Gulari													*			
Bardia, Shivapur														*	*	*
Kanchanpur, Piparia															*	*
Total	10	10	11	11	7	8	8	10	3	10	10	10	5	5	5	6

3.3 The Demise and Resurgence of The Hattisar

The data in this table enable me to relate the broad context of changes occurring in the Tarai and to the Nepali polity to specific changes in the state's management of its captive elephant resources. Several patterns emerge on close inspection. Firstly, it is evident that it was not infrequent for the location of stables in the same region to be moved, even temporarily duplicating provision of captive elephant resources, as with the Jhangalpaiya and Dumrawana stables in Bara between 1955 and 1962. An example of relocation is the Dumrawana stable, near the town of Birganj, which was subsequently relocated to Amlekhganj in order to more easily serve the Parsa Wildlife Reserve (which officially came into being in 1988). Similarly, the Sonbarsa stable in Chitwan had been operative for a long time before being relocated to Sauraha by 1985, at a location more convenient for fulfilment of the park duties for which the elephants were by then being kept (and close to the local DNPWC office). Secondly there is a sudden decline in the number of stables from 10 in 1933 to only 3 in 1947. The number of government stables then

recovers during the renewed Shah rule of King Tribhuvan and his son Mahendra¹⁰. Finally, the number again subsides to only five stables as we enter the modern era of the National Park in the early 1970s.

3.3.1 The Treasury in Crisis: Stable Closures and Reduced Expenditure

In the early twentieth century, the prime minister, Juddha Shamsher Rana was an especially keen hunter, and evidently took great pleasure in profligate displays of extravagance during *shikar*. This proclivity for staging grand *shikar* events was undoubtedly to the advantage of the institution of the *sarkari hattisar*, since it required the use of large numbers of captive elephants. From the accounts of Smythies and others, he spared no expense when hosting visiting dignitaries for *shikar*, the most notable of which included King George V in 1911, the Prince of Wales (and future Edward VIII) in 1921, and Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India in 1938. The former entailed the construction of facilities with hot and cold running water at Kasara, which would later become the headquarters of the Chitwan National Park administration. The preparations for the Prince of Wales' safari entailed the construction of 36 miles of motorable road from Bhikna Thori at the Indian border (the site of the Shrestha trading post), installation of 32 miles of telephone line, and assembly of an incredible 428 elephants (Raj 1995:3). Besides the employment of hundreds of *hattisare*, these events also entailed the compulsory labour (*begar*) of thousands of peasants, both local and otherwise. The orders to close so many of the elephant stables, which must have come from Juddha Shamsher, were then surely issued with great reluctance.

Although the table does not provide precise data about specific stable closures, and raises questions as to the reasons for such inconsistent intervals between the recordings of stable data, it does allow me to proffer some explanation for the pattern it reveals. It seems most likely that mounting pressures upon the state treasury were responsible for this drastic reduction in government elephant stables over the course of 14 years. In

¹⁰ During the turbulent 1950s, Nepal's initial experiments with an electoral model of multi-party democracy faltered, leading the King to reassert control through his model of Panchayat or 'guided democracy', which commenced with the constitution of 1959, see Thapa 2003:17-18, Whelpton 2005:86-88, Burghart 1993, Hoftun 1993, Macfarlane 1993.

January of 1934 an earthquake devastated the Kathmandu Valley, to which the prime minister, Juddha Shamsher responded with aid relief and an ambitious programme of reconstruction. He was also a man renowned for his sexual appetite, and frequently took beautiful women of lower status as concubines. The numerous illegitimate offspring that resulted from such unions were generally housed, educated and cared for (especially if they were male, less often if they were female), and these expenses came directly from the state treasury, which under Rana rule was managed as their own personal fortune. Besides the cost of these 'C-Class' Ranas (see Whelpton 2005:65-66), the dynastic multiplication they represented also resulted in competition for political privileges, eventually resulting in their removal from the roll of succession in March 1934 (and the agitations of these disenfranchised Ranas would subsequently contribute to the overthrow of the 'A-Class' Rana regime by King Tribhuvan and the Nepali Congress). Another key factor in the deteriorating state of the treasury's finances was Juddha Shamsher's commitment of significant numbers of Nepali troops to support the British in defending Burma from the Japanese in 1942 (Whelpton 2006 *pers comm*)¹¹.

3.3.2 The Shahs Resurgent: Reason to Reopen the Stables

During this period of stable closures and relocations, only one stable remained continuously open: the Sonbarsa stable in the favoured region of Chitwan. At the low point in 1947, when only three stables remained, Sonbarsa was supported by the re-established Jhanda Manoharpur stable in Kapilvastu, which had previously closed some time after 1914, and the Pahli Khola stable in Butwal, which had previously closed sometime between 1930 and 1933. Significantly, by 1955, during the period of Nepal's initial thwarted attempts at establishing an electoral democracy under the direct guidance of its King (Thapa 2003:16, Whelpton 2005:72, 88), seven of the stables that had previously been operative during Rana rule had been re-established. From east to west, these were Panch Gachi in Jhapa, Haraincha in Morang, Haripur in Sarlahi (at which one

¹¹ The completion of the railway between the border town of Birganj and Amlekhganj in Parsa in 1927 does not seem to have had any bearing on the closures of the Dumrawana and Jhangalpaiya stables in the neighbouring district of Bara, even if it did reduce the need for elephants in transport duties. Jhangalpaiya closed shortly after 1901 and only opened again sometime between 1948 and 1955, whilst Dumrawana was briefly open in 1898, again in 1930 and 1933, and like Jhangalpaiya was open again by 1955 after being closed in 1947.

of my informants once worked), Bhutaha in Mahottari, Motipur in Rautahat, Jhangalpaiya in Bara (which had closed much earlier, sometime between 1901 and 1914), and Dumrawana (at which many of my informants previously worked), also in Bara.

It seems likely that after being deprived of power for so long, kept under virtual house arrest, Tribhuvan and then his son Mahendra, wished to once again take up the regal pursuits by which kings traditionally displayed their majesty (*cf* Burghart 1987). From the accounts of Bhagu Subba, it would seem that Mahendra put on hunting safaris to rival those attributed to Juddha Shamsher Rana before the onset of the austerities of his penury. To do this, Tribhuvan and Mahendra had to set about rebuilding the captive elephant infrastructure that their ancestors had originally done so much to foster. Since the Shah dynasty had languished under ignominy for so long as a result of Rana usurpation, this rebuilding of the network of *sarkari hattisar* might also be understood as a symbolic gesture to reassert their honour.

3.3.3 National Parks, The Deforested Tarai and a New Era of Captive Elephant Management

The previous two subsections have dealt with retrenchment in the state's captive elephant resources towards the end of Rana rule, and the subsequent recovery of *sarkari hattisar* as the resurgent Shah dynasty reasserted itself. However, in tracing the history of the Tarai, I have already intimated how malarial eradication, settlement and the drive to economic development impacted upon the distribution of the government's elephant stables after Tribhuvan and Mahendra came to power. The final trend to be explained from the data on the demography of elephant stables then is how their number and location were adapted to fulfil a new set of purposes during the second half of the twentieth century. The following section explains how a concern with natural resource management emerged at the state level, leading to measures to protect forests and preserve biodiversity, both of which influenced the distribution and deployment of captive elephant resources.

3.4 The Emergence of Protected Areas

So, as we have seen, with the collapse of the patrimonial, isolationist Rana regime, a new Nepali political order emerged under the sovereignty of Kings Tribhuvan and Mahendra. This was oriented towards modernisation and development through collaboration with international organisations, and also resulted in rapid settlement of Tarai land, at the expense of the forests in which the *shikari* had hunted and the captive elephants had grazed. With this regime change came a shift in the purposes for which captive elephants were deployed. Thus, the 1960s and 70s was a period of transition for captive elephant management. The era in which elephant stables were primarily maintained to facilitate regal hunting expeditions was eclipsed by one in which captive elephants were deployed to facilitate biodiversity conservation, natural resource management and tourism. Consequently, the state's rationale for maintaining elephant stables was fundamentally transformed. Furthermore, as the forests upon which the elephants depended disappeared, so too the stables had to be closed¹². The state consolidated its captive elephant resources by concentrating them in its newly designated protected areas.

3.4.1 The Need to Conserve Forests

Although King Tribhuvan ensured that the number of government elephant stables reverted to their previous levels by 1955, their future was already in jeopardy, as the significance of deforestation and the possibility of megafauna extinction was realised soon afterwards. During Rana rule, forest management had not been an issue of governance given great credence. After all, the forests had not yet been recognised as a limited resource requiring careful management. Soon after the demise of Rana rule, as new migrants settled in Chitwan and its forests and grasslands consequently began to retreat at an alarming rate, a piece of legislation was passed which represented a fundamental turning point in the state's attitude towards natural resource management.

The Private Forests (Nationalisation) Act of 1957 represents the beginning of this shift towards regulated management. This legislation, and subsequent amendments, allowed

¹² On one occasion I visited the location of the former Dumrawana stable, which was surrounded by miles and miles of continuous settlement. I could see that there was no longer any suitable elephant grazing land remotely near the old stable.

the state not only to appropriate private, communal and fallow tracts of land, but also to determine their use (Muller-Böker 1999:49). This strategy of centralised management proved to be both bureaucratically inefficient and socially unjust, since it divested communities of traditional rights of use that were essential for their subsistence, and it did so without adequately addressing alternative means of satisfying community needs. Nonetheless, it did represent the first step towards developing effective legislation, infrastructure and initiatives for forest management (eventually resulting in the internationally applauded model of community forestry committees, which in Chitwan's Buffer Zone now administer much of the elephant safari business, see Lama 2006).

Legislation such as this was indicative of the realisation that forests could no longer be treated as an endlessly exploitable resource. They were now conceived as an important component of the country's natural wealth, and could no longer be managed merely according to the immediate and instrumental concerns of agricultural colonisation and revenue from timber exports. Instead Nepal would have to manage its forests sustainably for the benefit of current and future generations, since local people's livelihoods still depended on forest resources. In Chitwan, these economic concerns were also tempered by consideration for conservation of precious biodiversity, especially species such as rhino and tiger, which were beginning to be recognised as endangered (Muller-Böker 1999:47-50). Furthermore, such iconic fauna could itself serve as a revenue-generating commodity through wildlife tourism.

3.4.2 The Creation of Chitwan as a National Park

During the phase of in-migration in the 1950s, it was not just deforestation that was causing concern, but also recognition of an escalation in rhinoceros poaching. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) had already put the Asian One-Horned Rhinoceros on the 'list of animals in danger of extinction', and as Stracey (1957) noted, the trade in rhino horn as well as skins, had developed into a lucrative business, with a well-established market in China (in Muller-Böker 1999:50). In the wake of public reports of rhino slaughter, Gee travelled to Chitwan in 1959 to appraise the situation on behalf of the IUCN. He reported that the autochthonous Tharu were not

significantly involved in the poaching business, and did so by recourse to the typical stereotype of the Tharu as ‘innocent’ forest people, in keeping with their characterisation as backwards, ‘noble savages’ (see section 7.5.6 ‘The Jangali Other Who Warrants Little Respect’ in chapter seven). He estimated that the rhino population stood at about 300 individuals (Gee 1959:60 in Muller-Böker 1999:50).

At the time of Gee’s visit, the Mahendra Deer Park had already been opened to the northeast of Narayanghat, plans for a wildlife sanctuary south of the Rapti River were already being planned (since the Deer Park provided insufficient habitat for a sustainable rhino population), and a Rhinoceros Protection Department had been established (Muller-Böker 1999:50). In 1962 the proposed sanctuary for the protection of rhino was opened. The sanctuary, as the first step towards the subsequent creation of the Royal Chitwan National Park, comprised 544 sq km of land, in which the collection of forest products and the grazing of livestock was still permitted¹³. The sanctuary entailed a complete mosaic of ecotopes to meet the rhinos’ needs, including riverine forest, grassy plains and marshes (Muller-Böker 1999:51, Mishra 1982, McLean and Strade 2003). Despite these measures, rhino poaching was worsening, and Gee made another visit to Chitwan, this time also reporting on the problems of agricultural colonisation (Gee 1963:69 in Muller-Böker 1999:51).

At this time in the early 1960s, the professional hunter John Coapman, a personal friend of King Mahendra, was beginning to negotiate plans for Tiger Tops, an exclusive safari resort in the heart of the jungle that would provide elephant back safaris, just like in the days of *shikar*, only without the shooting. To do this, Coapman made it clear to the King that the illegal settlers from the hills would have to be moved otherwise there could be no future for the mutually reinforcing interests of wildlife conservation and wildlife tourism in Nepal. On his advice, and with the support of the Forest Department, King Mahendra nominated Sailendra Kumar Upadia to head a commission that would be fully empowered to remove illegal settlers from the valuable wildlife habitats of Chitwan (and

¹³As previously mentioned, after the uprising of April 2006, when King Gyanendra was forced to relinquish power, the designation of ‘Royal’ appending the national parks and the national army was officially dropped.

other locations such as Suklaphanta in the far western Tarai of Nepal). At the future site of Tiger Tops, situated close to the Meghauli airfield that had been built to host the safari visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1961, an area of three miles in circumference, at the confluence of the Riyu and Rapti Rivers, was cleared of 5000 settlers. Over the next few years, many more thousands of settlers from all across Chitwan were also moved, and by 1965 Tiger Tops was open for business. The first of its kind, Tiger Tops had its own *hattisar*, and maintained close connections with the staff of the government elephant stables at Sonbarsa. Races were even held between the elephants of the two stables, an event that was not only popular with visiting tourists, but which also engendered solidarity among the *hattisares*, who used to look forward to these celebratory events (Coapman *pers comm.*)¹⁴.

The next significant date in the history of Chitwan as a protected area, was the inauguration of Chitwan as a national park (see figure 3.2). In 1973 the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act was passed. This not only created the legal basis for a national park, but also the apparatus to administer it, and thus a mandate for the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) also came into being. In comparison to its precursor, the Rhino Protection Department, the DNPWC had expanded powers and capacities, including responsibility for management of what used to be the royal elephant stables.

¹⁴ At this time, there was little separation between the lifeworlds of the *sarkari* and Tiger Tops' *hattisares*, unlike the contemporary situation I observed during my field research. Recently, the old practice of elephant races has been re-established at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center (Mahato *pers comm.*).



Figure 3.2: Map of Chitwan as of 1978, revealing rivers, roads and settlements (from Muller-Böcker 1999)

The newly established Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) not only enclosed the territory of the previous wildlife sanctuary, but was also enlarged to include the Itarni peninsula, south of Sauraha, as well as strips of the Narayani River, encompassing a total landmass of 894 sq km. In 1977, this territory was further expanded to its current size of 932 sq km (currently serviced by the Sauraha and Khorsor elephant stables), and in 1984 was recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. In 1988, 499 sq km of land adjacent to the eastern edge of Chitwan was declared the Parsa Wildlife Reserve (serviced by the Amlekhganj elephant stable). The RCNP was the first of a network of 19 protected areas, which would eventually comprise 16.5% of Nepal's landmass (Sharma 1998, McLean and Straede 2003, Muller-Böcker 1999:51), and which would also become a part of a Tarai network of protected areas and wildlife corridors shared by Nepal and



India, otherwise known as the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) (see figure 3.3) (WWF-Nepal 2002)¹⁵.

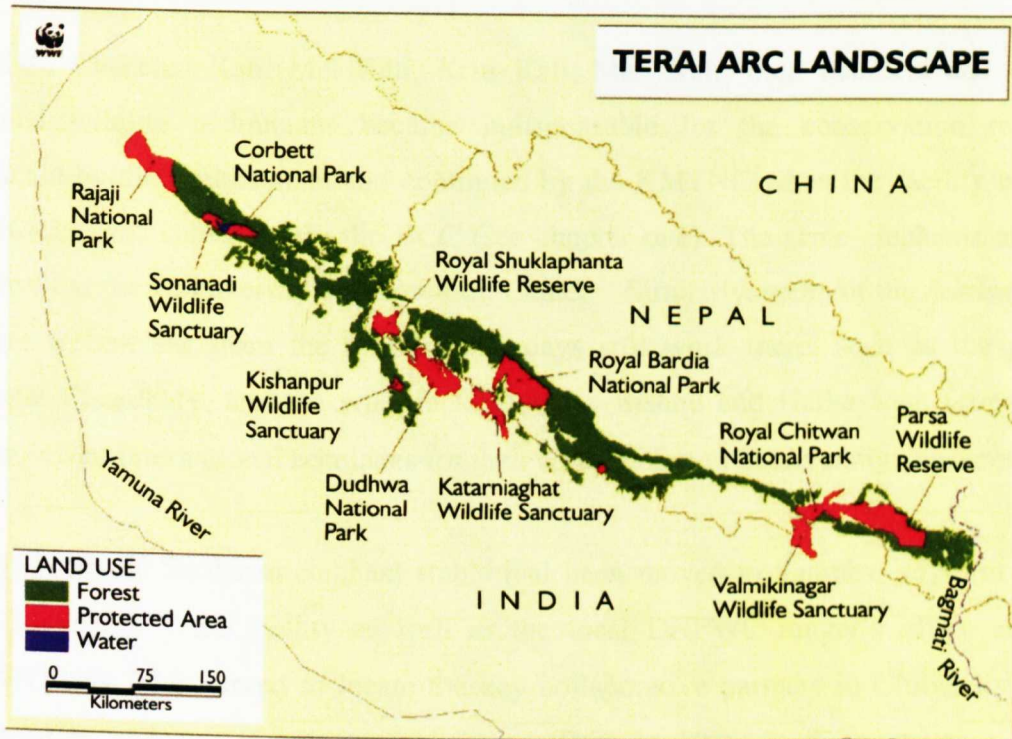


Figure 3.3: Map of The Tarai Arc Landscape (from WWF-Nepal 2003:2)

3.4.3 The Role of Elephants in Chitwan

Although the RCNP is under the legal jurisdiction of the DNPWC, other organisations have also operated conservation projects and tourist activities in Chitwan, some of which rely on the use of elephants, not all of which are maintained in *sarkari hattisar*. In 1973 the Smithsonian Institute launched its Tiger Ecology Project, based at a facility constructed in Sauraha (since the endangered status of tigers was realised soon after that of rhinos). This entailed extensive survey work for which only elephants could provide the desired mobility in the jungles, rivers and grasslands of Chitwan. As a result, the Smithsonian purchased five elephants and established its own *hattisar*, staffed by local

¹⁵ Whilst 'Terai' is a popular spelling in Nepali Anglophone publications, scholars tend to consider 'Tarai' a more faithful transliteration from the Devanagari script, one that is consistent with the way literate Nepali is taught to speakers of languages written in the Roman alphabet (see Hutt and Subedi 2003, developed from teaching materials used at The School of Oriental and African Studies, and also Matthews 1998, also developed from teaching at SOAS).

Tharu handlers, which besides the *sarkari hattisar* has probably fulfilled the most crucial role in the management and conservation of the ecotopes of Chitwan National Park¹⁶.

Jun Kali, Chanchal Kali, Mel Kali, Kriti Kali, Man Kali, their handlers and locally recruited wildlife technicians became indispensable for the conservation research conducted by the Smithsonian and continued by the KMTNC when the facility became the NCRTC and subsequently the BCC (see chapter one). The same elephants are still employed at the Biodiversity Conservation Center¹⁷. Similarly, some of the *hattisare* and wildlife technicians from the Smithsonian days still work there, such as the *phanet* Pashupat Chaudhary, and the wildlife technicians Bishnu and Harka Man Lama, who have received international accolades for their contribution to biodiversity conservation.

By 1985 the old Sonbarsa elephant stable had been moved to Sauraha, adjacent to the King Mahendra Trust facility as well as the local DNPWC ranger's office and the DNPWC vets. This served to locate the key collaborative partners in Chitwan's major conservation endeavours next to each other. Then in 1986, at the suggestion of the KMTNC, the DNPWC opened its elephant breeding centre at Khorsor (see sections 4.11 and 4.12 on the rationale, function and logistics of elephant training in chapter four), which was easily reached by elephant or alternatively by road. By this time, all the captive elephant resources of Chitwan could be easily marshalled, either separately or together as in the Rhino translocations, to fulfil their various duties, which are stated below:

Government's Stated Objectives for Hattisars (from WWF-Nepal 2003:5)

- Controlling poaching activities
- Captive breeding

¹⁶ Here I am following the first (rather teleological) definition given for this neologism coined by the pioneer Ecologist Arthur Tansley in 1939, who described an ecotope as; "the particular portion...of the physical world which forms a home for the organisms which inhabit it".

¹⁷ Of the BCC elephants, Chanchal Kali has now gone blind, and during my research was beginning to absent herself in the jungle for prolonged periods, which is considered the elephant's own way of signalling its desire to retire, as well as an awareness of its impending death as its final set of molars wear out, which will prevent it from effective intake of food, therefore leading to starvation.

- Capture wild elephants
- Wildlife Conservation
- Elephant safari to promote eco-tourism
- Emergency evacuation during natural calamities
- Royal ceremonies
- Special functions and festivals
- Sports such as elephant polo
- Wildlife research and monitoring

Surveying this list, a few residues of the traditional, regal use of elephants are still evident, in that provision is still made for their use in ceremonial and leisure activities, but otherwise it is clear that elephants have now come to serve a key role in supporting park management, conservation and tourism (see chapter one).

3.4.4 Recent Developments in Nepali Captive Elephant Management

Considering the extent to which park management, conservation and tourism relies on the use of captive elephants, their management has until recently rarely received the focused attention it requires. In 1985 the Royal Palace Investigation Center issued its plans for captive elephant management in Nepal (Shrestha *et al*). Although this provided a detailed analysis of management structure, ideal practice, and medical issues, including a concern both with maintaining high standards of elephant care and with ensuring that staff are well trained and sufficiently motivated, it seems unlikely that its recommendations were effectively translated into action. Later, in 2001 Narayan Dhakal of the KMTNC's BCC, put together plans for a Hattisare Education Programme (see section 7.7.2 in chapter seven). Besides suggesting that the previous document had done little more than outline an ideal model, this acknowledged the need to better integrate *hattisares* with the agendas of protected area management. Sadly, the Hattisare Education Programme was never

instigated for lack of funds¹⁸. Fortunately this situation is now changing, as testified by the WWF-commissioned report on Nepali hattisars (2003).

Furthermore, despite the political instability that has plagued Nepal in recent years, and subsequent to my field research, the DNPWC has engaged in collaborations on projects intended to improve captive elephant management practices and elephant welfare. Firstly, there is a Humane Elephant Training Programme, involving the DNPWC, WWF-Nepal, WWF-Finland, and WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals), which is intended to maximise the use of positive reinforcement and minimise the use of punitive methods in elephant training¹⁹. Secondly, there is a programme intended to combat the increasing prevalence of tuberculosis in elephants (and possibly also handlers), which was originally contracted from humans. Elephant Care International has initiated this project with the cooperation of the DNPWC, who are keen to be seen to be at the forefront of an issue afflicting elephants, both wild and captive, throughout elephant-range countries in Asia²⁰. In addition, the authorisation of my research and the accompanying film project can also be seen as indicative of the desire for better understanding of Nepali captive elephant management, and for these practices and programmes to receive greater recognition.

3.5 Meeting the Aajivan Subba and Learning About The History of Hattisares

So far I have traced the changes to *hattisar* distribution, recruitment and deployment in broad, structural terms within the changing historical context of the Tarai, yet during my research there was a man who had lived through the key transition I have been able to reconstruct. He is famed as a living connection to this history of change, and embodies the attitudes which service as a handler traditionally engendered, from a time when *hattisare* took pride in themselves as servants of the King. As such, this old handler casts light on the experiential aspect of the history of the *hattisar* as a royal institution, just as his significance for the conduct of my research warrants recounting.

¹⁸ The fact that Shrestha *et al* were commissioned by the Royal Palace rather than the DNPWC is indicative of the continuing legacy of the elephant's association with royalty, and perhaps also of the slow rate at which *hattisars* were being effectively integrated into the apparatus of protected area management.

¹⁹ See: http://koti.welho.com/helkanr/elephant_training.htm (accessed on 10/10/06).

²⁰ See: <http://www.elephantcare.org/tbnepal.htm> (accessed on 10/10/06).

Bhagu Tharu (see figure 3.4) is a living legend, renowned throughout the local community as the man who saved King Mahendra's life from a tiger attack during a hunting trip (*shikarko gusti*), and who has received gifts and honours from the Royal Family ever since. Bhagu was for me a living connection with the previous era of elephant handling, before the establishment of the National Parks, when the government maintained stables for the purposes of extravagant hunting trips.



Figure 3.4: Bhagu Tharu, the Aajivan Subba at Ram Bahadur's Tea Shop in Sauraha in November 2003

Meeting the septuagenarian Bhagu was truly a privilege, and together we forged a relationship of enduring fondness. Throughout my stay in Chitwan, he remained an enthusiastic supporter of my research and the allied film project, for which he was happy to be interviewed. As a well-respected man with over 50 years of experience with elephants, he was a fount of knowledge about elephant handling and the management of Nepali elephant stables. He was one of the few remaining handlers to have extensive traditional elephant medical knowledge, since its acquisition has been displaced by the

practices of qualified veterinary specialists. He loved the opportunity my research provided for him to recount stories from his venerable career as a servant of the King (whom he referred to as *sarkar*, a word which means ‘government’; for he came from an era when the King, or even the hereditary *Rana* prime-minister, was not merely synonymous with, but actually embodied government, hence the metonymic expression).

Bhagu retained a keen interest in the institution that had given him such cause to take pride in himself, and would frequently visit the *hattisar* to chat with the staff (more often the Sauraha *hattisar* which was close to his home whereas reaching Khorsor required greater time and effort). He would still even occasionally take an elephant out into the jungle, and when he offered to take me out on an elephant, I beamed a huge smile and said; “*Dhanyavad Bhaguji, dhanyavad, ekdam ramro bichar, malai dherai kushi lagyo!*” (“Thank you Bhaguji, thank you, an excellent idea, that would make me very happy!”). Similarly in 2006, when a Finnish animal trainer called Tuire Kaimio came to Khorsor to demonstrate a greater role for positive reinforcement in elephant training (as part of the WWF Humane Elephant Training Programme), Bhagu, who is typically introduced to international foreigners as ‘The King’s Mahout’, was a keen participant, undeterred by his status as a retiree, and still open to learning new approaches (*Telkänranta pers comm*).

Bhagu had come from humble origins, akin to a somewhat uncertain ‘pedigree’ in Tharu terms²¹. His indeterminate origins were usually glossed over, as was evident by the fact that he was typically respectfully addressed by his professional designation as ‘Bhagu Subba’, and rarely by the name ‘Bhagu Tharu’ which appeared on his citizenship card. ‘Tharu’ is not a respectable *thar* (family or surname) for a Tharu man, unlike conventional and reputable Tharu *thars* such as Mahato and Chaudhary (both of which historically designated positions within the local elite as revenue collectors and community leaders) or even Dhami (which historically designated a healer, and hence denoted somebody who provided an important social service).

²¹ As I later explain, elephant handlers typically come from the poorer sections of Tharu society; the indentured, landless labourer (*bahariya*) rather than peasants with rights to land (*raiti*), and in this respect Bhagu is not actually unusual (see chapter seven).

As a boy Bhagu had been tending livestock in the forests when he first saw mahouts riding elephants, and thought that might be an interesting thing to do. After joining the Dumrawana *hattisar* as a mahout (*mahute*) working with an elephant named Madan Prasad, and earning 3.5 Nepali rupees per month, Bhagu progressed through every single one of the *hattisar* ranks, reaching the very highest position of *adikrit subba* or 'section officer', of which there is only one at any given time, and which effectively refers to the chief elephant handler responsible for all of the Nepali government stables. And now, in retirement, Bhagu occupies the honorary position of *aajivan subba*, or 'subba-for-life', which comes with the added benefit of full salary in addition to the half salary which retirees have until recently always been entitled to. Unfortunately, in 1999 the *sthyai* status of government elephant handling employees was rescinded, resulting in the loss of job security and pension rights for new recruits (see chapter four).

In his long and distinguished career Bhagu received six medals, some merely for long service, whilst others were for his contribution to royal *shikar*. One medal was awarded to him at Suklaphanta in the far west of Nepal, in a ceremony on the culmination of a successful hunting trip (*shikarko gusti*) with King Mahendra. Another medal Bhagu received was for his service on royal safaris, and was presented to him by King Birendra (Mahendra's son and successor) at the Tundikhel military parade ground in Kathmandu. Bhagu's most prestigious medal however, required his attendance at the Narayanhiti Royal Palace in Kathmandu, where once again King Birendra presented Bhagu his medal, this time in recognition for his lifetime of outstanding service to the royal family and the state.

In the modern era of the National Park, in which the opportunities to ride elephants for royalty are much reduced, so too are the opportunities for the receipt of royal honours. I found that the contemporary generation of *hattisare* conceive of themselves as employees of the state rather than as servants of the king as did Bhagu. Just as the chances to receive medals have dwindled, so too have the opportunities for complementary cash benefits (*baksis*), which were once integral to service as a handler on royal hunts (*rastriyako shikar*), as Bhagu mentions in the quote that opens this chapter.

Indeed, the beneficence of Mahendra and his late father in continuing to maintain the royal elephant stables and reward their servants is especially valued by Bhagu Subba, who remains proud to be a loyal subject of the Kings of Nepal even to this day. Some of the younger generation of handlers, who have grown up in a time when Nepali society became increasingly pre-occupied with *bikas* (development), empowerment, and modern forms of citizenship, are inclined to see Bhagu's attitudes as sycophantic and redolent of a 'feudal' past that Nepal has been trying to overcome. Unlike Bhagu, they cannot hope to have such cause to celebrate their service to the state, for there is no handler alive today whose achievements have been so well rewarded and recognised. However, Bhagu was always keen to remind me of his friend and mentor Ram Lotan Subba (Bhagu substituted his *thar* of Chaudhary with the honorary title by which one addresses a man of his rank, just as others do when addressing Bhagu). Like Bhagu, Ram Lotan Chaudhary also received great honours, but had already passed away by the time of my research (see figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5: Ram Lotan Chaudhary wearing the red sash (patuka) that designates his rank as *adikrit subba* (from Shrestha et al 1985)²²

Bhagu though had the added distinction of being the man famous for saving the King's life from a tiger, something that has given his reputation a formidable mystique. Bhagu explained the circumstances behind this:

“The tiger didn't get a hold of the King but it tried to attack the King and jumped on the elephant. He didn't get to attack the King, I saved him and the tiger wasn't able to cause any harm. We encounter these problems when we go hunting. Nothing bad happened, that was good, I saved him. Later we shot the tiger.

²² At the time of these photos, included in the volume to illustrate the system of coloured sashes worn on official occasions to designate rank, Bhagu appears wearing the blue sash (*patuka*) of a *nasu subba*. In ascending order the other ranks wear; white for *mahute*, khaki for *pachuwā*, orange for *phanet*, yellow for *raut*, and green for *daroga* (see section 4.9 in chapter four).

Hunting is a dangerous job. When we go hunting we can get hurt badly... At that time I saved the King, seeing that – the King's faith in me grew. He felt I did a great job saving his life in such a dangerous situation. For those who didn't see, it's nothing. No one saw this but the two of us- how I saved him... We were in the middle of the jungle. We had about 15 elephants- they all ran away into the jungle... there was no one around to help us, so I drove the King to save him. Even if we had been forced to jump off the elephant, I would have tried to save him... he gave me a title (*Darja*)... He made sure that I had enough to eat for the rest of my life and my sons' lives”.

Bhagu credits his life saving endeavour with earning him accelerated promotion. He was reluctant to admit to the additional privileges and gifts he has received throughout the years by virtue of securing the favour of the royal family, who continue to recognize him as a loyal servant. Indeed, by way of gratitude, he still has the honour of travelling to Kathmandu every year during the festival of Tihar to receive a daubing of tikka powder on his forehead from the King²³. In telling his story he was also very concerned not to present himself as an undignified braggart, acknowledging that his success had sometimes caused jealousy and animosity in others (many of whom would recount Bhagu's generosity in sharing branded, bottled beer with his friends, although I was never quite sure whether this was intended as fond nostalgia or recrimination for the foolish hedonism that the Tharu have come to self-consciously characterise themselves with- see section 7.5.10 'Stereotypes of Cunning Bahuns and Gullible Tharus' in chapter seven)²⁴.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained how Chitwan became one of only a few remaining forested 'islands' containing valued megafauna whilst other areas of the Tarai

²³ Bhagu was keen to lay to rest one myth about about him that has persisted. He assured me that it was not true that the King had given him a wife, as many people claimed.

²⁴ As Bhagu explained to me, he's too old to drink now, and has only one remaining vice, that of mouth tobacco (*tobago*).

experienced settlement, deforestation and localised species extinctions²⁵. This has provided the basis for explaining how environmental and political changes may have affected the distribution of elephant stables, as well as how the history of settlement and in-migration began to affect recruitment to the profession of *hattisare*, which was formerly monopolised by the autochthonous Tharu, whose habituation to the endemic malaria of the Tarai had made them ideally suited to the pursuit of elephant handling²⁶. Through interviews with the renowned retired handler Bhagu Subba, I have also been able to explore how the changing deployment of captive elephant resources has affected the status of handlers, their relation to their superiors, and their attitudes to their job. In sum, all of this has served to provide a historical perspective on how the government's *hattisars*, previously maintained primarily to service state hunting expeditions, came under the jurisdiction of the newly formed DNPWC in order to fulfil the new purposes of protected area management, conservation and tourism. An appreciation of this transition is crucial for understanding the contemporary *hattisar*, as detailed in subsequent chapters.

²⁵ The rhino translocations represent an effort to repopulate regenerated habitats with native wildlife that had previously been lost largely due to the economic development of the Tarai, before legislative acts sequestered land for wildlife preservation.

²⁶ However, the Tharu are not the only indigenous group of the Tarai, and the particular reasons why other indigenous groups did not secure a significant role in elephant handling warrants further consideration. The Chepang, who traditionally pursued a foraging strategy of subsistence, were probably outside of the state structures of land tenure that had enabled the Tharu to receive elephant handling commissions. The untouchable Musahar, meaning 'mouse-eater', were also outside of the system of land tenure, limited to the provision of ancillary services, and may even have been considered too impure to act as the custodians of a sacred creature like the elephant. The possible reasons why the Danuwar did not establish themselves as elephant handlers are less clear though. Furthermore, I do not have demographic data from the past that might have a bearing on this issue.

4. Institutional Life in the Hattisar

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I recount my initial experiences of meeting and becoming familiar with members of the local elephant handling community, as well as my efforts at developing an effective working rapport. I knew that irrespective of official authorisation, the success of my research would depend upon the handlers' attitudes towards me, their willingness to accept me into their world, and to co-operate with my research inquiries. After this, I provide an account of the basic routines of life in government stables, as well as the system of ranks by which labour is organised, order maintained and social position established. Finally, I consider the rationale for the specialist functions of breeding and training that are performed at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center (*hatti prajananendra*), a prelude to the detailed account of the practical and ritual aspects of elephant training dealt with in the following chapter.

4.2 Meeting the Mahut Ram Bahadur and Making an Entry into the World of The Hattisar

In October of 2003, whilst waiting, as promised, for final confirmation of official authorisation from the DNPWC head office in Kathmandu to conduct research in the *sarkari hattisars* of Chitwan, Satya my research assistant and I took up residence in the dormitories of the BCC, with which I had already established a research relationship. This facility had its own *hattisar*, and seemed like the best place to commence my field research, since I had previously stayed there during my preliminary field trip in July 2001, courtesy of Basant Mishra, chairman of Temple Tiger and trustee of the KMTNC, which runs the BCC. At that time however, the staff canteen of the BCC was closed, so Bhagawan Dahal, one of the senior conservation research staff, arranged for us to take our meals at the house/tea shop of a local elephant handler, close to both the BCC and the Sauraha Hattisar.

That a government elephant handler's family lived in the local area was in itself fairly unusual as I would soon learn, since a majority of the government elephant handlers

come from districts further east and so live and work at the *hattisar*, with only a few opportunities a year to go home to spend time with their families (this is because they come from places with a tradition of recruitment to the network of *sarkari hattisars* that has persisted even after local stables have closed, whereas handlers at resorts like Gaida Wildlife Camp have typically been recruited locally from families without such established histories of involvement with elephant handling). And so, twice daily Satya and I would go to Ram Bahadur's house for our *dal bhat*, Nepal's national dish and primary mode of sustenance¹.

This was the house of Ram Bahadur Shrestha, who rather unusually was an elephant handler from the *Newar* ethnic group, whom I learnt was of the rank of *mahut*. Ram Bahadur's father Lakshmi Lal had also been an elephant handler, and before reaching the mandatory retirement age of 58, had achieved the higher rank of *phanet*. There were quite a number of *Newars* bearing the *thar*, or family name of *Shrestha* in the local area, since members of this mid-ranking *Newar jat* or caste, had founded the nearby town of *Narayanghat* almost a century previously (see section 3.2.4 'Changing Patterns of Recruitment in The Hattisar' in chapter three). Shresthas are traders by custom, and are considered equivalent to the *vaishya varna* as laid out in the traditional Hindu *varnasramadharm*a, a set of edicts which express one's obligations (*dharma*) according to the stages of life through which individuals should pass (*asrama*), and according to the functional classes into which humanity is divided (*varna*), both of which comprise the ideal form the socio-cosmological order should take (see Flood 1996:58-64)². That some *Shresthas* had (presumably) been forced into a profession generally considered of lesser prestige and income, as well as one associated with the low-status, indigenous Tharu ethnic group, was a fact that immediately piqued my historical curiosity.

Ram Bahadur's wife Asthamaya, whom I was encouraged to refer to as *bhauju*, the term for one's elder brother's wife, proved to be a fine cook; providing us with tasty meals and

¹ *Dal bhat* comprises cooked rice (*bhat*) and lentil soup (*dal*), is eaten by hand, and is usually accompanied by some vegetables, *tarkari* in Nepali or *sabji* as it is commonly referred to in the *Tarai* where Hindi vocabulary is often used, as well as relish (*accha*), and maybe even some meat (*masu*).

² The four *varna* are: *Brahman* (the priestly class), *Kshatriya* (the ruling warrior class), *Vaishya* (the merchant class), and *Sudra* (the labouring or servant class) (Dumont 1980:67).

always ready to make *chiya* for us (hot, sweet, milky Nepali tea), which we would slurp from small glasses whilst watching American WWF wrestling with her sons on an old, battered black and white TV set (a programme which they believed to be a genuinely competitive sport rather than the predetermined, and rather ‘hokum’ entertainment I understand it to be). But this would prove to be far more than just a venue for us to fill our bellies and do ‘time pass’ (an Anglo-Indian term widely used throughout South Asia); by introducing me to Ram Bahadur, Bhagawan had provided me with a gateway into the social world of the government elephant handlers, a world to which I was eager to be admitted.

Although Ram Bahadur was, from the outset, enthusiastic to be seen to be assisting me, ordinarily he would have been too busy with his work duties to spend much time acting as a guide and informant. However, just two months previously, a wild male had attacked his elephant. Since Ram Bahadur’s elephant was attacked at night when he was chained to his post, he was disadvantaged and consequently suffered fatal wounds. Twenty days after the attack, his elephant Sher Prasad succumbed and died. The vets had been powerless to do much except alleviate the pain of the elephant’s suffering. The loss of Sher Prasad was a personal tragedy for Ram Bahadur and the handlers at Sauraha, as well as a significant economic loss for the DNPWC³. Ram Bahadur even confessed that he had shed tears on the demise of Sher Prasad, a fine regal tusker, the type of elephant one was proud to be seen working alongside⁴. This was not merely due to the respect that accrues to those who must face the challenge of controlling a male elephant, since they are subject to occasional bouts of dangerously unpredictable behaviour which result from the

³ Several months later, the DNPWC received funds from SNV, the Dutch national development agency with which to upgrade its *hattisar* facilities, and this included electric fencing to protect the captive males from incursions from wild interlopers. Whether this would prove effective seemed doubtful however, since the wires were rapidly deformed, leaving room for a sufficiently determined elephant to find a way in. Consistent electrification would be unlikely anyway since the electricity supply was not dependable and to my knowledge there were no emergency generators. Furthermore, similar efforts to exclude wild elephants from raiding valuable human crops have time and again demonstrated the extent of elephants’ cunning, such that they continue to develop strategies to overcome whatever hindrance stands in the way of their desires. This led me to make further inquiries about the problem of wild males, and I was surprised to learn that in the past, perhaps until 40 years ago, *hattisars* kept a specially chosen male whose specific duty was to fight off wild males.

⁴ Hart reports similar expressions of grief amongst mahouts in Karnataka on the death of particularly revered bull elephants, one of which, Rajendra, even received a marked grave when he died in 1977(2005).

state of heightened sexual arousal known as *musth* (or *mada* in Nepali), but also because he was the type of elephant that afforded one prestigious opportunities to take part in processions and important ceremonial occasions (referred to by the Nepali term *mahatsabh*)⁵.

And so it was that Satya and myself, with the assistance of Ram Bahadur, were able to make ourselves known in and around Sauraha. Until I received final confirmation from the DNPWC, I felt it prudent to exclude the government stables from my research activities, but this was by no means problematic. I was still free to visit the *hattisars* just as tourists can do, and for the few weeks I had to wait, I filled my time with daily interviews with Bhagu Subba, the famous retired (or *bhupu*) elephant handler whom I would regularly meet at Ram Bahadur's house to conduct semi-structured interviews (see section 3.5 'Meeting The Aajivan Subba and Learning About The History of Hattisares' in chapter three).

4.3 Meeting the Subba of Sauraha and Learning About Appropriate Manners in the Hattisar

After two weeks of daily interviews with Bhagu, the authorisation I had been waiting for arrived, now permitting me to spend protracted periods of time observing working practices in the Sauraha and Khorsor *hattisars*, and to conduct interviews with their staff. From this point, my research activities progressed rapidly and my immersion into the life-world of the elephant handlers truly began.

Firstly, Ram Bahadur introduced me to his immediate boss Amerko Prasad Chaudhary, the *nasu subba* of Sauraha (who was later re-assigned to the *hattisar* at Bardia in the western Tarai; I learnt that it was normal practice for *subbas* to be periodically re-assigned, since the location of one's assignment has such an impact on the ease of access to one's family)⁶. Although always polite and hospitable, Ram Bahadur had by now

⁵ The clearest indicators of an elephant in *musth* are the sweet-smelling liquid oozing down its temples, which is excreted from the temporal glands, and the constant drip of urine from its penis.

⁶ His replacement *subba*, Chandra Man Tamang, who had been serving at Bardia, is from the Tamang ethnic group, and was the highest-ranking Tamang *hattisare* I heard about.

become relaxed around me, but in the presence of superiors such as Amerko Prasad, his behaviour noticeably changed; his normally informal demeanour evaporated, he would seem mildly agitated, was prone to avoiding eye-contact, and became pre-occupied with comporting himself with meticulously observed manners.

I soon came to realise the significance of Ram Bahadur's uneasy behaviour. It helped sensitise me to the subtleties of body language as they pertain to hierarchy, order and discipline in the *hattisar*. The most obvious parallel from my own cultural experience was with the order of deference expected towards superior ranking officers in a setting such as an army barracks (which I had found appallingly servile and demeaning while briefly serving as a cadet in my teenage years)⁷. Instead of the typical 'namaste' by which one typically greets another of equal or superior status, Ram Bahadur used the more formal 'namaskar', and sometimes, when he particularly wished to signify his deference, such as on occasions when he wished to make a special request, he would bow and touch the feet of the *subba*.

This is significant since the feet, as that part which makes contact with the earth, are considered symbolically polluted as well as hygienically unclean (both meanings covered by the Nepali term *jutho*), even among those Nepali groups not especially pre-occupied with maintaining the behavioural strictures associated with the 'pure' castes, such as the *janajati* (ethnic groups), of which many do not even consider themselves Hindu. Furthermore, this was no mere idiosyncrasy on Ram Bahadur's part; other *hattisares* would also make this distinctively obeisant gesture.

This type of deferential behaviour is very much a legacy of the social mores of Nepal's hierarchically-ordered past, before the era of national development (*rastriyako bikas*), when the symbolic (and bodily) expression of social position tended to be much more

⁷ This appreciation of the social significance of bodily practice relates to Paul Connerton's notion of incorporating practice as entailing; "messages that a sender or senders impart by means of their own current bodily activity" (1989:73), which he illustrates through a discussion of posture: "Power and rank are commonly expressed through certain postures relative to others; from the way in which people group themselves and from the disposition of their bodies relative to the bodies of others, we can deduce the degree of authority which each is thought to enjoy or to which they lay claim" (1989:73).

strictly observed⁸. In the current Nepali discourse on civil society and development, the deferential touching of feet tends to be associated with ‘backwardness’ (see also chapter seven). Furthermore, other *subbas* seemed to find the touching of feet excessively sycophantic and thereby demeaning to the actor, brushing them away with a dismissive hand gesture that implied; ‘I’m glad that you are acknowledging my status, but that’s really not necessary’.

4.4 Participating in the Social Life of the Hattisar

Shortly after meeting Amerko Prasad, whom I addressed as *subba-sahib* (as did all the *hattisares*), I was excited to be invited to their weekly Tuesday evening *kirtan gaune* or ‘hymn singing’ sessions at which we would perform rituals (*puja*) addressed to images (*murti*) of the Hindu goddess *Lakshmi*, and the Hindu gods *Shiva*, and *Ganesha* (in this case; inexpensive, commercial prints rather than statuettes)⁹. This involved the purification (*shuddhikaran*) of the images by means of burning incense, followed by the presentation of religious gifts (*dana*), comprising fruit. Once infused with divine grace by the sacrificial act of worship, the remains of these gifts to the gods were then distributed and consumed as *prasada* (portions would even be set aside for absent dignitaries such as Bhagu Subba that the participants also wished to receive divine power or *shakti*). On completion of the *puja* we began the devotional singing, accompanied by miniature hand cymbals, thereby combining worship with pleasure.

This was a practice that had been initiated by Amerko Prasad as a Hindu devotee, and which I came to realise was indicative of his own personal leadership, rather than a longstanding custom of social life in a traditional *sarkari hattisar*. As a *subba*, he had the authority to initiate social activities, although this is not to suggest that attendance was mandatory and that *hattisares* only participated with reluctance; on the contrary, these were enjoyable occasions, and most would freely attend. When the new *subba* Chandra Man Tamang arrived, who had previously been based at Bardia, and who is from the Buddhist Tamang ethnic group, the Tuesday evening *kirtan gaune* sessions no longer

⁸ The state civil code, the *muluki ain*, had stipulated appropriate behaviour between the state-ordained ranked groups that occupied the territory of Nepal (see Höfer 1979).

⁹ The more commonly used Nepali word for a hymn or song of devotional praise is *bhajan*.

continued on such a regular basis. Furthermore, this coincided with the re-assignment of one of the Sauraha *hattisar's* best singers, the *patchuwa* Narayan Chaudhary, who remained an elephant handler despite having lost his arm in an electrocution accident that had killed his elephant (the retention of his job was a result of his status as a *sthyai* employee- see section 4.8). Along with his elephant Aishwarya Mala, he was transferred to the nearby stable at Khorsor, thereby depriving Sauraha of its leading singer. Narayan was distinguished by both his singing ability and his knowledge of devotional songs.

During this early phase of my research, I began to visit the *hattisar* each morning, taking *chiya* with the men whilst sitting around the fire at the centre of the *hattisar* (it was winter and the mornings were laden with a cold, damp fog that often persisted until as late as 10am). I would stay and chat to the *phanets* whilst we waited for their *patchuwas* and *mahuts* to return from their morning grass-cutting duty. When I was subsequently asked to stay for *dal bhat*, I was most gratified, since the commensality of food sharing is typically accorded great significance in Hindu culture. I took this then as an indication of my increasing acceptance among the *hattisare*. Some men were clearly shy around such an unprecedented outsider as myself, and were perhaps also inhibited by the necessity of conversing with me in Nepali. For almost all the *hattisare*, Nepali is their second language, and some Tharu elephant handlers clearly lacked confidence in using the language (*bhasa*) of the *Gorkhas*¹⁰. Others however, were attracted by my interest in their work and the possibility that my research might facilitate a greater appreciation of the skills of elephant handlers and the demanding nature of their work.

4.5 Meeting the Adikrit and Moving to Khorsor

One day, shortly after establishing my routine of daily visits to the Sauraha Hattisar, a man arrived on a motorcycle. It seemed unlikely that he could be a *hattisare* since I considered ownership of a motorcycle an indication of wealth and standing beyond the reach of someone on an elephant handler's salary. However, he didn't appear to be a

¹⁰ Nepali has previously been known as *Gorkhali*, and also as *Khas kura*, which refers to the way of speaking of the *Khas* tribe from which *Prithvi Narayan Shah*, the founder of the *Shah* dynasty and 'unifier' of Nepal came. The imposition and reinforcement of Nepali as the lingua franca of Nepal has been a key component in the state building strategy of its rulers, latterly raising concerns about the language rights of the *janajati* (see Sonntag 1995, and Burghart 1984).

DNPWC official either; they are almost all *Bahun* and *Chhetri*, and as such always seem a little out of place when they enter the territory of their inferiors; the *hattisares*. This man exuded the air of someone at ease in familiar surroundings, and furthermore his composure seemed to me more like that of a Tharu. The stranger had a distinctive handlebar moustache reminiscent of an Edwardian British military officer, and a small strand of plaited hair on the back of his head, which I knew indicated that he wished to be seen to be a Hindu devotee, since during funerary rites this is meant to allow Yama, the god of death, to easily remove the skullcap in order to release one's essential self or *atman*. He strode into the inner sanctum of the *hattisar*; the area cloistered by the living quarters, around which the elephant posts are arrayed, and as he did so all the handlers present clasped their palms together, giving him the respectful *namaskar* greeting, and addressing him as 'Section Sahib'. Spontaneously acting as an interlocutor, a *phanet* beside me quickly explained in hushed tones that this was the *adikrit subba*. Now I understood...

I was excited and a little nervous; this was the most senior ranking elephant handler in Nepal, traditionally with responsibility for all of its *sarkari hattisars*. The success of my research could well hinge on the rapport I established with him at this very moment. He wielded ultimate power for me, and I hadn't even expected to meet him on this day. After a short while conversing with Amerko Prasad, checking that all was well with the *hattisar*, an opportunity presented itself for me to be introduced and to greet a man whom I hoped would become a patron for my research. Section Sahib introduced himself by rank and by name as Rameshwor Chaudhary, and indicated that he had heard about me. This was a relief; I was glad that my novel endeavours warranted acknowledgement. He seemed neither guarded nor suspicious, and was instead rather curious. Indeed, he even seemed well disposed towards me. Before I knew it, our imperfect conversational exchange, hindered by my still faltering Nepali, had led to an invitation.

He was based at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center (as the *adikrits* have chosen to since its inception in 1986), the largest and potentially the most interesting of Nepal's *hattisars*, and he told me that I should come to witness the training of an elephant that

would commence within a few days (see figure 4.1). This was truly an exciting prospect. I didn't know it yet, but this would prove to be a momentous and pivotal moment in my research that would lead to my residence at a *hattisar*; actually eating, sleeping and participating on a full-time basis, not just visiting but living among my informants.



Figure 4.1: Signpost for The Elephant Breeding Center

(The accompanying Nepali script reads: Shahi Chitwan Rastriya Nikunj, Hatti Prajanan Kendra, 'Royal Chitwan National Park, Elephant Breeding Centre').

4.6 The Hattisar as a Total Institution

These narrative vignettes of my progressive immersion into the world of the *hattisar* have suggested that being an elephant handler does not permit a clear temporal demarcation between work and leisure. There may be vacation entitlement, and 'down time' when there are no pressing duties, which can permit 'time pass' activities, but certainly nothing like the typically western labourer's notion of 'clocking off'. On numerous occasions, keen to emphasise the commitment elephant handling requires, many of my informants stressed that this was a 24-hour job. In a sense this was true, for instance; at the Khorsor,

Sauraha and BCC *hattisars*, fires are kept burning throughout the night, and men keep watch according to a rota, for they have precious living commodities to guard.

The demands of elephant care can call at any time; if a wild male enters the *hattisar* and approaches one of the captive males, then the night-watchman must inform the staff of that elephant, whose responsibility it is to ensure that the wild interloper is chased off. His presence among the females, whom he may woo and even choose to impregnate, generally poses no danger, and is even desirable, but for the males whose presence represents a challenge to his supremacy, it spells trouble. The expulsion of an interloper will require the cooperation and goodwill of one's colleagues, since it is only the cacophony of angry voices and the chaos of their multiple torch-bearing charges that can successfully see him off (as I myself learnt firsthand on a few occasions when a wild male in musth was making frequent visits to Khorsor). As the case of Sher Prasad shows, failure to discharge this duty can have catastrophic consequences. If one were found to be negligent in such a situation, then the wrath of the *subba* would be fierce, and could even result in the humiliation of demotion.

Since one can be called on at any time, and since with only rare exceptions one will live, eat and sleep full-time at the *hattisar*, it should be obvious that it conforms to Erving Goffman's idea of the 'total institution', which he defines according to the following criteria:

- Virtually all aspects of life are conducted in the same place under a single authority
- Many of each member's activities are conducted in unison with their colleagues
- All phases of the day's activities are subject to a regimented schedule
- And finally, the various activities of the institution derive from a rational plan designed to meet the objectives of the ruling institution (in this case the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation or DNPWC) (Goffman, 1961:17)

Although it is hardly problematic to assert that *hattisars* are ‘total institutions’, this does not mean that it is not worth exploring the nature of the *hattisar* as such in further detail. The first criterion, that of ‘the essential aspects of life being conducted in one place and under a singular authority’, has already been demonstrated to some extent, although an elaboration of the authority structure will serve to clarify this issue (see section 4.9 ‘Ranks and Roles in the Hattisar’). The second and third criteria, that of ‘activities conducted in unison and according to a regimented schedule’, will become clear upon a description of the basic routines of the *hattisar* (see section 4.7 ‘Daily Routine in the Hattisar’). The fourth criterion, that of ‘rational plans to meet institutional objectives’, has also already been indicated to some extent, in as much as the functions of the various *hattisars* has been stated in section 1.2 ‘The Use of Captive Elephants in Chitwan, Nepal’ in chapter one, and section 3.4.3. ‘The Role of Elephants in Chitwan’ in chapter three. However, the linkage between the DNPWC and its *hattisars* has only been sketched in its broadest outline. The sections that focus exclusively on Khorsor; 4.11 ‘The Rationale of Elephant Training’ and 4.12 ‘The Function and Logistics of Elephant Training’ will serve to elaborate the stated relationship between the DNPWC and its specialist *hattisar*.

Before proceeding to explore the daily routines of elephant care and the ranks by which labour is organised, it is also worth placing the *sarkari hattisar* regime of care within the wider context of traditional keeping systems, for which Fred Kurt has developed a threefold typology (see Kurt 1995, and also Kurt & Mar 2003, Kurt *et al* 2007, Mar 2007). Kurt defines **extensive**, **intensive** and **alternative keeping systems**, of which the latter applies to Nepal’s *sarkari hattisar*. Extensive keeping is most typically found in forest camps and is defined by elephants being permitted to enjoy unsupervised and relatively unrestricted foraging at night. The elephants are however hobbled by their front feet, and each morning their handlers must fetch them from the forests in which they roam. This enables elephants to live in family groups and to interact with both tame and wild conspecifics. When sub-adult and adult males are in musth however, then their typical freedoms are curtailed, and they are kept tethered at the stable. Intensive keeping is most typical of privately owned elephants, either kept individually or in larger groups, as with temple elephants. They are fed exclusively on prepared fodder, have no

opportunity to forage for themselves, and are kept chained at night. Alternative keeping systems are intermediate between the two, and typically entail supervised day-time foraging in combination with night-time tethering.

4.7 Daily Routine in the Hattisar

4.7.1 Grass-Cutting

Each morning, *patchuwas* and *mahuts* must rise between 5 and 5.30am in order to take their elephants into the jungles and grasslands of the RCNP to cut grass for the elephants' evening rations and for making *dana*, and will typically return between 7 and 8am. The time varies according to the seasonal availability of fodder and the distances one must traverse to access it. *Hattisares* with long-standing experience, such as *Section-Sahib* (with 31 years as an elephant handler) and *Bhagu Subba*, would happily remind junior staff how lucky they are, for in prior times it was typical practice to rise before dawn, as early as 3am in order to go grass-cutting (especially at stables like Dumravana, at which increasing settlement and deforestation prolonged grazing journey times)¹¹. The changing environment of the Tarai meant that some of the older government stables were not in such close proximity to *jangal* as the current stables of Chitwan, and this was surely a key factor in stable closures and relocations (see chapter three). The thought of rising in the dark and having to drive an elephant for more than 45 minutes just to reach grass for cutting was certainly not one that I would have relished (see figure 4.2)¹².

¹¹ The way in which elders would take pleasure at the expense of their juniors, in claiming how much tougher elephant handling was when they were young became something of a recurrent motif, and reminded me of 'The Four Yorkshire men' comedy sketch made famous by Monty Python's 1983 performance 'Live at The Hollywood Bowl', in which four old men from mining towns in the North of England try to outdo each other in claims as to how hard they had it when they were young, each one making increasingly preposterous claims with less and less credibility until their exchanges ultimately collapse into utter absurdity. In such instances, although far less comedically elaborated, the elders at the *hattisar* weren't merely providing information to a curious and potentially naïve outsider, they also seemed to be taking pleasure in performing according to a recognisable trope.

¹² Elsewhere however, such as in Burma, Bengal, Assam and Karnataka, it used to be typical practice to let elephants out into the jungle at night. The next morning, it would fall upon the handlers to track down their elephant charges and bring them back to the stables in order to commence the day's work.



Figure 4.2: Elephant team returning from grass cutting on a misty winter morning

Phanets usually only perform grass-cutting duty (*gas katneko dipti*) when other members of their elephant team are absent, such as when injured or on vacation. In general, a *phanet's* seniority gives him the privilege of delegating more onerous tasks to his juniors. However, whilst the *patchuwas* and *mahuts* are away administering to elephants' needs, the *phanets* are required to administer to the needs of the *hattisar's* human staff. Under the auspices of the quartermaster (a role occupied, usually in yearly rotation, by a *phanet*, which temporarily relieves him from most duties concerned with elephant care), the cooking fires must be started, the morning tea brewed, food prepared for *dal bhat*, and (at Khorsor) if there are any mothers with young less than 6 months old, then *kir* must be cooked. *Kir* is a dietary supplement of rice pudding, made from boiled rice (*bhat*) and molasses (*sakkhar*). After cooking, it is left to cool, and is fed to mothers and their young on the elephants' return from grazing in the afternoon, when they all receive their usual treats of *dana*.

When the *hattisares* return from grass-cutting duty they expect morning tea to be ready. By local arrangement, milk is either delivered or collected early every morning. During my research at Khorsor, which is a little inconveniently separated from the nearest habitation by the Kageri Khola (river), for which the KMTNC employ a ferry boatman (who is paid NRS 2000 a month), a young boy named Kale usually fetched the milk. His father had been a *patchuwa* at Khorsor, but two years previously (in 2002) Kale's father was killed in a tragic incident. One day, whilst out in the jungle cutting grass with his elephant, a tiger lunged at his head, striking a fatal blow.

Despite his family receiving some financial compensation and living within relatively close proximity, Kale preferred to stay at the stable (which was closer to school than his family home), and in exchange for helping out with minor duties, *Section-Sahib* was happy for him to sleep and eat at the *hattisar*¹³. Kale was not the only son of an elephant-handler to stay at the *hattisar* for extended periods of time, and the presence of young boys seemed indicative of the means by which recruitment to work in the *hattisar* has traditionally been sustained; through family ties and informal apprenticeship processes. Many of the current salaried elephant handlers had begun living and working at *hattisars* before they were legally entitled to claim pay at the age of 18. Some had worked for up to 4 years just receiving food and residence before their positions were formalised and their acquired skills thereby acknowledged (see chapter six).

4.7.2 Making Dana

After morning *chiya*, the elephant handlers (most usually the *mahuts* and *patchuwas*) must make packages of unhusked rice (*dhan*), molasses (*sakkhar*) and salt (*nun*) with the grass they have just cut. These packages are called *dana*, whilst in India they are known as *kuchi* (see figure 4.3). The Nepali word *dana* refers to a religious gift (an ordinary gift without any sacred connotation is known by the term *upavar*), and this is surely a significant reminder that to be an elephant handler is also, in a sense, to be a 'servant of *Ganesha*', whose spirit substance resides in the bodies of all elephants (see Marriott 1989

¹³ Hart also reports how a family member's elephant-related death tends not to dissuade prospective handlers from pursuing the profession (2005).

on Indian Ethnosociology)¹⁴. According to the logic of Hindu ritual, this would suggest then, that by giving *dana*, the *hattisare* are honouring the patron deity of elephants, and in so doing may expect a favour in return. In practice the use of *dana* may be observed to play a significant role in persuading elephants to adhere to a routine imposed by man and to act as an enticement to respond to his wishes.



Figure 4.3: Phanet at the Sauraha Hattisar making dana

For their favoured treats of *dana*, which provide an important nutritional supplement, adult elephants receive a daily ration of 15kg of rice, 75g of molasses, and 25g of salt. However, at Khorsor and Sauraha, molasses and salt are not given on Tuesdays, which in Nepali is called *mangalvar*, the day of Mars, which is the planet associated with *Ganesha*. At Sauraha the regime is slightly different in that the salt and molasses are also left out on Sundays (*aitevar*), a day particularly associated with the dead in Tharu culture

¹⁴ As Richard Burghart explains; “In common parlance the Nepali term religious gift (*dana*) is used to designate any offering in which the donor, acting with a religious intention, relinquishes his possession over an object so that it might be accepted by the recipient” which is “offered in consideration of the divine status of the recipient” (1987:242).

(see Muller-Böker 1999:75). Sunday is the day on which the Sauraha stable's resident night watchman and *pujari* (ritual practitioner), performs a *puja* to posts that represent the spirits of departed elephants. Furthermore, in Tharu culture, Tuesdays and Sundays are said to be days when witches (*boksi*) and spirits can hear everything said about them, and it would seem likely that the prohibition of salt and molasses is somehow related to these beliefs (see Muller-Böker 1999:75, and Guneratne 1999b).

That Khorsor neither performs the *aitevar puja* nor refrains from giving its elephants molasses and salt on Sundays is surely indicative of its more recent date of establishment, the *sthyai* status of Sauraha's *pujari* (see section 4.9), and the DNPWC's intention to discontinue payments to maintain a resident *pujari*. This suggests that the transition in the function of Nepal's *hattisars* from the era of royal *shikar* to that of National Parks, with the attendant ideological shift from that of traditional authority to one of scientific and bureaucratic management, has resulted in some changes to the traditional culture of the *hattisar*. The DNPWC, as a modern institution dedicated to scientific wildlife management, unlike the *hattisars'* former regulatory body, cannot justify spending its resources on staff whose primary function is only to perform rituals (although in other respects the DNPWC permits traditional ritual practices to continue, since these can be claimed to contribute to *hattisare* morale and high standards of care).

4.7.3 Making Morning Dal-Bhat

Once *dana* have been made and secreted away in sacks to be given to the elephants later in the day, then the men will await the first meal of the day, which the Quartermaster and assisting *phanets* (working according to a negotiated rota) will have been preparing whilst the other staff have been preparing the elephants' favourite 'snack' food (see figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: Phanets preparing morning dal-bhat and kir in the Khorsor kitchen

The serving and the order of eating in the *hattisar* is organised hierarchically according to rank. The most junior *mahuts* act as servers, providing pitchers of water for hand-washing, plates of *bhat*, spoonfuls of *dal*, chilli peppers and helpings of *tarkari* and *accha* (which at the *hattisar* might merely consist of crushed chillis or *khursani*). *Phanets* and *patchuwas* eat first, and *mahuts* must remain on hand to provide additional helpings (throughout Nepal the consumption of *dal-bhat* is on an eat-all-you-can basis). In the cold winter months, the *hattisare* will eat in the kitchen, sitting cross-legged or crouching, whilst in warmer months they will sit at outdoor benches.

The *subba*, the *khardar* and sometimes even other senior staff of *daroga* and *raut* rank, eat separately at a table, often after the men have eaten. In prior times *subbas* would often eat separately cooked rice of a superior quality. These days however, they usually eat the same *dal* and *bhat*, although they may receive additional extras; meat, locally collected river shrimps, river-snails, an extra vegetable or chutney, or just some raw onion with

lemon juice. Unless I needed to eat promptly in order to go out on the elephants, then I would take *dal-bhat* with the *subba* (and thereby share in the pleasures of a superior meal)¹⁵.

4.7.4 Grazing

A short while after the morning meal, the elephants must be taken to graze (*caraune*). It is the responsibility of a *phanet* as the chief of an elephant care team, to ensure that himself, his *patchuwa*, or *mahut*, take the elephant out. *Phanets* are not expected to take equal turns in taking elephants out; they have already paid their dues by their longstanding service by which they have risen through the ranks. This provides those that remain with opportunities for 'time-pass' activities, such as sleeping (*sutne*), chatting (*kura garne*), playing cards (*tash kelne*), going to town, or even to manufacture baskets and other useful items from grasses collected from the jungle (see figure 4.5)¹⁶.

¹⁵ Without the extra food, I found it difficult to sustain myself on the ordinary *dal-bhat* of the common men, and was especially grateful for the biscuits and snack noodles available at the Khorsor shop.

¹⁶ The playing of cards (and even chess), widely associated with the laziness of men and a contributor to the oppression of women, has been banned in Maoist controlled areas. The *hattisar*, as a governmental facility, is a place free of such strictures, where it is men that perform many of the tasks associated with women in a domestic setting.



Figure 4.5: Patchuwa Ram Chandra making a basket

However, there are other duties (*diptiharu*) that must also be performed. Principal among these is the making of rope. New sets of ropes must be manufactured once every few months, and this is a practice almost exclusively performed by *phanets*, since it is said to be a skill that takes years to master. The DNPWC provides twine with which to spin into strong rope. Only in the case of elephant training is sufficiently high quality rope required such that pre-made rope is procured. Another key duty, also concerning equipment maintenance, is the repair or construction of *gada*, a cushion comprising an outer covering of sacking called *patera*, and a filling of dried grass called *tat* (see figure 4.6), upon which passengers sit and upon which the *hauda* is mounted. The *gada* is secured to the elephant by means of ropes called *dori* (other types of rope are called *rasa*), whilst the bulkier *hauda* requires a tougher, more stabilising canvas strap or belt. The *hauda*, or ‘howdah’ as the British typically spelt it during the colonial period, is a balustraded seat used in the past during *shikar* to enable honoured guests to shoot from elephant back, and these days as a safe seat for inexperienced tourists on elephant back safaris (see figure

4.7). At other times, the *subba* may instruct his staff to sweep the hattisar, tend to the plants in the inner sanctum, or to re-thatch those buildings without corrugated tin roofs. Junior staff who do not take elephants out to graze must clean their elephants' stables, removing dung, and once every few days, for reasons of hygiene, set fire to the piles that rapidly accumulate in the specially dug trenches behind the elephant's posts.



Figure 4.6: Phanet Dil Bahadur repairing a *gada*



Figure 4.7: During filming for ‘Servants of Ganesh’, the anthropologist gives a demonstration of elephant equipment at the BCC hattisar, including the strap that goes around an elephant’s torso to attach the *hauda* (photo by Satya Lama)

For those who must take their elephants to graze, the elephant must first be prepared. For females, sometimes the driver designated for that day will receive assistance, depending on his level of skill and depth of experience as well as the temperament of the elephant. For males, additional assistance is always given, a mandatory practice observed for reasons of safety since males are most prone to unpredictable behaviour. First the elephant is unshackled; the chain (*sikri*) attaching its leg to its post (tall *kamari* or short *kambha*) is removed. Most females of sound temperament are only shackled by one foreleg, but males are shackled by both forelegs.

Next the elephant will be told to lie down (*sut*, a command literally meaning to sleep) so as to enable the handler to use a sack (*taraha*) to beat off the dust and earth that the elephant will inevitably have sprayed over itself with its trunk (to protect its delicate skin

from the bites and irritations of insects). The handler will not wish to drive on an elephant in a state that will make him dirty. Next, the metal chain and stirrups with which to drive the elephant and steady oneself upon it are slung around its neck and secured. This metal chain is called a *kasni*, which includes the large metal ring (*mathiya*) in between which are strands of rope in which one inserts one's feet. This is the stirrup or *atargal*. During this procedure, the elephant may be given one or two *dana*. The *hatti* will have learnt that its obedient compliance may earn it an extra treat. Then, finally the driver will mount the elephant, most usually by means of the knee of its back leg, whereupon he will clamber onto the elephant's neck, sitting upon the sack (*taraha*, also *bora*) so as to make the ride a little more comfortable¹⁷.

The driver and elephant will now amble off, crossing the *Rapti Khola* in order to enter the official territory of the Royal Chitwan National Park, where the grazing lands are found (the rivers serve as the official boundaries of the park, the Narayani on the west, and the Rapti on the north)¹⁸. During grazing time, drivers will give their elephant at least one thorough wash, which entails giving the elephant's skin a good scrubbing (see figure 4.8)¹⁹. On reaching grazing lands, trustworthy female elephants may be allowed to graze without their handler remaining upon her. Some handlers will tie her front feet together to restrict her ability to abscond, whilst others will let her wander freely. But handlers will not allow their elephants to wander out of sight, and will usually find themselves a comfortable perch from which to keep track of her amblings as she eats²⁰. Males are never

¹⁷ It is said there are at least eight ways of mounting an elephant, perhaps the most spectacular of which is to grab the elephant at the base of its ears, who will then provide his or her trunk as a step from which to climb onto its head.

¹⁸ That the riverine ecology of Chitwan means the course of the river changes significantly from year to year can result in local landowners losing adjacent arable land to erosion, without adequate compensation from the DNPWC. Muller-Böker reminds us that the river both takes as well as gives land, providing loamy and fertile soil. In *Tharu bhasa*, land taken by the river is called *narkathi*, whilst land given by the river is called *narbarhi* (1999:108).

¹⁹ In South India, coconut husks are widely available and serve as ideal scrubbing brushes, which are widely used by handlers.

²⁰ When I took Sitasma Kali and her son Kha Prasad to graze, my neophyte status made it unwise for me to allow her to graze without me. Five hours or so of sitting on an elephant constantly munching could become tedious. I was able to make it a little less so by using it as an opportunity to learn; observing the various types of food the elephant would eat, and asking my colleagues for the local names of plants, trees, and vines.

allowed to graze without a rider (and many drivers of males will develop the confidence to lie on their elephant's back so as to take a snooze-see figure 4.9).

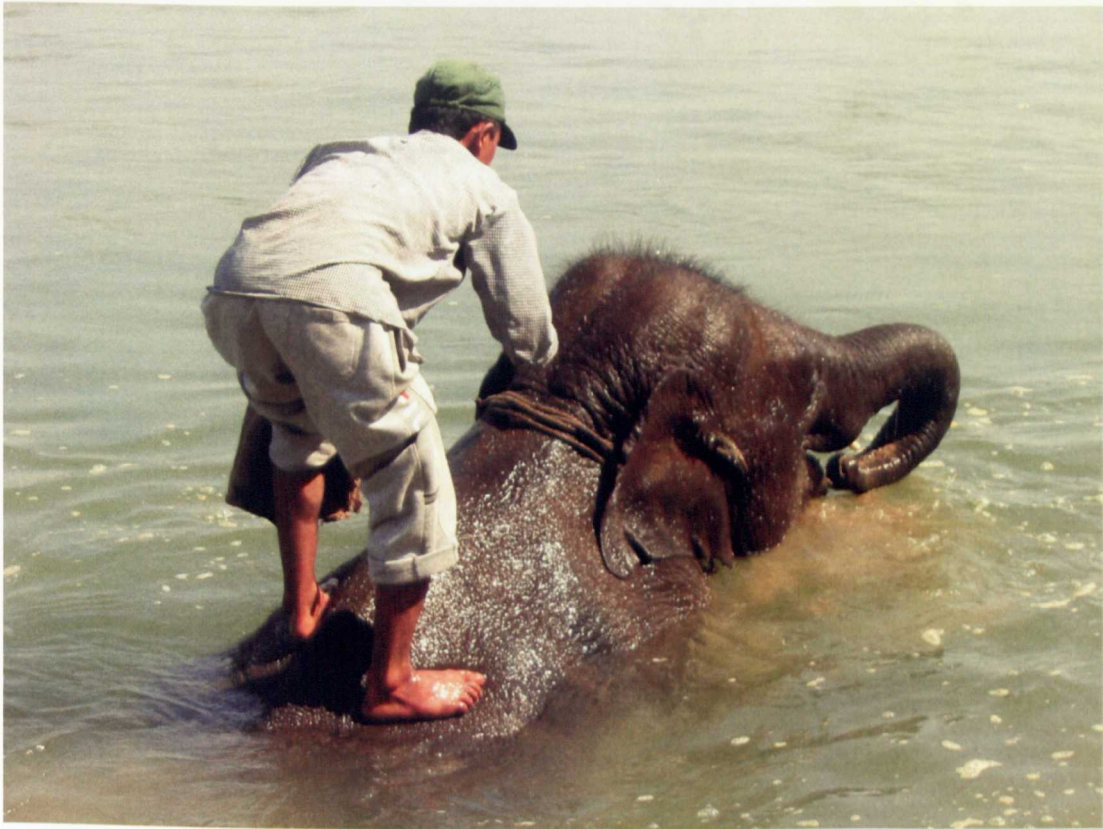


Figure 4.8: Phanet Poorna skilfully gives Karnali Kali a wash without having to get himself wet



Figure 4.9: Patchuwa Bukh Lal sleeping on Birendra Prasad

Very occasionally, an elephant will abscond (taking a ‘jungle holiday’ or *jangalko bida* as we would jokingly refer to it), but almost always the elephant returns by nightfall of its own accord in order to partake of *dana*. More rarely, an elephant will absent itself for a few days. The handlers understand this to be indicative of a natural urge for the elephant to occasionally desire a return to its habitat, to reclaim a ‘wild’ state, and to temporarily relinquish its typical dependence upon humans. It is understood that training can never permanently extinguish such urges, supporting the claim (first made in chapter 1) that trained elephants are never truly tamed.

After five to six hours of grazing, the handlers will drive the elephants back to the *hattisar*, usually returning by 4pm for afternoon tea (with milk if enough is left over from the morning). It is a time to stretch tired limbs, and take a break from the stresses of being in the jungle and grasslands during the heat of the day and glare of the sun (in the hot, dry season), or of hours sheltering under an umbrella being drenched by heavy rain (in the

summer monsoon season). At this time, handlers might also spend a little money on biscuits or snack noodles to accompany their tea and satisfy their appetites until evening *dal-bhat*.

On less exhausting days, handlers sometimes even play volleyball, which at Khorsor can prove especially entertaining since those baby elephants with sufficient courage to stray from their mothers may also join in (for the sake of their proper development babies are not tethered until they are a year old). In the first few months of 2004, one elephant, the son of Koshi Kali, displayed such an interest in kicking balls that the handlers gave him the nickname of 'Beckham' (after the English footballer, whose fame has even reached Nepal, where football has only recently begun to establish institutional support-see figure 4.10).

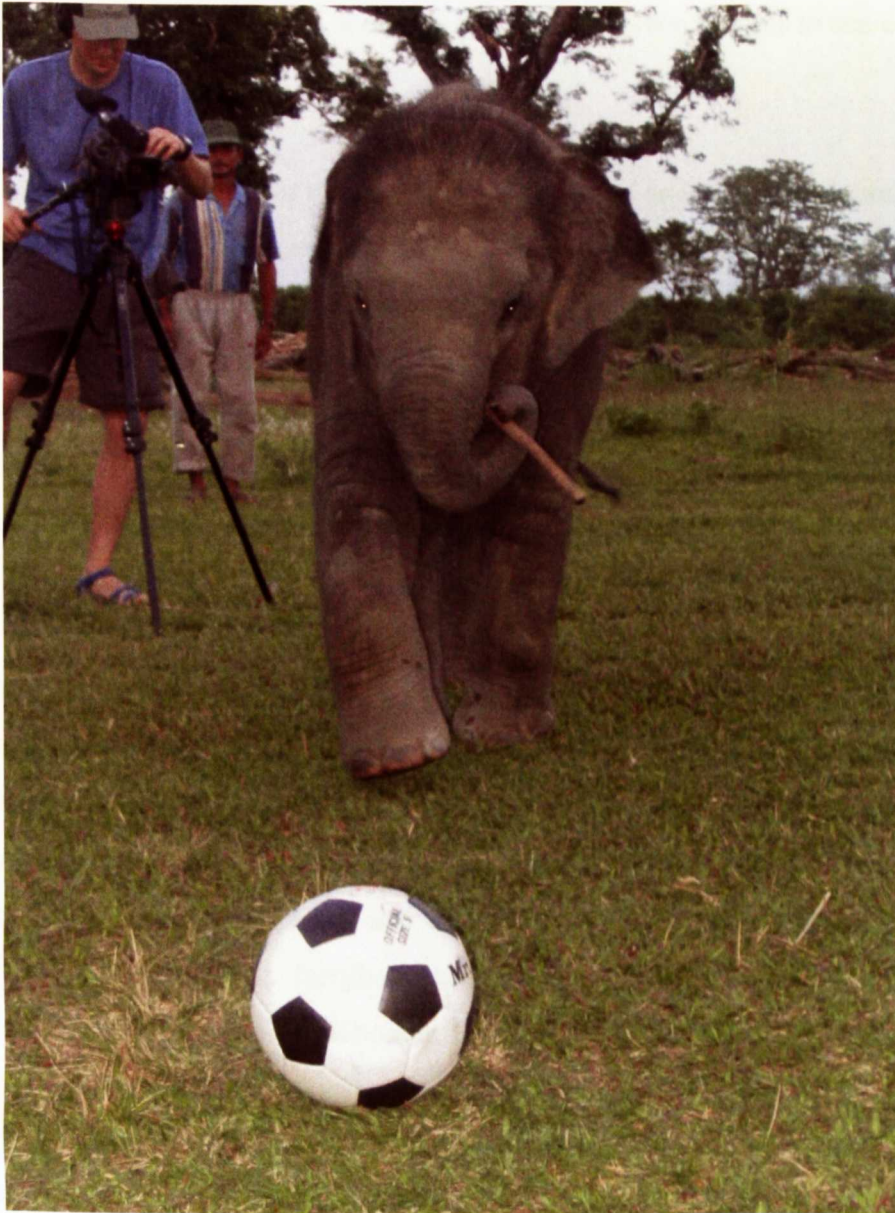


Figure 4.10: Mark Dugas filming ‘Beckham’ playing with a football

4.7.5 Feeding Dana and Receiving Tourists

Around 5pm, handlers give their elephants *dana* (*dana dine*). This is perhaps the least arduous of their duties (*dipti*), and one of the most pleasant and relaxed portions of the day. Handlers will typically sit together, with their sacks of *dana*, tossing the grass packages to their elephants one by one as they chat together. This is a very important part of the elephants’ routine as it serves to reinforce the working bond between an elephant and its handlers. This is the idyllic vision of men caring for elephants that visitors to the

hattisar are most likely to witness, as this is the ideal time for tourists to see elephants in a *hattisar*.

Many of the tourists who stay in the less expensive resorts and hotels in Sauraha may not even have an elephant resident at their hotel. Save for the sight of local traffic in private elephants and experience of an elephant safari (most likely on a private elephant in one of the buffer zone forests managed by local community Forest User Groups), tourists are unlikely to have witnessed much of the routines involved in looking after elephants. The sheer scale of a *sarkari hattisar*, both in terms of staff, facilities and numbers of elephants, makes for an interesting complement to a typical tourist experience of Chitwan.

A trip to Khorsor is a popular item on a tourist's itinerary, and unlike the Sauraha Hattisar, it is officially encouraged. A trip to Khorsor (most likely arranged and accompanied by a local guide) requires one to make a decision necessitating logistical considerations; it is not immediately adjacent to hotels nor is it easily accessible for tourists. It is about a 30-40 minute cycle ride from Sauraha, and one must cross a river (the Kageri Khola) by means of a narrow wooden ferryboat to get there. Furthermore, monsoon floods sometimes wash away the road to Khorsor, limiting the ability of cars and jeeps to reach the riverbank, at the other side of which is located the *hattisar*. However, as the DNPWC realises, the possibility of seeing baby elephants with their mothers makes for a great tourist attraction and a valuable revenue-generating commodity (one not fully exploited by the DNPWC in my opinion).

Consequently, entry to Khorsor requires a fee of NRS 15 (about 10p). However, tickets state that this money is only used for the purchase of veterinarian medicines for the elephants. On many occasions, whilst talking with Section Sahib and Khardar Sahib, I voiced the opinion that tourists would surely be willing to pay considerably more for entry to the *hattisar*, and that the *hattisars* could benefit considerably from this.

The issuing of tickets demands a minimal level of literacy and English language competency with which to converse with tourists. This is because the DNPWC requires the nationality of visitors to be recorded, and for those without a guide to be made aware that they must purchase a ticket (not all foreign visitors notice or understand the English language sign that stipulates this)²¹. Many of the elephant handlers are illiterate, especially the older ones, and so there are two *phanets* who assist the *khardar* in this duty. Satya Narayan Hujdar and Shiva Chandra Chaudhary have passed their SLC; the School Leaving Certificate that is conferred upon those Nepali students who pass a set of exams in the final year of school (year 10), usually taken at the age of 16, and which includes examination in rudimentary English language proficiency²².

It should be noted that tourists also visit the Elephant Breeding Centre in the mornings, in between the elephants' return from grass cutting and their departure for grazing. At these times, the ferry boatman is kept busy punting and receives *baksheesh* (complementary payment) from tourists who feel obliged (or who will be urged by guides) to make a modest payment to cross the river (usually about 20 NRS). In the stable itself, the tourists almost always direct their attention exclusively to the elephants, only very rarely taking an interest in the handlers themselves.

Most foreigners clearly lack the skills with which to interact, but even Nepali-speaking visitors rarely speak with the handlers. It should be noted that most of the handlers have little inclination to speak with visitors, either because they are pre-occupied with duties or because of the inhibiting effects of the social distance between them. Nepali visitors are typically middle-class, wealthy, and high-caste (see Liechty 1998 for the emergence of a Nepali urban middle-class defining itself through practices of consumption). On many

²¹ From records collated by the *khardar*, for the year 2060 VS, Khorsor received a total of 16,924 visitors from 45 countries, amounting to a total of 253,860 NRS, or about £1813 at an exchange rate of 140NRS per pound.

²² Although the SLC is a highly valued educational asset that families hope will enable their sons and daughters to acquire improved income opportunities, it is clearly no guarantee. The Nepali job market remains one tempered by caste nepotism, urban bias and an impoverished economic environment, making it hard for low-caste, rural people like the Tharu to secure decent jobs. These *phanets* explained that their educational attainments had not provided them with any advantage, their options remaining limited such that they were forced to take on work as elephant handlers.

occasions the hierarchical nature of Nepali society was painfully revealed to me as visitors demonstrated a haughty and disdainful attitude in relation to the handlers, something I learnt they were all too familiar with. This was not limited to the casual visits of tourists, but was especially evident in the context of official visits. I observed such visitors causing offence, often unwittingly, to the handlers by both their disrespectful manner and their negligent behaviour, which surely indicated a communication problem (see chapter 7). On one occasion some official visitors from Kathmandu University expressed their exasperation that the handlers seemed unwilling to answer their questions. I was hesitant to point out to them that the picking up of grass and feeding it to the elephants without even asking, as they had done on the previous day, was both inappropriate and disrespectful. Similarly, Guneratne (2001) notes the impolite and intrusive behaviour of typically high caste guides who frequently take tourists inside the houses of Chitwan Tharu without even asking.

4.7.6 Evening Dal-Bhat and Relaxation

Whilst *dal-bhat* is being cooked, those not involved with its preparation will have a little free time, unless an elephant is being trained, in which case the handlers will be expected to attend the evening training session during which they sing songs, wave fire torches and massage the elephant. The procedure for *dal-bhat* (usually taken at around 8pm) is very much similar to the morning, except for the fact that there is less of a sense of urgency. After dinner there are sometimes communal social activities. Whilst at Sauraha there was a regular, weekly hymn singing (*kirtan gaune*) session accompanied by *puja*, at Khorsor, singing was organised on a more ad-hoc basis. Furthermore, at Khorsor there would be no *puja*, and the songs (*gita*) were rarely religious and devotional in nature. At Khorsor, such events might be accompanied by the social lubrication of alcohol (usually a locally distilled spirit made from rice called *raksi*), and lead to dancing and a greater degree of merriment. Unlike Section Sahib, the *subba* Amerko Prasad did not drink alcohol, and was less inclined to tolerate it. As he put it; “if you cannot control yourself, how will you be able to control your elephant?”

On several occasions Tharu *Saivite sadhus* visited and stayed at the *hattisar*, providing an added impetus to organise a singing session, and one at which the songs would tend toward a devotional tone and content. A *sadhu* of a *Saivite* order is a wandering ascetic dedicated to *Shiva*, from a Sanskrit word meaning 'good man'. More technically, a *sadhu* is a *samnyasi* or 'renouncer'; somebody who has given up all worldly ties to family and society in order to escape the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) and thereby attain liberation (*moksa/mukti*). Freed of ordinary social obligations, such people practice yoga, perform austerities (*tapasya*), and thereby provide an example to ordinary people, who may seek to receive his (or even her) gaze (*darsan*), much as a devotee would seek the gaze of a consecrated god's image (*murti*) (see Clark 2005).

Typically however, it is only the most renowned of *sadhus* who will attract devotees, although most people will show them respect and a little charity (which confers merit or *pun* to the benefit of one's accumulating *karma*). Furthermore, it was the very social ties that *sadhus* have ideally renounced that brought them to the *hattisar*. All those that visited originally came from the village of one of the handlers, and knew that the *hattisar* would be an institution at which they would receive food and a place to sleep. However, the *sadhus* did tell me that they liked to come to be among the elephants, since they are a living symbol of *Ganesha*, the son of *Shiva*. In the mornings they could be seen performing a *puja* addressed to an elephant.

4.7.7 Night Time Duty (Ratiko Dipti)

After *dal-bhat* and any social activities (either public events for all *hattisares* or smaller informal gatherings of friends) the men go to bed, hoping for an uninterrupted night's sleep. At Khorsor, rhino (*gaida*) often enter the *hattisar* at night to graze on the short grass, but this will not warrant the night watchman taking any action and waking his colleagues²³. However, should a wild male elephant enter the *hattisar*, then at least some other colleagues must be alerted. This usually only happens when a male is in a state of *mada* (musth), at which time it will likely become a regular occurrence (especially since

²³ As a curious foreigner, upon such an occurrence, the night watchman would awaken me, since they knew I would be keen to see a rhino at such close quarters (otherwise only possible from the safety of an elephant).

Chitwan's wild ranging elephant population is only calculated at about 30 individuals, limiting males' options for finding mates). So long as the interloper directs his attentions to the females, then there is no cause for alarm, but considering the possible consequences, his activities will be monitored. Should he approach a captive male, then conflict is highly likely, and he must be chased off. This is achieved by waving burning torches, shouting loudly and even running towards him if needs be. This will only deter the male for a short while, and he may even return again the same night, seriously disrupting the handlers' sleep. During these regular invasions, it is common to see tired handlers taking every possible opportunity for a daytime nap (it should be noted that rural Nepali sleeping patterns are not as rigidly demarcated between daytime activity and night time sleep as is common in the west).

4.8 Hattisare Employment Status: Sthyai and Asthyai

The issue of handlers' employment status has already been raised, and requires clarification. *Sthyai* means a government worker with guaranteed rights to employment and a pension (*nivrttibharan/ pensan*) of half-pay on retirement at the age of 58. However, in *sarkari hattisars* budgetary restrictions have led to this right being rescinded. Anyone employed since 1999 is no longer eligible for *sthyai* status, making their employment status *asthyai* (without guarantees), with the implication that government elephant handling has perhaps lost some of the meagre appeal it previously had for poor, often landless Tharu, whose other options are limited to work as indentured agricultural workers (*bahariya*). The jobs of the *hattisare* of the BCC are *asthyai*, and have never been subject to the security afforded by *sthyai kam* (guaranteed work) and pension, although they do receive higher salaries.

Poverty and lack of job options are such that recruitment to *hattisarko kam* (elephant stable work) does not seem to have been harmed by the abolition of *sthyai kam*, even if new recruits are disgruntled not to be receiving the same rights as their seniors. This is evident in the DNPWC recently hiring 18 new *mahuts*, for which a three-day training session was organised at which the two *bhupu adikrits* Bhagu Tharu and Kale Shrestha were invited to speak, and new recruits were tested as to their suitability by various tasks

including tree climbing. This mass hiring was itself indicative of the previously understaffed situation obtaining in the Sauraha and Khorsor *hattisars*, at which there were many elephants with a care team of only two *hattisare* (see also chapter seven).

4.9 Hattisare Ranks and Roles

Most *hattisar* ranks specify particular roles, although there is some degree of overlap in duties performed. What is most important is the way in which seniority of rank encodes recognition of one's degree of expertise, accomplishment and position within the hierarchy. Although there is no badge of rank worn on a daily basis, there is an accoutrement by which rank can be officially displayed. Worn only on formal occasions, this is a coloured cloth called a *patuka* that is wound around the waist and diagonally across the chest (see the photo of Ram Lotan Subba wearing his red *patuka* in chapter three). The *hattisare* ranks and the colours of their respective *patukas* are as follows:

- *Mahute*- white
- *Patchuwa*- khaki
- *Phanet*- orange
- *Raut*- yellow
- *Daroga*- green
- *Nasu subba*- blue
- *Adikrit subba*- red

Once a year, *hattisare* are issued with a new *patuka*, along with other equipment, including: *kammal* (blanket), *tumlet* (water bottle), *topi* (cap), and *khukri* (the distinctively curved Nepali knife), see figures 4.11 & 4.12:



Figure 4.11: New Patuka being issued at Khorsor

(Note the large pile of orange *patuka* for the *phanets*, a yellow *patuka* for the *raut*, on top of a pile of khaki *patuka* for the *patchuwas*, under which can be seen some white *patuka* for the *mahuts*).



Figure 4.12: Phanet Poorna Bahadur Thapa with his newly issued equipment

An explanation of the basic scheme of ranks, from the most junior to the most senior is as follows:

4.9.1 Mahute

'Mahout' (in its typically anglicised spelling) is perhaps the most generic and well-known term for an elephant handler since it is the principal designation utilised in India, where

typically a first and second *mahut* constitutes an elephant's care team. In Kathmandu, amongst Nepali speakers, the term is both pronounced and spelt '*mahute*'; however in Chitwan, I found the Indian pronunciation was most commonly used (in other words the 'e' is silent, although the Nepali spelling is employed in the official literature)²⁴. Unlike India, Nepal utilises a system in which three members of staff are allocated to each elephant. As the most junior and least experienced elephant handler, a *mahut*'s primary duties are the preparation of *dana* as well as the sanitary maintenance of each elephant's post and surrounding area in the stable.

Contemporary practice as observed in Chitwan's *sarkari hattisars* is that new *mahuts* will be encouraged to begin driving elephants from the outset, initially under the supervision of their elephant's *patchuwa* or *phanet*. It seems likely however, that in the pre-modern era of elephant handling, *mahuts* might have been restricted to more menial duties, since their work might have been performed by young boys, often the sons of handlers. This would have been before the introduction of modern employment law, when the people of Nepal were subjects of the King rather than citizens in the modern sense, with all its implications of legal rights. The remnant of such former practices seems evident in the fact that many of the handlers had begun living and working in the *hattisar* from a young age in an unofficial capacity before they became eligible to be formally recorded as employees. I believe this no longer occurs, but has only recently petered out, since there were handlers at Khorsor as young as 25 who had become *hattisares* by this method (see also section 3.5 in chapter three).

4.9.2 Patchuwa

The term *patchuwa* refers to a man responsible for cutting grass for an elephant, traditionally understood as the man who stands on the haunches of the elephant, behind the driver who is seated on the neck. Early morning grass cutting remains one of his primary responsibilities, for which his *mahut* will assist him, and for which he has the authority to decide whether he or his *mahut* will drive. A *mahut* should respect the

²⁴ For the rest of this chapter I shall spell the term '*mahut*' so as to signify its regionally inflected pronunciation.

authority of his *patchuwa*, who will most likely have more longstanding experience working with elephants. A *patchuwa* will also regularly take his elephant to graze. As already suggested, it is highly likely that a *patchuwa* will drive his elephant more regularly than his *phanet*. Both the *mahut* and *patchuwa* are directly responsible to their *phanet*.

4.9.3 Phanet

Previously *phanet* was a designation for an elephant capturer, a task requiring an especially skilled and confident elephant handler. In India the cognate term *phandi* is still used to describe such a practitioner, and is derived from the word *phand*, which refers to the noose that is thrown over an elephant that has been chased to exhaustion (as in the *jaghiya* method of capture). Nowadays however, in Nepal, the term *phanet* is used to refer to a chief driver, one with primary responsibility for his elephant and for managing its care team. It should be noted that many of the tasks described for the *patchuwa*, the *mahut*, and even the *phanet*, are interchangeable, and members of an elephant team will cover for each other when a colleague is on vacation. The *phanet*, by virtue of his long service and theoretically superior skill, expects to work less than his juniors, and will almost always take the most prestigious driving duties. Typically, whilst the *patchuwas* and *mahuts* are out cutting grass and making *dana* in the morning, *phanets* will take it in turns to prepare the morning meal, under the auspices of the designated quartermaster, who is himself a *phanet*. Often, whilst his subordinates are taking the elephant grazing in the middle of the day, a *phanet* will take on less taxing duties such as making ropes, since he is responsible for the upkeep of essential elephant equipment and also because rope-making is considered a skill which takes a long time to acquire.

4.9.4 Raut

In previous times the *raut* was the man in charge of elephant capturing operations and like the *chaudhari*, who collected taxes on behalf of the state, would be rewarded for his work by the gift of land grants (see sub-section 2.4.3.2 'The Rewards Available to The Overseer of Elephant Capture and Training' in chapter two). In the modern era, the *raut*

is responsible for managing the team of elephant driving staff (the *mahuts*, *patchuwas*, and *phanets*).

4.9.5 Daroga

The *daroga*, as the second highest-ranking elephant handler in a stable, shares many duties with the *subba*, and will take command of the *hattisar* in his absence. It would seem that these days the difference between a *daroga* and a *raut*, consists of little more than seniority, and a *hattisar* can happily function without one or the other. In fact, at the moment the Sauraha *sarkari hattisar* has a *daroga*, whilst Khorsor has a *raut* but no *daroga*.

4.9.6 Nasu Subba

Rarely referred to by the full designation of *nasu subba*, the men of the *hattisar* respectfully address their boss as '*subba sahib*'²⁵. As chief of the *hattisar*, the *subba* is responsible for the day-to-day running of the *hattisar*, and the well being of the government's elephants. A *subba* needs to be able to rely on his *phanets* to report any behavioural abnormalities, injuries or illnesses that may be affecting their elephants. If applicable, he will then make decisions regarding whether a DNPWC elephant vet is required or whether the matter can be dealt with by the *hattisares'* own means. In managing the *hattisar*, the *subba* will cooperate with the *khardar* (administrator) in record keeping, equipment issuing and salary dispensing duties. He will also deal with the *tekh-dars* (contractors) who supply the *hattisar* with food.

The *subba* is immediately responsible to officials of the DNPWC. They will expect him to report any instances his staff may have observed of infractions of park-rules by the local populace. This can raise a moral dilemma for both himself and his staff. On the one hand, the *hattisares* clearly appreciate the conservation value of the RCNP and the negative effect that proscribed behaviour such as fodder and fuel wood collection can have, but on the other, they also appreciate the needs of local people, whose poverty forces them to break park rules (and with whom there is a sense of shared solidarity in

²⁵ The *nasu subba* is also referred to as *nayab subba* (as in Shrestha *et al* 1985).

relation to the wealthy, higher-caste officials who oversee park management). Whilst the DNPWC, with the assistance of the KMTNC, officially pursues a policy of participatory conservation and sustainable development, not all residents adjacent to Chitwan have yet benefited from policies designed to remove their need to illegally utilise park resources (see also chapter seven). Such people have no choice but to risk arrest for the sake of their own subsistence needs, and so will typically receive friendly warnings from *hattisares* who will remind them that DNPWC officials have the authority to arrest them and confiscate their equipment (most typically their sickles; *asi/hasiya* in Nepali, *pakhuwa* in Tharu).

4.9.7 Adikrit Subba

This is typically translated as ‘section officer’ and refers to the most senior *hattisare*, theoretically responsible for all government stables. *Hattisares* address him as ‘section sahib’. In the modern era in which government stables are subject to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), the *adikrit subba* has lost much of his former responsibility and operational autonomy. This is exemplified by the issue of promotion, for which the *adikrit* can now only make a recommendation that must be ratified by the Chief Warden of the Park. Similarly, the Department neither provides the time or the money for the *adikrit subba* to visit and inspect all the *sarkari hattisars*, as he once did. As the recollections of Bhagu Subba and Smythies’ book on Big Game Hunting in Nepal (1942) tend to confirm, it seems that the era when *hattisars* were facilities of the King, maintained primarily for the purposes of *shikar*, was one in which elephant handling afforded much greater prestige and opportunities for generous royal *baksis*. The handlers of today, even the *adikrit*, know that they cannot hope to either achieve the fame or benefit as men like Bhagu Subba and the late Ram Lotan could (another previous *adikrit* of considerable renown, see photo in chapter three).

Furthermore, the *adikrit subba* is now typically based at Khorsor, since it is the largest and most prestigious *hattisar*, at which the specialist practices of breeding and training are conducted. Here he performs the managerial duties as outlined for a *nasu subba*, but

with the added responsibilities of a *hattisar* at which pregnant females give birth and juvenile elephant training must be organised (see sections 4.11 and 4.12).

4.9.8 Aajivan Subba

This basically means ‘*subba* for life’, and is an honorary title bestowed upon a *subba* for outstanding service. It entails the benefit of the continued receipt of the salary of a *subba* in addition to the half-pay pension that all staff who have served for 20 years or reached the retirement age of 58 are entitled to. Currently there are two living *aajivan subbas*, both of whom are retired *adikrits*. One of these is the legendary royal-driver Bhagu Tharu. Besides the celebrated exploit involving the King, himself and a tiger, he is equally renowned for the canny way in which he has continued to exploit the good favour of Nepal’s royal family; never afraid to trade on his fame and ask a favour, usually financial (see chapter three). The other is a Newar man of Shrestha *jat*, a relative of Ram Bahadur called Kale Shrestha, who lives at Dumravana, the previous site of a government stable, at which there is no longer enough remaining forest with which to sustain elephants, and whom I was privileged to meet during the new *mahut* induction programme (see table 3 in chapter seven) and when I journeyed east to attend the wedding of a young *mahut*.

4.9.9 Khardar and Tekhdar

In addition to the *hattisare* ranks, there are two other roles relevant to the management of a *hattisar*. The terms *khardar* and *tekhdar* are both generic administrative designations not specific to a *hattisar*. Firstly, a *tekhdar* is someone who has secured a contract from government to provide services or products and should have secured this role (theoretically given on a yearly basis) by making the best bid from among several competitors. In relation to the Chitwan *sarkari hattisars*, there are two *tekhdars*, one providing fresh vegetables, and the other providing rice, salt, molasses, and lentils. Since the *tekhdar* will have theoretically secured his contract by making the lowest bid, he has every reason to provide the lowest quality product and service so as to maximise his own profit. As a result, the *subba* will inspect the *tekhdar*’s goods, and on a few occasions during my research found the products to be of an inadequate quality, and refused to

accept them. On many other occasions, goods were not or could not be delivered on time. This even resulted in the *hattisar* running out of unhusked rice (*dhan*) for the elephants' *dana*, with which de-husked rice (*camal*) for human consumption was substituted. The thought of hungry elephants was a daunting one that no one wanted to deal with (as we have seen, in the district of Mahottari in the 19th century, as recorded in the Panjiar documents, an instance of fraud resulted in malnutrition and death amongst the government's elephants, see sub-section 2.4.2.2 'The Hattisar As An Institution of The State' in chapter two).

The *khardar*, unlike the *tekhdar*, is an employee of the DNPWC, and in Chitwan resides at Khorsor, whilst also fulfilling the role for the Sauraha *hattisar*. The *khardar* is an integral part of the social world of the *hattisar*, a senior figure respected by the *hattisare* with whom he lives. In the past there was even an instance of a non-*hattisare khardar* becoming a *subba*. The *khardar* is responsible for dispensing salaries, issuing equipment, recording tourist visits, and issuing admission tickets. Most of the *khardar's* duties entail cooperation with the *adikrit subba*, *nasu subba*, and to a lesser extent the *daroga* and *raut*.

4.10 Hattisare Salary Structure (as of 2004)

Table 2: 2004 Hattisare Salary Rates

Hattisare Rank	Salary per month (Nepali rupees)
Mahut	NRS 3000
Pachuwa	NRS 3300
Phanet	NRS 4000
Raut	NRS 5000
Daroga	NRS 5500
Nasu Subba	NRS 6000
Adikrit Subba	NRS 8000

4.11 The Rationale of Elephant Training

This and the following section, focus on Khorsor as the *hattisar* with the specialist function of elephant training (although chapter five deals with elephant training more extensively). As such, they explain this role in relation to the *hattisar's* linkage with the DNPWC, a necessary prelude for the following chapter that explains the contemporary practice of elephant training in Nepal. In relation to the *hattisare* hierarchy, since the position of *adikrit subba* has involved a curtailment of responsibilities, residence at Khorsor and responsibility for elephant training has represented a key strategy by which holders of this position have been able to demonstrate the supremacy of their rank.

Breeding and training of captive born elephants is the primary function of the Khorsor Hattisar, a government stable operated under the auspices of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC). A relatively new *hattisar*, it was instigated at the suggestion of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) in 1986, with the aim of enabling Nepal to sustain its captive elephant population without relying on elephants imported from India or elsewhere.

In the past, adult elephants were captured from the wild and subsequently trained, a far more difficult and dangerous enterprise than training young elephants born to captive mothers (the last wild capture in Nepal, utilising the *jaghiya* or lasso method, was in 1970). Although the management of elephants from birth is more costly than the purchase of ready-trained adult elephants (since they will be of little economic value until they reach an age sufficient for deployment in work duties), the Khorsor programme has the advantage of ensuring that elephants are trained according to approved standards and are responsive to Tharu language command words, thereby avoiding re-training (as was necessary for Sruti Kali, trained by 'oozies' in Myanmar).

As a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) since 1975, the acquisition of elephants from India or elsewhere should, at least in theory,

pose legal problems for Nepal²⁶. However, besides the legal dilemma, a common problem in purchasing elephants from India is that it can be difficult to gain reliable information about an elephant's personal history (as noted by John Coapman when he went to the famed Sonepur Mela in Bihar in the 1960s). Specifically, this includes information about health, temperament and training, which are crucial in ascertaining the viability of an elephant.

Furthermore, those that are being proffered for sale may have a problematic history that has necessitated their owner getting rid of them. For example, Erawat Gaj, a mighty male of about 40 years of age, with tusks so large that a handler can stand upon them, was acquired from a private owner in India, and is said to have been responsible for the deaths of at least eight people. This may have been more indicative of the conditions to which he was subject, rather than the possibility that he possesses an intrinsically troublesome temperament. Since coming into Nepali government care he has had an immaculate record, and has not caused harm to anybody, suggesting that the former thesis is more applicable.

In Nepal, it has been typical for elephant experts to accompany purchasers, and during my stay in Chitwan, Bhagu Subba was asked to act as consultant in making a purchase decision for Gaida Wildlife Camp (which was subsequently cancelled as the downturn in tourism resulting from the Maoist insurgency meant that an expansion of the elephant numbers at its *hattisar* was no longer considered viable). This problem in identifying desirable elephants is especially pertinent to acquisition of elephants from India's longstanding annual livestock fairs, such as the Sonepur Mela in Bihar, at which all manner of livestock are available, and the one that used to be held at Sitamari, in the Tharu-inhabited borderlands between India and Nepal. At both these *melas*, elephant vendors are renowned for employing many devious techniques in presenting an elephant

²⁶ According to Richard Lair, although CITES makes no specific reference to captive elephants, the regulations should nevertheless preclude sale of domesticated elephants between countries, but would not apply to transactions within them (1997:1). In the post CITES era, there have however been exchanges of endangered species between countries, which thereby avoid contravention of the CITES prohibition on sale of species. One such example was the Nepali gift of four rhinos to Myanmar in 1984, for which Nepal received 16 captive elephants (one of whom was Sruti Kali).

as desirable for purchase. Their tactics include the falsification of elephant biographies, which may entail neglecting to mention any prior problems previous owners may have had, as well as feeding the elephant drugs so as to mask illness, injury and fatigue, thereby temporarily optimising the apparent condition of the elephant.

4.12 The Function and Logistics of Elephant Training

Elephant training is especially pertinent to a recognition of the unusual status of working elephants; neither domesticated in the technical sense of alteration through generations of selective breeding (Clutton-Brock 1987, Lair 1997:3), nor entirely tame in the sense that the 'wildness' of the animal is fully eradicated (see the discussion of elephants and domestication in section 1.7 of chapter one). Indeed, a realisation that working elephants inevitably retain a yearning for their natural habitat and behaviours informs virtually all aspects of management, and is manifested in the training process, which aims to habituate elephants to a social life shared with humans, but which is not understood to effect an irrevocable change²⁷. This suggests then that during its working life, there will be a persisting tension between an elephant's natural urges and those conditioned behaviours that result from contact with humans. This recognition that elephant training cannot effect an irrevocable transformation of its habits and loyalties provides a clue as to why training is not seen as a purely instrumental procedure, but as one for which the continued goodwill and assistance of deities is considered essential.

Elephant training (*hattiko talim*) of a juvenile elephant typically takes 2-3 weeks depending on the prevailing conditions and its aptitude to learn, and is a procedure that overwhelmingly influences institutional life at Khorsor. Training serves to forge a durable bond of co-operation between an elephant and his or her principal handler, the *phanet*, albeit one that should never be taken for granted. Only a handler with the rank

²⁷ Richard Lair notes that in its lifetime an elephant can not only be domesticated from the wild, but can also successfully reclaim a wild mode of existence, even if born in captivity (1997:6). Furthermore, whilst government elephants in Kerala, South India receive a pension for their upkeep upon reaching the retirement age of 58 (apparently often falsified to prolong an elephant's working life), in Nepal there are no such provisions. Instead, aging elephants effectively retire themselves by choosing to increasingly sojourn alone in the jungle and to return to the *hattisar* for *dana* with diminishing frequency, as was the case with the 60 year old, blind *Chanchal Kali* of the BCC *hattisar* during my research in Chitwan (see also section 3.4.3 'The Role of Elephants in Chitwan' in chapter three).

and experience of *phanet* will undertake the challenging and potentially dangerous task of giving training (*talim dine*), since in the prior era of capture from the wild, the term *phanet* designated an elephant capturer (Krausskopf 2000:43), and hence also trainer, just as the Indian term *phandi* still does. The intense but brief period of formal training serves to instil a responsiveness to verbal and tactile commands sufficient for control in terms of the basics of sitting, standing, grabbing, releasing, walking forward, to the left, to the right and stopping. Response to more complex commands will be instilled over the following months, until the elephant typically responds to a repertoire of around 25 command words.

In Nepal, the ideal age at which to separate an elephant from its mother and give basic training is considered to be three years. For training to be given, the *adikrit subba* will make a recommendation to the chief warden of Chitwan. The chief warden must ratify the *adkrit subba's* decision because he will need to authorise the provision of funds necessary to purchase the special, expensive training ropes required (all other ropes are manufactured on site from raw materials), as well as the costs of financing the rituals (*puja*) which are traditionally conducted as an integral part of the training process. This is indicative of the way in which the DNPWC continues to respect the Tharu cultural context in which Nepali elephant handling practices have developed.

The operations of the DNPWC are severely limited by budgetary constraints and unfortunately this has frequently resulted in delays in the giving of training. During my fieldwork, I observed and participated in the training of two elephants, firstly a female called Narayani Kali, named after one of the rivers of Chitwan, and secondly a male called Paras Gaj, named after the crown prince and eldest son of King Gyanendra. Males are considered more difficult to train since they are stronger, both in body and in spirit, in the sense that they tend to be more resistant to compliance. Narayani Kali received her training during the winter month of January 2004, at the age of four. This was considered less than ideal, since once elephants pass the age of three, they are considered to become progressively less receptive to training, with the implication that training will be more difficult and dangerous. Paras Gaj received his training at the age of three during the pre-

monsoon, summer month of May 2004, and this was only made possible by external financing from One World Films, since we wished to make the unique and relatively undocumented practice of Nepali elephant training the centrepiece of the “Servants of Ganesh” film project.

According to my informants, there are both pros and cons regarding whether training is given in hot or cold months. In the hot months, elephants are said to tire easily, and hence submit to the will of the trainers more easily. However, the hot months also pose a greater risk of wound infection, necessitating greater care and vigilance regarding the application of the sharpened bamboo sticks used in training, as well as in regard to the abrasions which result from the additional neck tethering utilised whilst the elephant is kept in special isolation for the duration of the training period. Conversely, during the cold months, it is believed that the elephant is likely to submit more slowly since its stamina and resolve will be greater, although it will be less likely to succumb to wound infection.

4.13 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the typical routines of daily life in a *sarkari hattisar* as a total institution that encompasses and determines both work and leisure. In doing so I have also tried to intimate the experiential quality of life for resident practitioners. This portrayal of daily life has also entailed an explication of the system of ranks that not only determine individuals’ specific work duties, but also the character of their social interactions within the *hattisar* hierarchy, and as employees of the DNPWC, obliged to uphold the values of the National Park (see chapter seven for *hattisares*’ relations with the DNPWC). However, rank is by no means the sole determinant of one’s standing within the *hattisar*. For instance, not all *phanets* command the same degree of respect or can expect to receive the same favours from their superiors (an issue that also emerges in my discussion of elephant training in chapter five). The informal means by which handlers establish themselves within the social world of the stable is an issue that could be explored further. Finally, I have explained the specialist role the Khorsor stable fulfils for elephant breeding and training. This summary of institutional life serves then to

illustrate how participation in a community of practitioners contributes to a distinctive professional identity with its own system of values.

5. Nepali Elephant Training

“We respect the elephant as a god like we respect the god Ganesha. So we bow to them as we would the god Ganesha-only then do we ride them. We ask them to please forgive us, and to protect us while we ride them. We think; ‘we are riding you as an elephant, but we know you are a god’. So we bow to them because we have to respect them as gods. That’s why for training we have to do Kamari puja. So that our elephant can succeed, we must pray to the gods and goddesses that the training goes well. We perform rituals in the hope that the elephant does well, doesn't get hurt, and that the elephant learns to walk well.”-Phanet Satya Narayan, the principal trainer of Paras Gaj

5.1 Introduction

The breeding and training of elephants for deployment in park management duties is the *raison d’être* of the Khorsor *hattisar* and the very reason why it was originally established. In this chapter I examine elephant training not merely as an operational procedure but also, as suggested by the quote from Satya Narayan, as a ritual process. This is an aspect of elephant training that until now has received very little attention in the contemporary literature on captive elephant management.

I argue that training, as a focal practice for Nepali elephant handlers, plays an important role in sustaining their sense of connection to the history and tradition of their profession, as well as providing a privileged opportunity for handlers to establish their professional reputation amongst their colleagues. Since elephant training involves the collective performance of an elaborate set of rituals dependent upon traditional notions about the sacred status of both elephants and the jungle environment in which they operate, I also argue that elephant training serves to inculcate values and attitudes that are integral to the professional identity of Nepali elephant handlers. Furthermore, the convergence of professional and religious practice evident in the training process may even be considered relevant to standards of elephant care, since these practices help to reinforce reverential and conscientious attitudes. Finally, although government elephant training is conducted at Khorsor, it is worth remembering that government stables are part of an integrated network. As

such, elephants which are pregnant or needed for training duties are regularly seconded from other stables, along with their handler teams, and therefore these contentions about the significance of training for the professional culture of handlers should not be seen as limited to Khorsor, even if that is where its effects on *hattisare* culture are most concentrated.

5.2 The Controversial Nature of Training and Limitations of the Contemporary Literature

The contemporary literature on captive elephant management does include some discussion of elephant training practices. For example Dhungel, Brawner, and Yoder (1990) report on elephant training and management in Nepal, whilst Khit (1989) considers training working elephants in Laos. Fernando (1989) writes on elephant training in general, albeit with specific reference to Sri Lanka and to a lesser extent Burma. Gale's manual on Burmese timber elephant management includes a section on the practicalities of training (1971:108-114), whilst Moore and Doyle (1986) and Dudley (1986), both deal with the training of zoo elephants. They argue that training is in the interest of elephant welfare since it facilitates an interactive relationship between humans and elephants. This, they contend can alleviate the problem of boredom, an acute dilemma facing keepers of highly intelligent, non-working animals kept in captivity¹. Despite these sources, elephant training seems to be a relatively neglected topic. This may be due to the fact that elephant training, or 'breaking', to use the rather emotive alternative term (more appropriate to captured rather than captive-born elephants), is recognised as a sensitive topic that can arouse ethical concerns about animal welfare.

For example, in 2003, the renowned elephant capturer and trainer Parbati Barua became the subject of controversy when she was accused of unnecessary cruelty after a male elephant in her care died. The government of the Indian state of Chhattisgarh had contracted her help in dealing with several crop-raiding wild males that were

¹ Incidentally, both these papers also recommend the training and riding of elephants for the sake of safety in terms of maintenance and medical treatment. This is contrary to the hands-free approach to elephant management in zoos and safari parks now being advocated by the RSPCA (Clubb & Mason 2002a & 2002b) and the European Elephant Group (Endres *et al* 2003). Hands-free, or 'no contact' is one of four types of western elephant keeping regimes deployed in zoos, safari parks and circuses, the others being 'free contact', 'protected contact', and 'confined contact' (Clubb & Mason 2002a & 2002b, Mar 2007).

causing problems to local people as a result of encroachment upon the elephants' dwindling habitat. A wild male called Basant Bahadur was captured by Parbati Barua, and during his 'breaking' he succumbed to gangrene and septicaemia, for which he allegedly received no medical treatment, and which led to his death 18 days after capture (see figure 5.1). Scenes of his slow and torturous death were filmed by Mike Pandey and included in his award-winning film "Vanishing Giants"². Pandey did however later apologise to Parbati Barua, conceding that he had not been entirely fair in his representation of her³.



Figure 5.1: Violent elephant breaking scene from 'Vanishing Giants'

As a consequence of fears about potential controversy, as vindicated by this recent instance, and even though it is not representative of new conventions for training captive-born elephants, there has apparently been a reluctance to report on training procedures in any depth (*Mar pers comm*). In this literature, elephant training has invariably been treated in primarily instrumental terms merely as an operational procedure. Until very recently, Richard Lair has been a lone voice in calling for a multi-disciplinary approach to captive elephant management that takes full account of the social, cultural and historical context in which key practices such as training occur (1997:1). Furthermore, it should be noted that available descriptions tend towards the anecdotal, and provide little more than basic and generic procedural descriptions devoid of theoretical analysis (with only scant reference to conditioning principles and techniques). In light of this, Lair declares the management of domesticated

² See: http://www.the-south-asian.com/December2004/Mike_Pandey-Vanishing_Giants.htm (accessed on 06/11/06).

³ See: http://indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=20107 (accessed on 07/09/05).

elephants to be a subject in its developmental infancy, with “the need to define fundamentals just beginning to be perceived” (1997:2)⁴. Recent work, such as that of Fred Kurt, Khyne U Mar and Marion Garai, is beginning to remedy this deficit however (2007).

5.3 Key Procedures and Preparations for Training

In Nepal, once authorisation for an elephant training has been received (since it requires additional budgetary allocation from the DNPWC), orders must be placed for high quality ropes to be used for attaching the juvenile elephant to the two elephants that will be used for principal driving instruction. Such elephants are known as *koonkies* in India (such elephants previously performed capture operations in addition to their use in training). This term is familiar to Nepali elephant handlers, but is not typically used. Lacking their own specific term, Nepali handlers instead refer to elephants that are used for giving training as *talim dine hatti* or ‘training-giving elephant’. Arrangements must also be made for the purchase of ritual equipment and animals that will be sacrificed in the rituals which accompany training. Finally, and most crucially, specially chosen elephants and their staff must be recalled from their usual resident locations.

This firstly involves the recall of an elephant to be used during the initial phase in which the juvenile elephant is separated from his mother. Currently, a large male named Erawat Gaj who typically resides at the Sauraha *sarkari hattisar* is used for this function, and who is additionally used to enable the *adikrit subha* and *raut* to monitor daily driving training sessions⁵. Secondly, those elephants and handlers with the requisite skills for giving training who do not normally reside at Khorsor, must be

⁴ This is indicative of the drive to subsume captive elephant management under standardised, bureaucratic control, an issue raised in chapter seven, drawing on James Scott’s more general ideas outlined in ‘Seeing Like a State’ (1998), even if in this instance the regulatory impetus is primarily derived from the lobbying efforts of international non-governmental organisations.

⁵ *Erawat Gaj* was acquired as an adult from India, and hence was not renamed. In India he had been responsible for 8 deaths, but since then as a Nepali government elephant, he has not caused either any fatalities or injuries. The name *Erawat* is clearly derived from *Airavata*, the name of the Vedic God *Indra*’s elephant mount (*vahana*). *Indra* himself is often represented iconographically in this form in temples. Mythologically, according to one story, this white, four-tusked elephant was one of the many treasures that emerged from the famous churning of the ocean of milk (*kshirabधि-manthan*) by the *devas* (gods) and *asuras* (anti-gods or demons). In another story, *Airavata* caused the churning of the ocean of milk. *Airavata* is also one of the eight elephants that support the world from different directions (*Airavata* from the east), and is described as the offspring of *Iravati*, daughter of *Bhadramata*, one of the ten daughters born to *Kasyapa* (son of *Brahma*, the creator god) (Clark, *M pers comm*).

recalled from their jungle posts where they are utilised in park patrol work with the Royal Nepal Army (RNA)⁶.

Elephant training basically consists of two modes; daytime driving sessions in which the trainee is tethered to two training elephants, and night-time sessions in which the tethered trainee is subjected to ordinarily alarming stimuli to which it must become habituated. In order to rest the *koonkie* elephants, two elephant teams are brought in which operate in rotation, although there is a definite preference for certain elephants over others. As expressed by my informants, those elephants whose loyalty to humans is greater than their loyalty to other elephants are ideal candidates for work as *koonkies*. For both Narayani Kali and Paras Gaj's training the following elephants were used; Sruti Kali (who was originally acquired from Myanmar), recalled from Kasara, the headquarters of the National Park administration located in the heart of the park, Thulo Chanchal Kali and Sano Chanchal Kali, from Dhruva Post⁷. Sharing the same name, the two Chanchal Kalis are distinguished by age, so that *thulo*, meaning large, is the elder, and *sano*, meaning small, is the younger. For Narayani Kali's training, the fourth elephant was Dipendra Kali, recalled from one of the other jungle posts, whilst for Paras Gaj's training the other elephant utilised was Aiswarya Mala, permanently seconded from the Sauraha Hattisar⁸.

5.4 The Choice of Training Elephants, The Assertion of Expertise and The Need for Operational Synchrony

During Narayani Kali's training, at a difficult moment when tempers were a little frayed, her *phanet*, Mani Lal, became irritable with the aging *phanet* of Dipendra Kali. Mani Lal accused him of exercising poor control during the driving training, which requires a cooperative synchrony between the *koonkie* elephants, the trainee elephant and all three drivers. Dipendra Kali's *phanet* defended himself by reminding the

⁶ Renamed the Nepal Army in the wake of the *Jana Andolan* or 'People's Movement' of April 2006, which forced King Gyanendra to relinquish power.

⁷ Kasara was originally established to host the prestigious hunting trip or *shikar* of King George V of Great Britain in 1911 (Smythies 1942: 42, see also section 2.4 'On The Specifically Nepali History of Captive Elephant Management' in chapter two).

⁸ Dipendra Kali is named after the former crown prince and son of the former king Birendra, whilst Aiswarya Mala is named after the late Queen Aiswarya, wife of the former King Birendra, both of whom were apparently killed by their son, the then crown prince Dipendra in the royal massacre of 2001 at the Narayanhiti palace. For accounts of the palace massacre, see Whelpton 2005:211-215, Thapa 2003:116, Gellner 2003:6-7, Hutt 2004:6, Raj 2001, Mishra 2001, Shrestha 2001, and for more populist accounts; Gregson 2002, and Willesee and Whittaker 2003.

younger *phanet* of Narayani Kali that he had previously driven for the training of four other elephants, with the added justification that giving training during the cold season was much more difficult and demanding than in the hot season when the elephants tire more easily.

This terse exchange entailed a senior reminding his junior of the value of his superior fund of experience, and served to demonstrate how at certain key junctures, handlers may feel the need to assert their professional capability. This incident shows the importance elephant training can have for both handlers' careers and their social standing. If one excels whilst playing a pivotal role, such as driving a *koonkie*, then one's chances of promotion may be improved. Training is also a time when reputations are at stake, when a handler's performance can determine how his colleagues perceive him.

Over time, I came to discern the lineaments of a tacit hierarchy of prestige, based upon a mixture of both social and professional evaluations. Everybody knew who was respected as a skilful handler, who was renowned for their vices, who was known to comport themselves in a dignified manner and was considered a man of integrity. Evaluations of one's professional acumen were often conflated with those of one's social standing. However, the verbal dispute between the *phanets* of the *koonkie* and trainee elephants, not only revealed how training can provide a context for contesting status, it also had some practical consequences. Mani Lal's criticism was perhaps one reason why Aiswarya Mala was chosen for the subsequent training of Paras Gaj instead of Dipendra Kali. For the *adikrit subba* has no desire for there to be dissent among those directly involved in training, which for both ritual and practical reasons demands harmony⁹.

⁹ The replacement elephant team of Aiswarya Mala is noteworthy not just because she currently has no *phanet*, as is the case with Erawat Gaj (budgetary constraints have limited the replacement of staff in recent years, leaving some elephants understaffed, and resulting in the belated mass hiring of 18 new *mahuts*, for which an induction programme was held, see subsection 6.2.2 in chapter six), but because her *patchuwa* has only one arm. In 1988, whilst driving his elephant, his arm touched an overhead electricity line. The shock killed his elephant, whilst he survived with terrible burns, and was airlifted to hospital in Kathmandu, where it was necessary to amputate his right arm. Although this prevents him from discharging certain duties such as the making of *dana*, and has surely prevented him from achieving promotion to *phanet*, he has been able to continue working by virtue of his status as a *sarkarko sthyai manche* (see section 4.8 on *hattisare* employment status in chapter four).

The elephant recognised as the best for giving driving training is Sruti Kali, whose *phanet* had to retrain her at the age of six after she had been acquired as a gift from the government of Myanmar in 1984. Her *phanet*, Dil Bahadur Shrestha, one of the few handlers from the Newar ethnic group, has worked with her ever since, and having now been involved in the training of eight elephants is recognised as the most experienced trainer in Nepal. Unlike the *phanet* of Dipendra Kali, he commands such social and professional respect that he is unlikely to ever bear the indignity of being challenged by a junior.

No other currently operative elephant handler in Nepal has trained more elephants and his recollection of prior observed elephant trainings is a valued source of experience. The memories of men like Dil Bahadur and other senior handlers like Section Sahib and Raut Sahib represent a crucial teaching resource for juniors. Their accumulated wisdom includes an array of examples of what can happen during training, and therefore how potential problems can best be prevented.

Having trained and worked with Sruti Kali for 20 years, there are few drivers with more intimate and longstanding relationships with their elephants than Dil Bahadur, and as a consequence the valued qualities of Sruti Kali as a *koonkie* cannot easily be distinguished from his own renowned expertise as a *hattisare*. This also highlights the significance of the elephant to which one is bound. The elephant with which a handler works can have a huge bearing on his ability to distinguish himself amongst his peers. Thus a handler's reputation is also partially determined by perceptions about his ability to control his elephant, especially in relation to the challenge that its particular temperament is seen to present.

5.5 Preliminary Arguments for Elephant Training as Ritual Process

As previously mentioned, the contemporary literature on elephant training almost exclusively treats the subject purely in practical terms, without any significant consideration of either how the culture of the practitioners affects the practical procedures, or how training is variously understood by handlers of differing ethnicity, culture and regional origin. In other words, indigenous understandings of traditional training practices have been neglected, as have associated ritual practices (if and where they persist in other places). In the Nepali context, the ritual aspects of training

are absolutely integral components, and are officially recognised by the DNPWC whose funding entails costings for ritual materials.

When one considers the fact of the sacrificial rituals which are performed at the onset and completion of training, the ritual prohibitions which the principal trainer is subject to, as well as the three identifiable stages of separation, isolation, and re-integration that it entails for the elephant, it becomes apparent that training can be understood anthropologically as a rite of passage, both for the elephant and its principal trainer. The three stage rite of passage is, of course, a schema famously elaborated in a work by the German-born folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1909), whose studies of custom in French villages were haughtily ignored by members of *L'Anée Sociologique* such as Durkheim and Mauss. The rudiments of this three stage scheme are evident in the separation of the trainee elephant from its mother and a life primarily responsive to her, its subjection to alien procedures, and then its re-integration into a new form of social life in which it has been taught to respond to humans as well as elephants, allowing itself to be ridden, and to obey human commands (growing up with its mother, it will already be familiar with the daily routine to which she is subject).

Therefore, an account of Nepali elephant training requires:

1. An explication of the Hindu worldview that informs and provides the imperatives for the locally inflected forms of Tharu ritual, as well as the ontological relations said to obtain between elephants, humans, jungle and deities¹⁰.
2. The analytical innovation of applying anthropologically formulated ideas about rites of passage to captive elephants, the study of which has previously typically come under the purview of animal behavioural science¹¹. However, although the elephant is the focal point of the transformative rites, one must

¹⁰ The Tharu describe themselves as Hindus, using the Tharu term *Hinwani* (Muller-Böker 1999:74).

¹¹ Lynette Hart, an animal behavioural scientist, has published papers on elephant handlers in Nepal (1994) and in South India (2000), as well as a comparison of both in relation to their touristic function (2005). Her differing disciplinary concerns are evident in that her papers do not comprehensively address the significance of indigenous conceptions for understanding elephant management practices. Instead, the papers are concerned with the social conditions of handlers, the declining trend for sons to follow their fathers into the profession, and the new uses to which captive elephants are put, since this impacts upon the quality and sustainability of extant traditions of elephant management.

not forget that the principal trainer is ritually bound to his elephant, and will also enter a liminal state during training.

5.5.1 Hindu Worldview and Its Implications

In the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, the existence of the world is explained as a cosmogonic act by God, in which the world and all its life forms are irrevocably separate from and dependent upon 'him', as well as each other. In Hinduism by contrast, the world, or rather the cosmos, is homologously seen as the body of God, subject to endless cycles of evolution and disintegrative devolution (each cycle composed of four *yugas* or ages, of which we dwell in the final stage, the *kali yuga*), and in which a permeable boundary between animals, humans and deities is postulated¹². Animals can become humans, and humans in turn can become gods (although not in one lifetime), all of which exist in a hierarchically ordered cosmos.

This becomes intelligible when one considers a few key concepts: *Samsara*; the cycle of reincarnation of essential selves (*atman*); *karma*, the principle which determines the form of rebirth on the basis of the consequence of past actions in relation to one's moral duties (*dharma*), since one can earn merit (*pun*) or demerit (*pap*); and *moksa*, the soteriological state of release from *samsara* through realisation of one's essence as an aspect of *brahman*; the total principle of existence which encompasses the gods, the cosmos, and all life¹³.

One might object to the relevance of these concepts by querying the extent to which such 'high minded' cosmological and soteriological ideas apply to everyday Tharu religious life, especially since scholars of Indian religions tend to emphasise the disjuncture between demotic religious experience and the scholarly tradition nurtured

¹² The famous Romanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, considered the 'cosmic homology' between the body, sacrifice and the universe as a defining feature of Indian religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism). The hymn of the cosmic man, the *Purusa Sakta*, in the *Rg Veda* tells how the cosmic man *Purusa*, was sacrificially dismembered, thereby creating the four hierarchically, inter-dependent classes or *varna* of society, namely the *Brahmin*, *Ksatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra* (Flood 1996:48-49).

¹³ The *atman* is the essence believed to inhere within all living beings, which persists beyond transitory material incarnations. In Indian thought ideas about this essential self are not entirely consonant with connotations of the Judeo-Christian 'soul' as something unique to individual beings. In Indian thought the essential self (*atman*) tends to be conceived as consisting of a generic substance, which only becomes distinctive by virtue of its karmic history, determined by the consequences of its actions whilst inhabiting and animating a material being.

by generations of learned, elite *pandits* (*Brahmin* religious scholars). The point is that besides innovating through their own philosophising, the *pandits* tended to systematise the undeveloped, unexpressed and implicit aspects of theory upon which religious practice depended, which most people typically felt little need to query¹⁴. Furthermore, the Tharu, as a 'tribal' group, were never traditionally considered an 'orthodox' part of the Hindu social order. Tharu do however identify themselves as Hindu, and long ago incorporated sanskritic practices into their ritual repertoire, calling upon the services of *Brahmin pujari* to perform their funerary rites (Guneratne 1999)¹⁵.

So-called 'popular Hinduism' has typically been characterised as being primarily concerned with ritual acts of worship (*puja*) and devotion (*bhakti*), as well as moral action appropriate to one's status and stage in life (*varnasramadharm*), which tends to relegate the concerted soteriological pursuit of escape from *samsara* and achievement of *moksa* to the specialist concern of learned men (*guru*) and religious renouncers (*samnyasi*), also revered as *gurus*; those whose knowledge (*gnan*) brings them closer to divine realisation, for which ordinary people seek the merit (*pun*) of looking upon them as they would a consecrated image of a deity (*murti*), an act known as *darsan*. This notion that there are different religious paths appropriate to different people, according to their dispositions and capabilities (conceived as an inherent rather than acquired kind of habitus), was systematised by *pandits* in the doctrine of *trimarga*, or the three paths. These are the path of devotion (*bhakti*), the path of action (*karma*), and the path of knowledge (*gnan*).

However, an analysis of the gesture by which Hindus greet each other and show respect reveals that the ideas of *samsara* and *karma* that are so crucial to divine liberation, and from which the permeability of animal, human, and god derive, is

¹⁴ In the 19th century, Orientalist scholars were intrigued by the apparent pre-eminence of practice over belief in Indian religions, giving them cause to question the way 'faith' is used as a synonym for religion. They found that orthopraxy (correct practice) mattered more than orthodoxy (correct belief), in stark contrast to the case of the Abrahamic religions with which they were most familiar (although the term 'orthoprax' itself was first introduced by Frits Staals in 'Rules Without Meanings' in 1975).

¹⁵ Prior to the malarial eradication programme, funerary rites had to be postponed to the winter months, since only in the non-malarial season would *Brahmins* be willing to come to Chitwan. As a consequence, the Tharu were afflicted by numerous ghosts (*bhut*), the 'spirits' of those who had died an untimely death and were condemned to haunt the earthly realm until released by the performance of funerary rites, for which a *Brahmin* was required (Guneratne 1999:10).

evident in demotic practice as well as in elite religious treatises. The elite path of *gnan* is not entirely divorced from the popular paths of *bhakti* and *karma*. Ultimately, they are different but inter-related means of achieving the same soteriological goals. The Hindu greeting of *namaste*, usually accompanied by the raising of one's hands and a slight bowing of the head, has been translated by one of Lawrence Babb's informants as a gesture made to salute "that bit of god which is in every person" (1975:52), an interpretation which is by no means idiosyncratic.

Chris Fuller argues that as a symbolic act, the *namaste* gesture; "expresses two of the most critical features of Hindu religion and society" (1992:3). Firstly, by noting that this gesture is made by people to deities, and by both deities and people to each other... "it postulates no absolute distinction between divine and human beings", and secondly, unlike the handshake, it; "expresses an inherent asymmetry in rank, because it is made by an inferior to a superior" (1992:3-4).

In the *hattisar*, this notion of life existing in a hierarchically ordered continuum of the relative stages of attainment of perfect realisation, in which deities are superior to humans, who are in turn superior to animals, and hence worthy of respect, is also evident in the way in which *hattisares* show respect to elephants. As animals, elephants are of course inferior to humans, but as sentient animals in which the spirit-substance of the deity *Ganesh* resides, and with their long history of regal associations, they demand respect. In a sense then, the elephant can be seen to confound the basic hierarchical relations encoded by the Hindu worldview, ambiguously occupying a simultaneously low and high position¹⁶.

Although captive elephants live in a state of subjugation to their human masters, their intrinsic godhood should not be ignored. Consequently, as Satya Narayan acknowledges in the quote that opens this chapter, most handlers will make a gesture to their head, chest and the elephant, on every instance before mounting it, or at least on the first instance of the day. This was explained by my informants as a way of

¹⁶ The elephant is of course, not the only animal to confound this basic hierarchical logic. The cow, also utilised by man, and of great significance for the agricultural basis of Indian civilisation, just as the elephant was in war and pageantry, is also sacred. Furthermore, the bull is the vehicle (*vahana*) of *Shiva* (and is called *nandi*), and as such reminds us of the significance accorded to certain animal species of utilitarian value.

showing respect and acknowledging their dependence on the goodwill of *Ganesha* for guaranteeing their safety on the elephant, since elephants can be unpredictable and subject to natural urges which may conflict with a *hattisare*'s duties.

Just as elephants are not seen merely as animals, and not in a purely instrumental perspective, so it is with the jungle environments in which the *hattisares* operate. On a mundane level, the jungle is conceived as a place of profuse plant life and dangerous animals, but in the Tharu worldview, it is subject to the rule of the forest goddess (*Ban Devi*), whose spirit-substance infuses the natural forces of the jungle and affects the behaviour of animals residing within it. As a potentially dangerous place where one might find oneself facing a charging rhino or the attack of a tiger (which does happen, as attested by the case of a *patchuwa* killed by a tiger whilst grazing his elephant in 2001), it would be foolish not to show respect to, and appease the potential wrath of *Ban Devi*, a deity specific to the Tharu, for which there is no image or *murti* as with pan-Hindu deities like *Ganesha*. There is of course, a standard form of practice by which one should supplicate the fierce and powerful deity that is *Ban Devi*; this is through the performance of sacrificial rituals. It should be noted that *Ban Devi* is a Tantric goddess, who is said to have taught the first Tharu *gurau*, a ritual specialist who mediates between the 'supernatural' and mundane realms¹⁷. To him she imparted knowledge of Tantra, mantras, medicine, and the appropriate means of worshipping her (Muller-Böker 1999:74).

However, besides *Ganesha* and *Ban Devi*, there is another deity relevant to the Tharu and to the elephant handlers of Chitwan. Whilst *Ban Devi* is the goddess of a particular type of environment, there is also a male god (*deva*) for whom respect is also due. *Bikram Baba* is one of the two territorial gods of Chitwan, which is divided between eastern and western realms. He is the transcendental ruler of a mundane

¹⁷ Tantra is a non-vedic set of religious practices with its own textual traditions (*tantrika*), most closely associated with the practices of *Shaktas* (worshippers of the goddess and the principle of power; *shakti*), characterised especially by ecstatic tendencies, often involving secretive initiations administered by *gurus*, and notorious for its erotic and antinomian elements which reverse the norms of purity and convention, such as ritual sex, consumption of alcohol and meat offered to ferocious deities (Flood 1996:159, Fuller 1992:86). Ruth Benedict's Nietzsche-derived distinction between Apollonian cultures of order and control and Dionysian cultures of ecstasy and freedom provides a broad ideological contrast between *Vaisnava* traditions (worship of *Visnu* and his *avatars*) and those of *Siva* and *Shakta* (Flood 1996:149).

realm, a god who fulfils the function of a king, and as such must receive tribute in the form of sacrificial gifts.

It is my contention then, that one must realise how ideas fundamental to Hindu worldview underlie the Tharu culture that informs the tradition of Nepali elephant management, without which the cultural logic of elephant training cannot be discerned. The ontological ideas outlined above about god/human/animal/environment relations may be seen to serve as conceptual co-ordinates by which elephant handlers negotiate their relationship to elephants and the jungle, as well as providing the imperatives for the ritual aspect of training.

5.5.2 Rites of Passage in Anthropological Theory

Before applying this analytic construct to a full ethnographic description of Nepali elephant training, I shall first trace the theoretical developments that van Gennep's original scheme has been subject to. Although 'rites of passage' is now a widely used generic term which has escaped the confines of specialist, academic usage, typically being utilised to describe life-changing ritual events that mark admission to adulthood and its various responsibilities, it is a curious fact that van Gennep's theoretical contribution only belatedly received the recognition that it was due. And this is despite the fact that his ideas, although uncited, were clearly known to, and an influence upon such renowned thinkers as Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown (Kimball 1960:xii). This anomalous situation becomes more intelligible when one realises that his book was only translated into English as recently as 1960, thereby enabling it to reach a wider scholarly audience. By the late twentieth century however, the name of van Gennep and the term 'rites of passage' became a regular feature in student introductions to the discipline of anthropology¹⁸. Since then, perhaps the two most significant theorists to have utilised and developed van Gennep's rite of passage formulation are Victor Turner (1969) and Maurice Bloch (1992).

¹⁸ For neophyte anthropologists, the successful completion of fieldwork; implying long-term research involving participant observation, has often been likened to a rite of passage, since it is an endeavour that entails the liminal experience of being a professional stranger adapting to a foreign context, the completion of which admits one to the ranks of 'authentic' anthropologists (Epstein 1967:vii, Holy 1983:18, also cited in Watson 2000:3, and Mills & Harris [eds] 2004).

5.5.2.1 Victor Turner

Victor Turner was initially trained in the synchronic approach of British Structural-Functional Anthropology. However, under the influence of Max Gluckman at the University of Manchester, he developed a diachronic approach that considered human society from a processual rather than a purely systemic perspective. This approach was applied to an increasing concern with ritual and symbolism, perhaps most significantly in “The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure” (1969), in which he elaborated upon van Gennep’s intermediary phase of ‘transition’ (*marge*) through his extended discussion of liminality. In a posthumously published work, Turner claimed that he had been inspired to adopt van Gennep’s interpretive apparatus after encountering the missionary Henri Junod’s use of the rite of passage typology to discuss circumcision rites in his ethnography of the Thonga of South Africa (Turner 1986:159)¹⁹.

Turner does not significantly diverge from van Gennep when detailing the first phase in the three-fold typology, although he prefers the designation of transition to that of separation. However, both terms are consonant in that they are taken to comprise symbolic behaviour signifying detachment from either an earlier, fixed point in the social structure or from a set of cultural conditions (a ‘state’), or both. Whilst van Gennep presents the intermediary stage as a means of leaving an old state behind in order to achieve a new one, Turner pays greater attention to what this entails, as a process of deconditioning and reconditioning. In the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu, and for the purposes of my appropriation, this can be alternately expressed as the negation of a prior habitus, to be replaced by the acquisition of a new habitus, where ‘habitus’ refers to socially-inscribed and subconscious dispositions, schemas, forms of know-how, and competencies (Crossley 2001:83). Articulation in such terms serves to incorporate an additional component to the rite of passage, one that Turner did not emphasise, in that elephant training cannot be analysed merely as a process of initiation, but also as a process of teaching and learning.

For Turner, in terms of social structure, the intervening period of liminality entails a state of ambiguity for the ritual subject (individual or corporate), in which ordinary

¹⁹ Junod’s “The Life of a South African Tribe” was first published in 1912, then in an enlarged edition in 1926, before its most recent publication in two volumes (I Social Life, II Mental Life) in 1962.

rights and obligations are suspended, which can be seen to apply both to the elephant and his trainer, as I shall argue. In terms of the cultural condition, the liminal subject eludes or slips; “though the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (Turner 1969:95). Furthermore, the ambiguous and indeterminate state of the liminal subject is expressed through a set of symbols specific to the ritualisation of social and cultural transitions. In the final phase, that of re-aggregation or reincorporation, the passage is consummated and the rights, obligations and signifiers of the new state come into effect (Turner 1969:95).

Turner’s idea of the liminal phase entailing a negation of the ordinary social position and cultural state is represented by his use of the term ‘anti-structure’. “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial...Their behaviour is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner 1969:95). It can be seen then, that rites of passage involve the subject being forced to sacrifice their autonomy and to be subjected to ordeals which both dramatise and serve to effect some kind of transformation, both of which will be evident in my account of Nepali elephant training.

Reviewing numerous rites, especially those of initiation, Turner notes that the liminal state entails a curious blend of lowliness and sacredness (Turner 1969:96), another aspect that is clearly evident in Nepali elephant training, as I shall argue. Noting two broad models of human inter-relatedness, the first of structure (who’s who in relation to each other), and the second of community (the solidarity of relatively undifferentiated individuals), Turner argues that the liminal state concerns the recognition of an essential and generic human bond without which there could be no society (1969:97). This suggests then, some kind of unconditioned basis upon which new norms and conventions can be imprinted.

In other words, the previous state must be negated in order to impose a new state, which in the terms of Bourdieu we might metaphorically refer to as ‘re-wiring’ the

habitus. In the case of elephant training, this would relate to the negation of a state in which the young elephant responds primarily to its own kind, to be replaced by a new state in which the young elephant, now weaned and separated from its mother, responds effectively to humans as well as to other elephants. For the handler, this would entail acquiring the mastery to control his elephant, achieved through his alienation from ordinary *hattisare* social life, whilst subjected to ritual prohibitions. Once relieved of these strictures and able to again fully participate in the social life of the *hattisar*, the successful trainer will ideally return with an enlarged fund of cultural capital, since he should have earned the respect of his peers from enduring the rigours of training and subordinating the elephant to his command.

5.5.2.2 Maurice Bloch

Subject to a different set of intellectual influences, Maurice Bloch articulates a different perspective on rites of passage, as part of a bold enterprise of developing a universal theory of ritual behaviour, one which is rooted in the biological constraints to which all humans are subject. Bloch is a nephew of Marcel Mauss of L'Annee Sociologique fame, is intimately familiar with French as well as British traditions of Anthropology, and has through his career shifted from a pre-occupation with the application of Marxist theory to a concern with integrating anthropological theory with the multi-disciplinary field of Cognitive Science.

“Prey into Hunter; The Politics of Religious Experience” (1992) represents the key text in which Bloch has developed his concern with the universal aspects of ritual phenomena, and his own treatment of van Gennep’s ‘rite de passage’ plays a central role in it. “Prey into Hunter” is a theoretical essay developed from his historical and ethnographic study of Malagasy circumcision ritual published in “From Blessing to Violence” (1986), in which he found that whilst some aspects of the ritual had functionally adapted to changing politico-economic circumstances, there remained a set of unchanging aspects which make up a central minimal structure or ‘core’ of the ritual process. This presented a problem for those theories that explain phenomena in terms of their fit with other aspects of culture and society, prompting him to consider the nature of the irreducible core of the ritual process.

Bloch is attempting then to identify minimal structures in religious phenomena that are the product of the general characteristics of human beings in terms of their material existence (and which in relation to Tharu elephant-handling can also be applied to the ritual process of training elephants). Such minimal structures are taken to derive; “from the fact that the vast majority of societies represent human life as occurring within a permanent framework which transcends the natural transformative process of birth, growth, reproduction, ageing and death. It is the near-universality of this construct, I argue, which accounts for the occurrence and re-occurrence of the same structural pattern in ritual and other religious representations at many times and many places. Ultimately, therefore, I am seeking to establish a connection between a religious construction and universal human constraints” (Bloch 1992:3).

The core of ritual representations is taken to be a simple transformation of the material processes of life in plants, animals and humans. This takes place within an idiom of two distinguishing features: firstly, by means of a classic, three-stage dialectical process (the three phases of rites of passage), and secondly, it is taken to involve a marked element of violence or conquest. He terms this ‘rebounding violence’, and it is this very concern with violence, which distinguishes his formulation and makes it so suitable for a ritual analysis of elephant training, in which both physical and symbolic violence play such a salient role.

In developing his argument, Bloch reiterates some basic assertions about the shared ideas that underlie all human cultures. He notes that all cultures in some way recognise birth, maturation, reproduction, decline and death as constitutive of the process of material life. In ritual, life is represented as an inversion of such understandings, in which some kind of ‘other’ life is implicitly propounded, one beyond such material constraints. By means of the passage of reversal, one can enter a world beyond such process to be part of an entity beyond process, i.e to affirm a life-transcending principle. In Nepali elephant training, this is evident in the appeals to *Ban Devi* and *Ganesh*, since their intervention is considered crucial in mitigating against the possibility of the training process threatening the mortality of participants, both elephant and human. But for Bloch, merely departing the world of material constraint would have no political significance. The solution seems to be found in the rejoining of the here and now with the transcendental units that rituals create.

So we find a ritual process that involves both a departure from the constraints of materiality, and then a return to the materiality of the here and now as a conquest by the transcendental. "In the case of initiation, the initiate does not merely return to the world he had left behind. He is a changed person, a permanently transcendental person who can therefore dominate the here and now of which he previously was a part" (Bloch 1992:5). So Bloch is saying that rituals dramatise a journey of the person to the beyond, coupled with a conquering return. By entering the transcendental, vitality is lost, but is regained on return, albeit in an altered form, in which the limits of vitality have been coupled with the power of the transcendental. In Nepali elephant training, both the survival of the elephant and his trainers as well as the acquisition of new skills, dispositions and competencies is considered dependent upon the transcendental intervention of divine power. The elephant and his handler, having survived the violent uncertainties of training, and as a result been imbued with beneficial divine power, are understood to have had their prospects for the future considerably altered and improved.

Bloch is utilising the three-stage process of separation, liminality and re-incorporation of van Gennep (1909), but in his formulation a different content is attributed. For van Gennep, the first stage was a separation between the primary actor and the group they leave behind, whilst for Bloch it is seen "principally as a dramatically constructed dichotomisation located within the body of each of the participants" (1992:6); not so much a social departure as entry to a drama of resolution. For van Gennep, the third stage was seen as a re-integration into society, and for Turner, into mundane reality, whilst for Bloch, "the third stage is not seen as a return to the condition left behind in the first stage but as an aggressive consumption of a vitality which is different in origin from that which had originally been lost" (1992:6); a conquering return. For Bloch, the accounts of van Gennep and Turner ignored or at least underplayed the symbolism of violence present in so many religious phenomena, which are accounted for in Bloch's formulation by means of his idea of 'rebounding violence'. Bloch notes that the violence is not the result of some innate propensity, but is; "a result of the attempt to create the transcendental in religion and politics" (1992:7).

In applying these theoretical formulations to elephant training, the most significant issue that must be addressed is that the ritual subject is dual, both human and animal.

Through the ritual process the destiny of man and elephant are bound together. The elephant must be transformed and the trainer must acquire the means to subjugate it, resulting in a practical mastery deriving from a combination of divine sanction and the trainer's own skill. Only if the principal trainer adheres to a ritualised discipline for the duration of training will he receive the divine assistance necessary to achieve practical mastery over his elephant, and this includes his abstinence from the natural imperative to procreate. The elephant is subject to a process that is administered by humans, which entails a dialectical negotiation of the transcendental and the mundane, and which depends upon the appropriate honouring of the divinity inhering within it.

5.6 Nepali Elephant Training as Practical and Ritual Process

5.6.1 Separation

At the Khorsor *hattisar*, the training process commences with the young elephant being separated from its mother and taken into the jungle without her for the very first time. Whereas previously the young elephant would accompany its mother untethered as she was driven into the jungle for grass cutting and grazing duties (see figure 5.2), on the occasion of its separation, it is tethered to a different elephant by its neck and taken into the jungle. The mother is visibly and audibly distraught, and demonstrates her distress through agitated movements and loud trumpeting sounds, whilst her baby appears confused and initially unwilling to submit to being led away. Although technically elephants cannot jump, Paras Gaj's *phanet* Satya Narayan described his elephant's mother Prena Kali as jumping in distress, by which he was referring to the uncharacteristic manner by which she mounted her post with her front legs, almost as if to gain a better vantage to see Paras Gaj as he was led away by Erawat Gaj.

The weakness of the trainee elephant in relation to the superior size and strength of the new elephant to which it is tethered, means that it has no option but to submit. In both observed instances, the training of Narayani Kali and Paras Gaj, the large tusker Erawat Gaj was used for this task (see figures 5.3 & 5.4). He is the ideal choice because during separation, when the trainee will be in a state of distress, he remains obedient to his handler (usually his *patchuwa* Bishnu Chaudhary, who has 17 years experience as a *hattisare*). As explained to me by my informants, elephants other than Erawat Gaj might begin to sympathise with the trainee and disobey their handler.

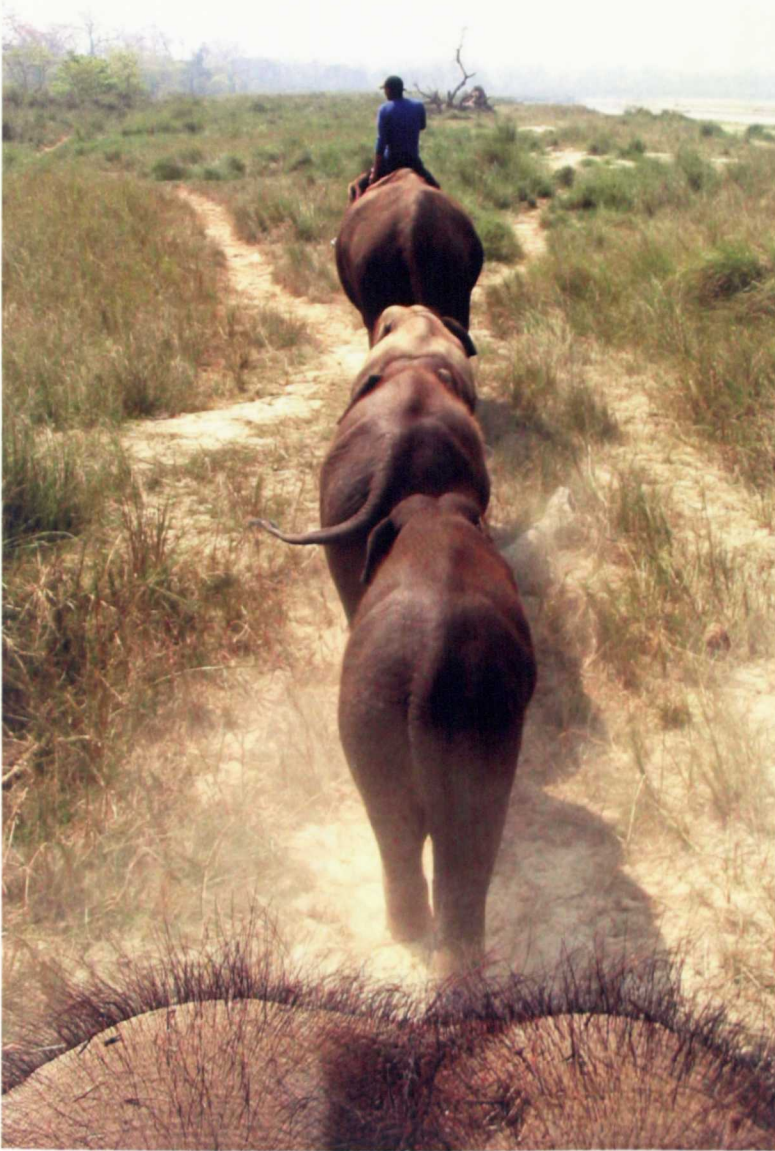


Figure 5.2: Untrained baby elephants following each other as they go to graze untethered



Figure 5.3: Paras Gaj strains at the ropes connecting him to Erawat Gaj as he is led away from the stable and his mother for the first time

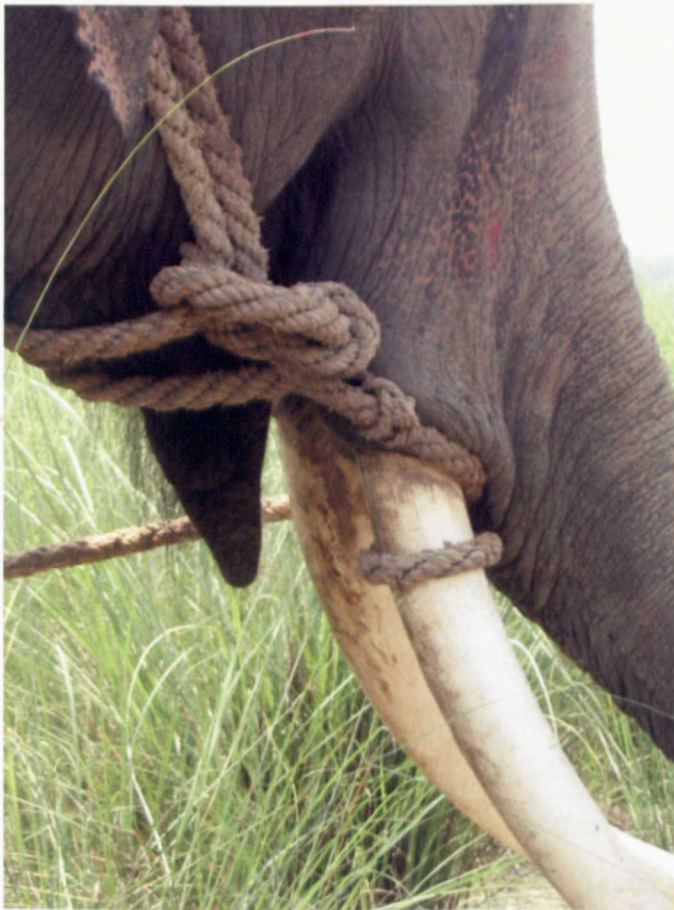


Figure 5.4: Erawat Gaj winds the rope around his tusk to gain better leverage for controlling Paras Gaj's movement

The newly separated baby will no longer return to its place under the shelter of a corrugated tin roof, chained to the *kambha* or short post of its mother, nor will it feed from its mother's teat again (by now it is already sufficiently habituated to eating grass and *dana*; the grass packages that contain unhusked rice, molasses and salt). Whilst out in the jungle becoming accommodated to its separation, arrangements are made for a sacrificial ritual at its new *kamari* or tall post (necessary for tethering the elephant by its neck as well as its feet), which is situated some distance away from the other posts (some of which are *kambha*, and some of which are *kamari*)²⁰.

In the case of the training of Paras Gaj, conducted during May 2004, and filmed for the documentary 'Servants of Ganesh', the juvenile did get a chance to rejoin his mother and drink from her teats again. Paras and Erawat returned early from their jungle sojourn, requiring that they wait and watch whilst we completed the *kamari puja* that would ensure his training went well. Then he was led back to his new post, the tall *kamari*, specially erected in isolation from the other elephants. The handlers were faced with the challenge of tethering him securely. He would no longer be able to roam on a long chain and reside next to his mother. Now he was to be securely tied by ropes connecting both his front feet and his neck to the *kamari*. However, this was beset by a problem; the men's attempts to tether him securely were undone by Paras Gaj's determination to escape this strange confinement that he could not comprehend. As Section Sahib explained; "when they tied him, they didn't do it properly. I told them to tie it properly but they didn't listen. The elephant was upset that he had been tied. He would hit anyone who came near him from anger. In his mind he was wondering what he'd done wrong to deserve to be separated from his mother".

And so Paras began to persistently struggle against his neck tether, at first as though it were a mere irritant, and then as something he had to rid himself of, eventually managing to free himself. As onlookers, we were all amused and impressed by his recalcitrant spirit. With a gentle sense of exasperation, Section Sahib moaned about the men's incompetence, and a battle ensued to re-secure him (see figure 5.5). Cognisant of the need to safeguard their elephant's welfare, Section Sahib eventually

²⁰ Males, who are subject to *musth*, a state of agitation associated with the onset of strong sexual urges, during which a sweet, honey-smelling secretion is emitted from their temples, tend to be tethered to *kamari* rather than *kambha*, since these taller posts permit the additional possibility of being tethered by the neck.

gave the command to desist, allowing Paras to remain at the *kamari* tethered only by his feet.



Figure 5.5: The handlers attempt to re-secure Paras Gaj's neck tether

Paras' indomitable spirit had earned him a brief respite from being held in such constrictive captivity. The next morning, nobody was surprised or concerned when they saw his training post deserted. During the night his efforts had surreptitiously continued, and without the added neck restraint, he was also able to undo the ropes that shackled his feet (during training metal chains are not used for practical and ritual reasons, necessitating the application of exceptionally tightly bound rope knots). He had returned to his mother, and could be seen contentedly resting at his mother's feet. The separation procedure with Erawat Gaj would have to be performed again...

5.6.2 Kamari Puja

This ritual is named after, and conducted at a special, tall post, located some distance away from its mother's post and those of the other elephants²¹. It is performed before the trainee elephant returns from the jungle, on its first day of separation, whilst

²¹ I was initially confused, wondering what the *Kumari* had to do with this, and so made sure they were not referring to the renowned ritual practice of the virgin girl from the Newar *Sakya* caste who is treated as a living goddess until she bleeds.

tethered to Erawat Gaj, and is considered essential for ensuring the success of training. For training to be successful, the gods upon whom such an endeavour depends must be propitiated (*Ganesha, Ban Devi* and *Bikram Baba*).

In terms of the three aspects of the rite of passage, the *kamari puja* ritually finalises the process of separation and marks the beginning of the liminal phase for both the elephant and its principal trainer. On the completion of training, a similar ritual honouring the same deities is performed, which ritually marks the end of liminality and the induction of elephant and handler into both their new co-dependent relationship as well as their respective transformed statuses. This finalising ritual is not conducted at the *kamari*, but on the space bordering the *hattisar* and the jungle, the domain of *Ban Devi*. These rituals then symbolically demarcate the time of training, bracketing the period of liminality, during which the ordinary routines and obligations of both the trainee elephant and his principal trainer are suspended, and after which they will return transformed as a result of their dramatic ordeal and the intervention of transcendental powers.

The ritual officiant (*pujari*) oversees the preparations for the sacrificial ritual (*puja*) with the assistance of *hattisares*. Such a *puja* is typically conducted by a *hattisare* with the requisite skills (which few *hattisares* currently possess), whilst on the occasions of the annual *Asar* and *Dashain* pujas at Khorsor, a professional non-*hattisare* Tharu *pujari* is employed²². At present, the Newar *phanet* Dil Bahadur Shrestha, performs the duties of the *pujari*. Having lived in Chitwan for many years since coming from the hill district of Gorkha to seek work, Dil Bahadur is fully proficient in Tharu language and ritual.

During semi-structured interviews in which I asked Dil Bahadur why it was that a non-Tharu was regularly performing *puja* to Tharu deities, he claimed that the transmission of Tharu ritual knowledge was on the decline. This tends to support the view held by anthropologists and Tharu people alike that the influx of settlers from

²² *Asar* is a month in the Nepali *Vikram Samvat* calendar, which coincides with July in the Gregorian calendar, whilst *Dashain*, known as *Durga Puja* in India, occurs in October. *Dashain* is a five-day national holiday to celebrate the goddess *Durga*'s slaying of the buffalo demon *Mahi-asura*, signifying the end of demonic supremacy in the cosmic battle between *devta* and *asura*, and entails extensive buffalo sacrificing and feasting.

other ethnic groups and castes, the recent development of Chitwan, and the attendant transformations to Tharu livelihood, is causing disruption to their traditional religious beliefs, practices and identity (see chapter three and Mclean 2000, Straede & Helles 2000, McLean & Straede 2003). This recognition has also provided a powerful motivation for initiating the Tharu Culture Museum project (see sub section 7.5.4 in chapter seven).

Before the sacrifices can be performed, various purificatory preparations must be made. Consonant with the understanding that Hindu worship (*puja*) is a means of honouring deities, these preparatory acts also serve the function of symbolically conveying the *hattisares'* respect for the deities to be worshipped (Fuller 1992:68)²³. These should not be seen merely as necessary preparations for a ritual act of sacrifice, but as integral components of the total practice of worship (*puja*) which entails acts of devotion (*bhakti*) as well as sacrifice (*yajna*).

Facing east and in front of the *kamari*, a rectangular patch of ground is cut from the grass. The orientation is of significance since this is the direction from where the sun rises, said to be the direction from where the gods come²⁴. A sanctifying mixture of elephant dung and water is applied to this sacrificial and devotional space in order to make it ritually pure (whereas in most Hindu ritual, in acknowledgement of the sacred status and ubiquity of the cow, a mixture of cow dung and water would be applied). The *kamari* must also be sanctified, and this is effected by several means; the purificatory application of water, the insertion of a burning incense stick into the grain of the post, the smearing of red and yellow tikka powder onto the post, the placing of red and white strips of cloth and flower petals at the base, and the wafting of a flame (see figure 5.6). The acts of consecration administered to the *kamari* resemble those administered to a divine image (*murti*) in typical Hindu worship, in that it can be seen to entail acts of bathing (*abhisheka*), clothing and decoration (*alankara*), and the display of lamps (*diparadhana*). Although the *kamari* is not a *murti* for which

²³ By utilising an 's' followed by an apostrophe (*hattisares'*), I have of course applied an English language mode of indicating the plural possessive. In Nepali a plural is indicated by the appending of 'haru', whilst the possessive is indicated by appending a 'ko' (*hattisareharuko*).

²⁴ My informants were bemused that Muslims pray in the 'wrong' direction, since they face west, the direction of Mecca, the significance of which they were unaware of. Although there are many Muslim elephant handlers in India, a legacy of the era of imperial Mughal stables, I know of only one Muslim elephant handler in Chitwan, who works at the *hattisar* of the Temple Tiger jungle resort.

devotees seek *darsan*, nonetheless, these acts of consecration of the *kamari* may be interpreted to accord with the intention commonly attributed to image worship; namely to install divine power within them (Fuller 1992:57-58, 64-65). The ropes to be used in the training must also be imbued with divine power, and so are placed between the space of worship and the *kamari* (see figure 5.7).



Figure 5.6: Mark filming patchuwa Tej Narayan purifying the Kamari with water



Figure 5.7: Mark filming the placing of the training ropes between the Kamari and the sacrificial space

In order to attract the deities, the sacrificial space must be made alluring to them. And so, just as an architecturally-constructed temple (*mandir*) is intended to be a special place worthy of attracting divine beings, serving as a residence for temporarily receiving and entertaining them (Michell 1977:61), so here in the *hattisar*, with more meagre means available, a simpler and more transitory house of the gods is created²⁵. This consists of the application of charcoal powder, rice grains, and both red and yellow tikka powder, to create square forms intersected with diagonal lines (see figure 5.8). According to my informants, these represent a proxy for the structure of the temple at which religious gifts (*dana*) may be offered. However, these geometric forms may also be interpreted as a simple *yantra*, a sacred diagram which in Tantric traditions are seen as one means of representing the goddess (Flood 1996:160), and/or as a ‘cosmogram’ or map of the cosmos (Flood 1996:188).

²⁵ Hindu temples (*mandir*) are also known by the terms *devagriham*, meaning house of god, and *devalaya*, meaning residence of god (Michell 1977:61).



Figure 5.8: Phanet Dil Bahadur constructing the proxy mandir in the purified sacrificial space

The *tikka* squares, as proxies for a temple, are also decorated with tiny flags of red and white cloth and flower petals, said to serve to attract and please the deities, as well as burning incense sticks, which serve to purify the sacred space, and lamps moulded from a malleable clay composed of an earth-water mix, in which cooking oil serves as fuel, and fine rope strands as wicks. For the goddess *Ban Devi*, artefacts of feminine beautification, such as a mirror and a comb, are also often presented (in keeping with the anthropomorphic conception of deities typical of Hinduism). This then, concludes the worshipful preparations, all of which are accompanied by the invocation of *mantras*, the knowledge of which is a key criterion of qualification to act as a *pujari*.

The final component in the conduct of the ritual at the elephant's training post is the presentation of sacrificial gifts for the deities to symbolically consume (see figures 5.9 & 5.10). Having been presented, the consecrated 'leftovers' are apportioned to the ritual participants, namely the staff of the *hattisar* and any guests who might be in attendance. These 'leftovers' are known as *prasada*, which literally means 'grace'

(Fuller 1992:74). *Prasada* are substances that have been ritually transubstantiated so that they are temporarily infused with divine power and grace (the fact that the power fades over time provides the imperative for having to repeat acts of *puja*) (Fuller 1992:74). *Prasada* can include food as well as non-consumables such as *tikka* powder and blood. These are taken by dabbing one's first finger onto the *tikka* and applying it to one's forehead, which also serves to signify one's participation in a *puja*, and hence the partaking in divine power (see figure 5.11).



Figure 5.9: Phanets Satya Narayan and Mani Lal presenting sacrificial gifts (note the sweet rice balls and apples for the vegetarian Ganesha, as well as the decorative lamps, incense sticks, flags, flower petals and rupee notes)



Figure 5.10: Mahut Ram Kumar ensures that blood from the decapitated chicken offered to Ban Devi is dispersed across the sacrificial space



Figure 5.11: Raut Sahib daubing tikka on his forehead

In the *puja* at the *kamari*, both vegetarian and meat-eating deities are worshipped, and as such will have been presented with gifts appropriate to their temperaments. As a

fierce goddess capable of wrathful acts, *Ban Devi* must be appeased by satiating her appetite with meat and alcohol, typically receiving as much as two pigeons, two chickens (*kukhuro*, ideally cockerels, *bhale*), two goats (*bakhro*) and a bottle of *raksi*, a clear spirit distilled from rice (*dhan*) or maize (*makka*)²⁶. The animals' are decapitated by severing their throats with a grass-cutting sickle (*asi* or *hasiyya*), blood is then purposely dripped over the *yantra*/proxy *mandir*, and the heads are reverently placed upon the *yantra*, close to the flame of the lamp, the incense and the flags.

Ganesha, by contrast, as a deity to be petitioned for assistance, who is typically iconographically represented with a bloated belly and a tray of sweet rice balls, does not accept meat, and is thus given fruit and sweets, especially his favourite, the sweet rice balls²⁷. In the cases I observed, the fruit was apple, but the ritual does not specifically prescribe apples. Rather, the choice of fruit is determined by seasonal availability. The rice balls are presented on plant leaves, next to the apples, just in front of the geometric forms of the *yantra*.

The number of *yantra* does not seem to be stipulated, and in the various *Ban Devi puja* I witnessed (not just performed on elephant training occasions) the number constructed typically varied from 4 to 10²⁸. On one occasion 21 were constructed, but this was for *Asar puja*, a major ritual occasion not specific to the *hattisar*, when many other goddess forms are also worshipped. On this occasion, the *yantra* were not merely in a line, but formed a right angle, at the intersection of which was a special post, which received the same acts of washing, clothing, decoration and purification as a *murti* or the *kamari* in an elephant training ritual²⁹.

²⁶ In the elephant training rituals I observed, the goats were only included for sacrifice on the occasion of the *puja* performed on completion of training. Yielding more meat for consumption as *prasada*, this was also more convenient since the completion of training is a time for celebration, free of the anxious uncertainty as to the outcome of training.

²⁷ It is believed that the pan-Hindu deity known both as *Ganesha* and *Ganpati* historically developed from a fierce *yaksa*, a type of nature spirit that required propitiation to avoid negative consequences, only later to become the much-loved *Vinayaka*, or remover of obstacles, invoked at the commencement of all endeavours to ensure good luck.

²⁸ On one occasion a *Ban Devi puja* was performed on the pretext of giving me divine protection, since as a neophyte *hattisare*, I was beginning to regularly enter the dangerous jungle domain of *Ban Devi* to take the elephants to graze. Since I was financing this ritual, it would also provide a feast for the Khorsor staff, and as such served as an appropriate means for me to reciprocate my hosts' hospitality and co-operation, as well as providing a means of satisfying my ethnographer's curiosity about Tharu ritual practice in the *hattisar*.

²⁹ At the *Saurahako sarkarko hattisar*, but not at Khorsor, there are a number of small posts, said to represent elephants that have died, at which a modest *Ganesha puja* is performed every Sunday

At Khorsor, *Ban Devi puja* are always eagerly anticipated since it implies the atypical opportunity to feast upon meat (*masu*) as well as an opportunity to celebrate, at which all the staff know that Section Sahib will not disapprove of the drinking of *raksi*. Typically, in the evenings after a *Ban Devi puja* and the taking of *dal-bhat* with the added extra of *masu*, the men will gather in a social area to make music, to sing, to drink, to dance and to generally make merry, all the more so if the *puja* was one of completion.

5.6.3 Being Tethered to the Kamari

Once the *puja* at the *kamari* has been completed, the trainee elephant is led to its training post, at which it will reside for the duration of its training. It will be tethered by both feet as well as by its neck. For training it will be tethered especially tightly so as to restrict its movement to a mere circumambulation in very close proximity to its *kamari*. This is in contrast to adult, trained elephants whose range of possible movement is much larger. Furthermore, subsequent to training, it is only usually the male elephants that are tethered by both feet.

Trainee elephants are shackled by ropes rather than chains primarily because the elephant will initially struggle against its state of bondage, and rope abrasions are less injurious than those caused by chains³⁰. However, whilst watching Satya Narayan construct a *mathiya* from rope (the ring component of the stirrups), I was also told that according to tradition the use of metal during training is ill advised as it is considered impure (*jutho*) (see figure 5.12). For Narayani Kali's training though, *phanet* Mani Lal did not construct rope *mathiya*. This was in keeping with his less devout approach to training, which unlike Satya Narayan's, was not characterised by such strict adherence to the maintenance of purity. Depending on the extent of abrasive injury and the behaviour of the elephant, the neck tether may be removed. Typically, neck tethering will only be deemed necessary for the first few days. After that, trainee

(*aitabar*), by their resident *pujari* who also acts as a night guard. This rarely attracts the attention of other *hattisare*, and there is no *prasada*. Khorsor, as a recently established *hattisar*, does not have a resident *pujari*, and since the *pujari* at *Sauraha* is old, I believe that this is a position that only continues to receive funding because his employment status is *sthyai*.

³⁰ Photos by Hank Hammatt of Elephant Care International, of untreated abrasions on elephant ankles in Sumatra are particularly shocking, and provide a testament to the importance of vigilance and care in keeping captive elephants shackled (see appendix six).

elephants will usually have become tired and resigned to their state of subjugation, such that they no longer struggle against their bonds.



Figure 5.12: Phanet Satya Narayan constructing rope stirrups (atargal)

According to the theory of conditioning by punishment and reward which informs handlers' conception of training (not dissimilar from ideas of operant conditioning in the behaviourist approach to psychology pioneered by B F Skinner), one might assume that the elephant will be learning to realise that the extent of its tethering is dependent on its behaviour, such that an absence of struggle, and hence resignation to its subjugation and dependence on the whim of its human masters, will yield the 'reward' of a less restrictive tethering (i.e removal of the rope attaching it to the post by its neck). Should it begin to struggle again, conceived as 'misbehaving' by its handlers, then it can be 'punished' by having its neck tether re-attached. Consideration for the injuries that the elephant causes itself whilst struggling against its bonds, can however confound this process of conditioning.

Whilst there is obviously a practical basis for undertaking these special measures to confine and isolate the elephant, ritual symbolism is also evident in these procedures. The trainee elephant has had a state of liminality imposed upon it. At the *kamari* it has been divorced from its previous state, in which it lived in contented proximity to its

mother, and will be subjected to dramatic ordeals that will effect its transformation towards becoming an elephant that can be ridden and obeys its driver. Having petitioned deities for their assistance, its sacred status will be more acutely appreciated, even though this entails the handlers exercising a far greater degree of coercive and punitive control than at any other time in its life.

5.6.4 Day Time Training

Having been separated from its mother, taken into the jungle attached to Erawat Gaj, and had the *Kamari Puja* performed, a trainee elephant will soon be adjudged ready to begin receiving its day-time driving training. According to the *hattisares*, the acute effects of the trauma of separation only afflict the mother and her baby for a few days. All the while, as it adjusts to its restricted movement at the *kamari*, separated from its mother, and receiving reduced rations, it will be tiring itself out. As the handlers explained to me, the more the trainee struggles the better, since as it gets weaker it becomes more compliant, and therefore more receptive to human intervention.

This is why training has often been represented as an attempt to ‘break’ the elephant’s will. This is a rather stark interpretation with unpleasant connotations that the ritual process seems intended to attenuate. Indeed, the necessary suffering inflicted upon the elephant is something the handlers readily admit that they regret, and is one reason why they believe they must ritually communicate their apologies to *Ganesh*. Furthermore, since training is not without risk to the long-term welfare of the elephant and his principal trainer, the thought of transcendental intervention is psychologically reassuring for the handlers.

Precisely how soon driving training commences is a decision made by the *adikrit subba* in consultation with senior staff experienced in giving training (*talim dine*). In the cases I observed, this comprised the *raut* and the *phanet* Dil Bahadur. Sometimes several days of isolation and solitary jungle trips tethered to Erawat Gaj will be deemed necessary, depending on evaluations of the physical and mental stamina of the elephant. If the trainee is too boisterous, then he could jeopardise the safety of his driver. Females usually receive driving training a day or two after separation, whilst males usually begin to receive theirs two or three days after separation. This also

indicates the importance of vigilance, which depends on the acquired ability to discern signs of change in an elephant's demeanour as it endures the ordeal of training.

Once the decision to commence driving training has been made, the trainee will be subject to a new routine of daily sessions lasting about four or five hours for a period of two to four weeks, depending on the elephant's aptitude for learning to respond to basic verbal commands as well as the tactile commands applied by the toes to the back of the neck, by which a driver can steer his elephant to the left and right (see figure 5.13). The basic verbal commands that must be taught during training are: move forward (*agad!*), sit (*baith!*), stand (*maiel!*), stop (*ra!*), lay down (*sut!*), give (*le!*), and leave alone (*chhi!*), which is important since the trainee will not yet have learnt that it's inappropriate to shower himself with cooling and protective earth whilst bearing a driver (see figure 5.14). Over the next six months a trainee elephant will learn further commands, typically responding to a repertoire of around 25 words, although more can be taught (see table 3).



Figure 5.13: With the foot through the atargal, the driver can give commands by depressing his toes against the back of the elephant's ear



Figure 5.14: Paras Gaj has yet to learn not to cover himself with earth whilst being ridden- he doesn't understand the 'chhi!' command yet. For this reason Satya Narayan wisely wears a face -mask. The other handlers are helping remove the ropes which enable Satya Narayan to cling on whilst Paras learns to accept and accommodate a driver.

Table 3: Nepali Elephant Commands

Command Word	Meaning
<i>Baith!</i>	Sit!
<i>Maiei!</i>	Stand up!
<i>Agad!</i>	Walk forward!
<i>Chaeh!</i>	Move fast!
<i>Ra!</i>	Stop!
<i>Sut!</i>	Sleep (i.e lay down)!
<i>Ihimer!</i>	Move around!
<i>Le!</i>	Give!
<i>Chhop!</i>	Drink/spray water!
<i>Chhah! (or pichhe hath!)</i>	Move backward!
<i>Chhi!</i>	Leave!
<i>Dhar!</i>	Grab!
<i>Dhar samit!</i>	Grab and put in mouth!
<i>Pasar!</i>	Tilt while seating!
<i>Jhuk!</i>	Bend forelegs by bowing head!
<i>Sam!</i>	Join forelegs!
<i>Khol!</i>	Lean by two hind legs!
<i>Sar baith!</i>	Bend forelegs together!
<i>Hiek!</i>	Knock down tree!
<i>Dhar dab!</i>	Press by foreleg!
<i>Dhar utha!</i>	Raise driver by trunk!
<i>Bileak!</i>	Bend while raising legs!
<i>Had!</i>	Raise trunk!
<i>Tan!</i>	Stretch legs!
<i>Uper de!</i>	Give the catch!

This new driving routine entails Paras Gaj being roped up to the two training elephants (see figure 5.15). The daily departure is a collectively witnessed event, inaugurated by shouts and hollers from the onlooking *hattisares* as the training team runs off at full pelt. A sense of festive excitement is palpable. Each *talim dine hatti*

carries a driver and a passenger on a *gada*. Despite the joyous atmosphere of the send-off, the early days of training can be quite tense, demanding a great deal of effort and attentiveness from elephants and riders. For this reason, the passenger may be called upon to use a kind of truncheon called a *lohauta*, which is attached to the elephant's rigging by rope, and is occasionally used to beat the training elephant's haunches if it needs to be spurred on to go faster. During these first days the primary concern is for the trainee to be thoroughly exercised and to become accustomed to bearing a rider. As Satya Narayan explained to me: "Once the elephant is fatigued, then he will be willing to learn from us". More concerted efforts to inculcate understanding of specific commands will come later. The passengers will often sing songs, since the trainee needs to become desensitised to loud noise.



Figure 5.15: Paras Gaj tethered to the training elephants and about to commence driving training. The anthropologist is seated behind phanet Dil Bahadur on Sruti Kali on the right.

At first the trainee elephant is wilful, trying to go this way and that, yet to realise that life will be easier once he relinquishes his autonomy. As a result, it takes all of his rider's efforts just to hold on. Without effective trust and communication between the principal trainer and the other drivers, who in turn must be able to depend on their

elephants' ability to understand what is required of them, then the training session will not proceed well.

In the first few days of Paras Gaj's training, an incident occurred which illustrated just how crucial this working synchrony is. Dil Bahadur was unable to drive as a result of abrasions on his foot due to his stirrup rubbing as the elephants twisted, turned and pulled against the obdurate Paras Gaj. The secondary elephant training teams were now being deployed, and their drivers were considerably less experienced. Whilst out in the open fields adjacent to the *hattisar*, a sudden turn by Paras took one of the *phanets* by surprise, and he failed to ensure his elephant (Chanchal Kali) kept the connecting ropes untangled. As a result, Satya Narayan was forced to jump off Paras Gaj, otherwise he might have been crushed between ropes that were threatening to enclose him. Fortunately his quick response ensured he did not contract an injury that could have necessitated the abandonment of training. Harsh words were spoken, and accusations cast regarding the competence of one of the drivers (who was not a *phanet*). He had to bear the public indignity of incurring Section Sahib's displeasure, and did not receive a further opportunity to prove himself in giving driving training.

With regard to the elephant's ability to learn what is required of it, this is partially instilled through the use of violence, especially the principal trainer's use of sharpened bamboo sticks (*kocha*) applied to the backside of the elephant's ears (see figure 5.16). The rationale here is that once the elephant realises what it's driver is requesting of it, and acts accordingly, such as turning to the left, then the application of pain will desist. According to the handlers, after training, during everyday driving, it is the bodily memories of these unpleasant experiences that are activated when a handler depresses his toes to direct his elephant. The elephant responds they say, because it understands the causal relation, and has no desire to be subjected to those prior pain states again. The elephant has learnt that compliance with a request will ensure that it is not punished, and this learning is not easily forgotten, because it is somehow 'imprinted in the body' just as the ability to ride a bicycle is for humans.



Figure 5.16: Satya Narayan applies a sharpened bamboo stick to the rearside of Paras Gaj's left ear to instil the command to turn to the right

The assistance of the training elephants is also integral to this teaching process. Whilst a principal trainer is trying to instil the response to a command to go right or left, the pulling of the *talim dine hatt*i plays a reinforcing role. For example, Satya Narayan might jab Paras Gaj on the left hand side, and at the same time the right hand *talim dine hatt*i will receive a command from its driver to pull to the right. On occasion, especially when taking the trainee up and down inclines, the training elephants will even use their trunks to help correct the trainee (see figure 5.17). As we can see from

the photo, when one elephant is pulling the trainee up an incline, the driver of the other elephant must ensure that his elephant's connecting ropes are not taut, otherwise the trainee could get injured. Small inclines such as these are very useful during training as it is considered easier to get elephants to respond to the lay down and sit commands (*sut!//baith!*)



Figure 5.17: Dipendra Kali uses her trunk to pull Paras Gaj up an incline

Although this ‘conditioning by aversion’ is a fundamental component of elephant training, handlers were always keen to remind me that training also entails the building of trust, and that they considered reward just as important as punishment. When a trainee successfully performs a required command, the principal trainer will

pat his head with protective earth or mud, in a gesture they call ‘giving trust’ (*bishwas dine*), as in figure 5.18.



Figure 5.18: Satya Narayan smears the head of a tired Paras Gaj with earth, an action that provides calm reassurance. We had all spent a great deal of time coaxing Paras Gaj to lay down (sut!), and were all happy and relieved once he understood and responded to this vocalisation. Raut Sahib also affectionately pats Paras on the haunch.

As the trainee progresses, becoming increasingly responsive to its *phanet*, then the driving sessions begin to range further afield. Having mastered rural sights, sounds and smells, a decision will be made to take the trainee into town, the final stage of its driving training. This is because government elephants have to be trained to tolerate

the sights, sounds and smells of the city, with all its traffic and hustle and bustle. The sight of an elephant in the midst of being trained is an unusual sight and always attracts a crowd of curious onlookers (see figure 5.19).



Figure 5.19: Paras Gaj and his entourage attract a crowd of curious onlookers at Tadi Bazaar, about 10 miles from Khorsor.

5.6.5 Night Time Training

Whereas daytime training only requires a select few, nighttime training is a truly collective event for all *hattisares*. Each night, as the dark closes in, the handlers congregate around the trainee elephant, armed with burning torches, and begin to sing (see figure 5.20). These sessions always begin and end with devotional songs, and usually last for about 40 minutes. However, in between these songs, the men all have fun singing songs of a very lewd character, usually involving female genitalia. Just as rites of passage often involve ritual humiliation, so too they often permit reversals of propriety, and this is evident in a much loved song in which the men sing of having intercourse with the *subba's* wife, which he accepts without offence³¹. This helps to create a festive atmosphere, and whilst singing, the men will also massage the elephant's body so as to desensitise it, to 'take away its ticklishness' as Section Sahib

³¹ Recordings I made of these songs represent a data set worthy of further analysis.

explained to me. On these occasions men will also begin to clamber onto the elephant and will begin to shout commands such as ‘agad!’, whilst simultaneously applying pressure on the elephant to move it forwards as desired by the command.

It seems obvious that these occasions serve to integrate the whole elephant handling community of Khorsor with the training endeavour. The symbolism of conquest that Bloch alludes to also plays out in the night-time training sessions. The practical basis of these ordeals (conditioning the elephant not to fear ordinarily alarming stimuli, including fire, noise, touching and poking all over its body), effects a behavioural transformation. However, these ordeals can also be seen as a symbolic drama of subjugation.

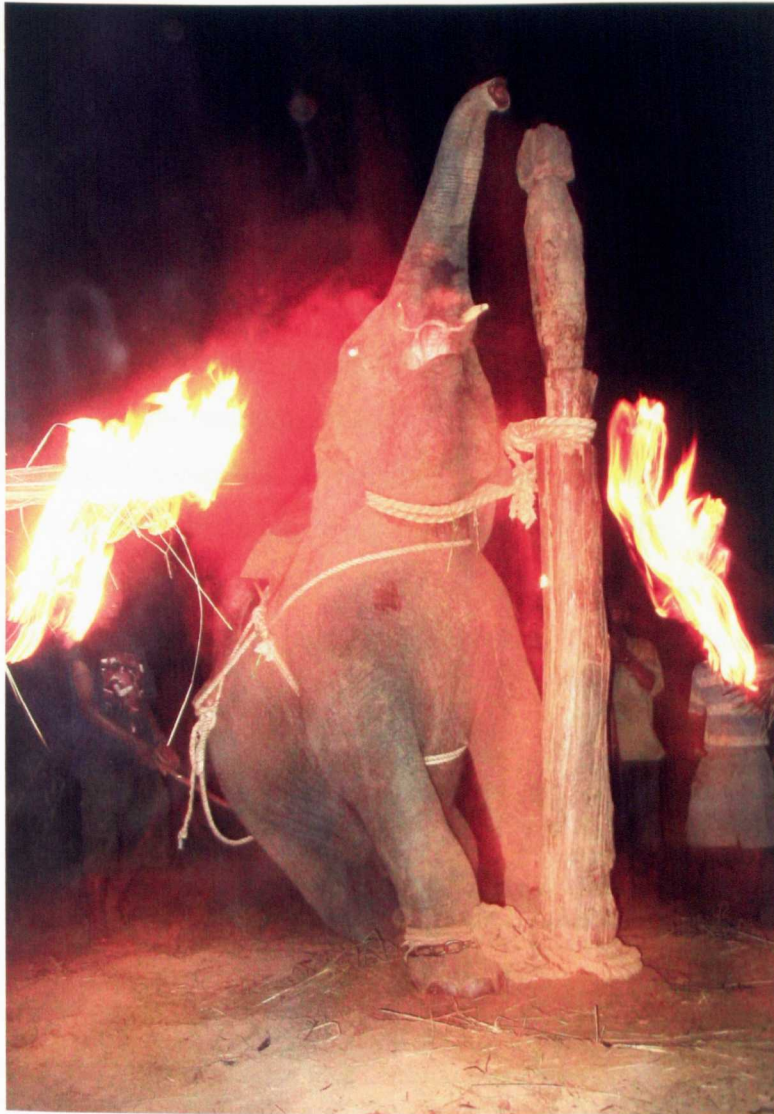


Figure 5.20: Paras Gaj distraught at the waving of fire torches on his first night of training

5.6.6 Duty of Care to the Elephant

The principal trainer, the *phanet* of the trainee, as well as the *raut* and the *adikrit subba*, are all responsible for the wellbeing of the elephant, for which they are subject to several incentives. Firstly and most importantly, elephants are valuable economic commodities owned by their employers, the Department of National Parks, the government, and by tradition also the King, and as such their professional reputations are at stake³². Secondly, one should not discount the fact that every elephant is conceived as being infused with the spirit of *Ganesha*, and that the handlers have therefore effectively taken a solemn vow not to displease the patron god upon whom their livelihood depends. After all, they have petitioned his grace and power to ensure that training goes well, so are in some sense bound by a responsibility to him. If training should go wrong, then it must not be a result of the handlers' own negligence. The validity of this contention is supported by the frequent gestures of obeisance most handlers make to their elephants when they mount them.

Consequently, the *phanet*, *raut*, and *adikrit subba*, in whom ultimate responsibility is vested, are especially vigilant during elephant training. Should the elephant cause itself excessive abrasive injuries during the first few days when it is still strong and struggling against its new restraints, then the neck tether can be removed. It is at the neck that the elephant is capable of creating the most friction³³. The raw wounds are prone to infection and irritation from insects and so the trainee's *mahout* is responsible for boiling up a mixture of water with the fine earth from a termite mound, which once cool, is applied as a paste to the wounds, thereby protecting them from insect attack.

³² Traditionally, elephants were always the property of the King, except by special dispensation, but even in the era of constitutional monarchy, government elephants still seem to be conceived as royal property. The venerable and legendary elephant handler, *Bhagu Tharu*, a man in his 70s, shaped by the attitudes of the pre-democratic era, would regularly talk of the King by use of the term *sarkar*, which means 'government', thereby conflating the two, since in his thinking the King still not only personifies government, but is synonymous with it (and at the time of the research, the King had not yet resumed power as an absolute monarch as he did on February 1 2005, before being subsequently deposed after a month of popular public protest in April 2006). For more on this, see section 3.5 in chapter three.

³³ As we have seen, when *Paras Gaj* was first shackled to his *kamari*, there was great difficulty in securing him by his neck. The knots were insufficient to restrain him at the neck, there were cracks in the old *kamari*, at the notch where neck ropes are secured, leading to worry as to whether the post would be strong enough, and he began to loosen the knots. In November 2005, when Kha Prasad, the son of Sitasma Kali was given training, an abrasive injury to his neck became infected and he subsequently died. Narayani Kali, during her training in January 2004 also received abrasive wounds that became infected and which had to be treated by the vet. These cases serve to demonstrate that training is a risky venture that demands utmost vigilance.

It is a popular myth that elephants have thick skin. Indeed, quite the reverse is true. During training, whilst being driven, elephants have to be taught not to throw dirt over themselves, which they do in order to protect themselves from insect bites. With a rider upon them, thereby precluding application of a protective coating of mud and/or dust, insect bites easily draw blood. A considerate handler must be cognisant of this, and many handlers will consequently occupy themselves by squashing flies with their stick (*kocha*), the flat side of their sickle (*asi* or *hasiya*), or Nepali knife (*khukri*).

5.6.7 The Phanet's Ritual Relation to the Trainee Elephant

The *phanet*, as the principal trainer who will take the greatest risk by riding an elephant not yet habituated to being ridden, differs from the *raut* and *adikrit subba* in his responsibility and relation to the elephant. He has a greater personal investment, since before training begins, he will already have developed a close bond through caring for the young elephant, which should have had its own staff allocated to it from at least the age of two. Training represents something of an ordeal for him as well as for the elephant, and the successful completion of this dangerous endeavour will bring him prestige and respect from his colleagues. Satya Narayan explained that the physical rigours of driving training were exhausting and caused aches and pains in his body, especially his lower back. In addition, the ritual prohibitions he must abide by serve to symbolically bond him to 'his' elephant, placing both the elephant and the trainer in a state of liminality.

For the duration of training, it is said that the *phanet* adopts a state of *sanyas*, or ascetic renunciation. Just as a *samnyasi*, or *sadhu* as they are popularly known, is someone who has abdicated his familial duties (the *asrama*, or life stage of *grhastha*, or householder) in order to work towards achieving *moksa* through the pursuit of *gnan*, (the knowledge of realisation), and the practice of *yoga*, so too during training, the *phanet* must give up many of the practices which signify his participation in everyday life in order to bring himself closer to the divine³⁴.

³⁴ *Samnyasa* is the final stage of the Brahmanic ideal typology of the four *asrama*, or life stages, which along with the four *varna* or classes of society, are the central components in the ideology of *dharma*, a model of and for (cf Geertz 1966), life in the moral order of the cosmos, thus together comprising the *varnasramadharmas*. The stages are as follows: celibate student (*brahmacarya*), householder (*grhastha*), hermit or forest dweller (*vanaprastha*) and renouncer (*samnyasa*) (Flood 1996:62).

He must avoid becoming polluted (*jutho*) by abstaining from meat and alcohol. In order to avoid being polluted, he must take his *dal-bhat* before anyone else has removed food from the cooking pots, and may even consume his meals in isolation³⁵. Furthermore, he must avoid sexual intercourse and any physical contact with women. In fact, the close proximity of women and young girls to trainee elephants and their *kamari* is considered extremely unlucky and they must be prevented from doing so. As Satya Narayan explained to me: “We have to take *sanyas* (live like an ascetic). That's been our tradition (*parampara*) from way back. Whoever's training, they eat first. We have to eat separately so we are not eating anyone's *jutho* (impurity). We have to wash out own dishes and water vessels, because we believe that if we are *jutho* the elephant might get sick. It's an old belief.”

Finally, at the completion of training the principal trainer has to shave his head and wear white. In other words, he has to fulfil the obligations of a chief mourner at a funeral. After all, in Bloch's formulation of the rite of passage, the final stage is conceived as a return to materiality entailing a conquest of the transcendental. Through divine intervention, the trainer has brought the elephant under his control. The funerary symbolism suggests then that the old handler and the old elephant are no more—they have both been transformed, and the handler's novel appearance serves to remind us of the dramatic change that has been effected.

5.7 Conclusion

We cannot be sure about the historical depth of this particular form of elephant training practice, but it seems likely that it developed over the course of at least a few centuries. The procedure is eminently suited to an analysis in terms of rites of passage, perhaps presenting one of the more curious cases in the ethnographic record. Elephant training undoubtedly plays a pivotal role in the reproduction of *hattisare* professional identity in Nepali government stables. It will be interesting to see how Nepali elephant handlers adapt to the WWF's Humane Elephant Training Programme. In theory, their stated aims of reducing the use of punitive training methods could

³⁵ At Khorsor, there is a separate housing quarter known as ‘the *sadhu* house’ at which the non-meat eaters cook and consume their food separate from the others, smoke *chilums*, and where a few of them also reside. Paras Gaj's *phanet* ate his food at the ‘*sadhu* house’ throughout training, although Narayani Kali's *phanet* chose to take his from the main kitchen, albeit ensuring that the food (*khana*) was untouched, and therefore not *jutho*.

interfere with the customary training rituals, its sustaining ideology, and hence also have a possibly negative effect on the community of practice as a basis for enskilment and professional identity formation.

6. Apprenticeship Learning and Handlers' Relationships With Elephants

“New recruits need to ask their seniors how things are done. ‘Tell me how to do this, I don’t know’. Otherwise they won’t learn. No one will tell them. Whatever they know that’s it, they’ll retire with only that knowledge. You need to ask people who know. ‘I don’t know how to climb a tree, teach me’. They’ll tell them you need to do this and this. If all they know is how to cut grass and drive, and that’s it, then that’s no good” - Section Sahib in interview with myself.

6.1 Introduction

This indicates something fundamental about the nature of apprenticeship for government elephant handlers in Nepal-the onus is on the new recruit to take charge of his own learning; he cannot simply expect to be given lessons. Only in the *hattisar*, among his colleagues, and on the job can he hope to acquire the situated, practical and embodied knowledge necessary to drive and manage elephants. Furthermore, Section Sahib’s statement implies that there is more to competency in elephant handling than merely driving and grass cutting, as we shall see. The new recruits’ training is primarily the responsibility of the *subba* of a *hattisar*, since he is in turn responsible to the Department of National Parks, who expect him to ensure that his staff are fit for the tasks the DNPWC demand of them.

In this chapter I consider the respective roles of didactic and experiential learning in a neophyte *hattisare*’s journey towards elephant handling proficiency, including institutional attempts at converting handling skills and practices into standardised guidelines, as well as institutionally organised training programmes (both aspects of the ‘political struggle for institutional hegemony’ that Scott alludes to [1998:311]). Following this, I discuss some of the issues and limitations arising from anthropological approaches to apprenticeship, as well as the anthropologist’s own role as an apprentice. I also explore the imperative for handlers to know their elephants in a very personal sense,

the way they attribute personhood to their elephant companions, and the significance resulting from their understanding of elephants as embodiments of the Hindu deity *Ganesha*. I also go on to consider how participation in elephant handling duties and more generally life in the total institution of the *hattisar*, contributes to the acquisition of skilled knowledge and proficiency, as well as engendering a specific professional identity and hence a stake in the membership of a specific professional subculture.

6.2. Didactic and Experiential Learning

Learning involving expressly didactic modes of instruction does have some limited relevance for government elephant handlers since their particular elephant driving duties are oriented toward their use in a regulated wildlife conservation area. Indeed, a plan for an education programme for handlers has been formulated by the KMTNC ('The Hattisare Conservation Education Programme' Dhakal 2001), which ideally would have also led to the production of an elephant-handling manual. This programme was not conceived to impart the skills necessary to manage elephants, but was rather intended to further integrate handlers with the agendas of park management, to bring about an improved understanding of the ecological impact of their elephants, and to address attitudinal problems believed to be afflicting the profession.

6.2.1 Mahouting Manuals

However, mahouting manuals have already been produced elsewhere. In India, The Elephant Welfare Association (EWA) of Kerala, in conjunction with the Zoo Outreach Organisation (ZOO), has developed a manual of practical guidance for elephant care; "Practical Elephant Management: A Handbook for Mahouts" (Namboodiri [ed] 1997). Similarly, in Thailand, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment with the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has produced "Elephant Care Manual for Mahouts and Elephant Camp Managers" (Phuangkum, Lair and Angkawanith 2005). However, low levels of literacy among Nepali handlers mean that production of a Nepali manual would be of limited utility, at least for the practitioners themselves. Along with the *Gaja Sastra* literature discussed in chapter two, both these manuals represent attempts to inscribe, and

therefore fix, aspects of the knowledge associated with what are predominantly incorporated practices (*cf* Connerton 1989:72-73).

Although the manuals are no substitute for the physicality of habituated, skilled bodily practice that is so intrinsic to apprenticeship as an elephant handler, they do serve as a complement and even a back-up resource for the representational components of elephant handling knowledge that has typically been transmitted amongst handlers orally. As such, they provide a resource for the regulators and employers of elephant handlers, giving them some insight into the knowledge and procedures employed by handlers, and hence also an increased opportunity for control.

6.2.2 Induction Programmes

With regard to explicitly didactic forms of instruction, during my research period the DNPWC put on a brief training programme for new recruits, which functioned primarily as an induction process and as a basis to test the suitability of candidates. Ordinarily, under conditions of adequate funding, such induction programmes would prove neither necessary nor desirable, since recruitment should ideally respond to vacancies, filled as and when additional staff are required. However, according to my elephant handler informants, after several years operating at less than optimal staff levels, many elephants were not being attended by the ideal three-man team. DNPWC resources only recently and rather belatedly permitted the hiring, en masse, of 18 new *mahuts*, for which the induction programme was initiated. The basic outline of the three-day programme is appended below:

Table 4: Induction Programme Inventory**‘Training for Improving Hattisar Management’****First Day****2060/10/06 (VS)**

Time	Programme Title	Resource Person
7.00-7:30am	Breakfast	
7:30-8.00am	Name Registration	
8.00am	Training Starts	
8.00-8:30am	Programme Highlights	M.A.O Mr. Shiva Raj Bhatta (Chief Warden)
8:30-9:30am	Roles of Hattisar	Mr. Bhagaur Tharu (<i>aajivan subba</i>)
9:30-9:45am	Tea Break	
9:45-10:45am	Hattisar Management	Mr. Kale Shrestha (<i>aajivan subba</i>)
10:45-11:45am	Hattisar Management and Regulation	Mr. Bhagaur Tharu ¹ (<i>bhupu hattisare</i>)
11:45-1.00pm	Lunch	
1.00-2.00pm	Upkeep of Elephant	Mr. Bhagaur Tharu (<i>bhupu hattisare</i>)
2.00-3.00pm	Control of Elephant	Mr. Kale Shrestha (<i>aajivan subba</i>)
3.00-4.00pm	Control of Elephant	Mr. Bhagaur Tharu (<i>bhupu hattisare</i>)

M.A.O - Main Assistant Officer

¹ Bhagaur Tharu represents the only remembered instance of a non-authentic *hattisare* being promoted to the position of *subba*, since he was promoted from the position of *khardar*, and thus was never actually an elephant handler, something which the *hattisares* generally disapproved of.

Second Day
2060/10/07 (VS)

8.00-8:30am	Breakfast	
8:30-9:30am	Elephant and Eco-tourism	Mr. Megnath Kafle
9:30-10:30am	Biodiversity Conservation and Elephant Management	
10:30-11:30am	Diseases of Elephant	Mr. Balkrishna Giri (Vet)
11:30-12:30pm	Treatments for Elephant	
12:30-1:30pm	Lunch	
1:30-2:30pm	Monitoring of Elephant and Wildlife Encroachment	Mr. Kamal Ghaire (Chief Vet)
2:30-3:30pm	Translocation of Elephant and Wildlife	
3:30-4:30pm	Elephant and Wildlife Monitoring	Mr. Bishnu Lama (Chief Wildlife Officer, BCC)

Third Day
2060/10/08 (VS)

8:30-9:00am	Breakfast	
9:00-11:00am	Control of poaching and hunting and Elephant	Mr. Kamal Jung Kunwar (Anti- Poaching Officer)
11:00-12:00pm	Elephant grazing / Activities and Tradition of Hattisar	Mr. Amerko P. Chaudhary (<i>nasu subba</i>)
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch	
1:00-2:00pm	Food Habit of Elephant and Breeding Center Management	Mr. Rameshwor P. Chaudhary (<i>adikrit subba</i>)
2:00-4:00pm	Group Discussion, Assessment and	

	Conclusion	
4.00-7.00pm	Dinner Party	

We can see that this induction programme incorporates staff from the two echelons recognised by the elephant handlers, namely that of the *hattisare* who perform practical duties, and their superiors who frequent the offices, utilise their literate skills, and participate in the more administrative aspects of park management, as represented by the briefings given by the Chief Warden, the Anti-Poaching Warden and the departmental vets. This perceived division is integral to the handlers' sense of their own social position within a complex institutional structure. This induction programme thus represented a rare opportunity for the DNPWC to demonstrate to its handlers the complementary and mutually dependent role of each stratum.

The input of elder and retired *hattisare*, sharing the wisdom of their longstanding experience, also served to reinforce a sense of the new handlers as the intended beneficiaries of a transmitted tradition of practical skill and knowledge. In addition to this though, it helped signify their admission to a group of practitioners with their own inclusive sensibility and professional identity, in which the achievements of one's elders warrants recognition and respect. By acknowledging the value it accords to elephant handling tradition, the DNPWC may then be seen to be endorsing the perpetuation of a traditional set of skills that retain their relevance even in the new era of natural resource conservation.

6.2.3 Knowing That and Knowing How

Primarily didactic modes of instruction such as these, depend on linguistic means of imparting knowledge, and result in declarative or propositional forms of knowledge, which the philosopher Gilbert Ryle has termed *knowledge-that*. By contrast, the learning by participation and imitation that is so crucial to apprenticeship as an elephant handler, results in a skills-based knowledge or mastery, which Ryle has termed *knowledge-how* (Crossley 2001:102, see also Ryle 1949:26-60). This is but one of many formulations for

expressing differences between theoretical and practical modes of knowledge. It should be noted that the endeavour of producing an account of elephant handlers' practical and habituated knowledge to some extent entails the transformation of a situated, social knowledge into an abstracted, declarative knowledge. This may also be conceived as the conversion of a performer's knowledge into a form amenable to the manipulations of a critic's consciousness, in other words, of putting an account of non-sentential knowledge into a linguistic medium (Carrithers 1990:272, Bloch 1991:193). Indeed, as Carrithers notes, such a conversion is at the very core of what ethnography aims to achieve, irrespective of its particular topical concerns (1990:272).

But this inclination to discursively represent such a verbally abstruse topic has also blighted attempts at theoretical explanation, forcing us to reconsider what we mean by 'knowledge' and 'understanding', and to clarify the blurred distinctions between both 'practical knowledge' and 'skill', and 'embodied knowledge' and 'habit'. As Connerton remarks: "Embodied experience, of which habitual practices form a significant part, has recently been subjected to a cognitive imperialism and interpreted in terms of a linguistic model of meaning...This is to view understanding as a process in which a sense-datum is subsumed under an idea, and to view the body as an object arbitrarily carrying meanings" (1989:94-95). Like other voices reacting to the explanatory inadequacies of previous approaches, Connerton turns to the phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty to seek an alternative way of understanding bodily knowledge, free of the hegemony of cognitivism. He cites the example of knowing how to type, which contrary to a conventional cognitivist perspective neither entails consciously knowing the place of each letter among the keys, or of acquiring a conditioned reflex for each letter. Instead, Connerton argues that; "we remember this through knowledge bred of familiarity in our lived space", concluding that; "habit is a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body; and in the cultivation of habit it is our body which 'understands'" (1989:95).

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2003), whilst discussing anthropology's current pre-occupation with the study of non-propositional forms of knowledge, has somewhat irreverently remarked on the paradoxical character of such an endeavour, in which

anthropologists are “chattering away endlessly about what goes without saying (so to speak)”! For theorists, this has the virtue that the less one’s ethnographic subjects have developed an interpretive discourse about the knowledge that underlies their skilled and habituated practices, the greater the opportunity for the anthropologist to engage in theoretical flights of fancy! Indeed, as I shall argue, it seems to me that this field of study has yielded a rich descriptive vocabulary, but rather less in the way of substantive methodological and analytic approaches.

It seems that even though anthropologists often acknowledge that fieldwork is a kind of apprenticeship, only occasionally do they express with humility the difficulty of writing about apprenticeship. Simpson, in his research on Gujarati ship-builders, is a rare exception when he bravely admits; “I have found it hard to write about these parallels adequately and honestly, as the boundaries between what I do and do not know about apprenticeship are often impossible to identify” (2006:151). Simpson further notes that despite a wealth of ethnographic studies that attest to the possibilities of non-formal learning, of the significance of ‘embodied knowledge’, and the relationship between apprenticeship and reproduction of the social order, he found himself frustrated by the aims and objectives of this literature, which all too often fulfilled concerns that were only vaguely pertinent to those of his own research, a dilemma with which I feel a great deal of sympathy (2006:152-153).

In my opinion, at times the vocabularies of these studies can even seem to verge toward mere sloganeering. This is almost acknowledged by Lave and Wenger when they concede that their notion of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (their formulation for expressing the process by which neophytes are integrated into communities of specialised practice) amounts to what merely seems to be a rather vaguely defined ‘analytical perspective’ (1991:39). As such, they admit that this set of ideas about parallel skills acquisition and professional identity formation, amount to neither an educational form, nor a pedagogic strategy, or a learning technique. It is not something that can be operationalised, but is rather just a way of understanding and heuristically representing non-propositional learning (Lave & Wenger 1991:40-41).

This paucity of truly explanatory frameworks makes the crafting of ethnographic accounts of skilled practices all the more challenging. A further irony Viveiros de Castro draws our attention to, is the fact that the transmission and circulation of the knowledge that informs practice is highly context-bound, and as such, this provides a distinct contrast to the universalising, and hence context-transcending aspirations of scientific discourse. Perhaps it is the insistence on a distinction between knowledge and practice that lies at the heart of this theoretical quandary, a distinction that compels us to revert to those tiresome dichotomies that separate plans from their execution, the cognised from the operational, and models from reality (see Ingold 2000a:178).

Since formal occasions of didactic instruction play such a minimal role in a Nepali elephant handler's apprenticeship, this chapter is primarily concerned with an account of the apprenticeship process itself, rather than with what little formal teaching is given for the purposes of the deployment of captive elephants for duties in park management (which will be addressed in the subsequent chapter on *hattisares* and their relations with regulatory authorities). This should not be taken to discount the role of on-the-job questioning, as acknowledged in the opening quote from Section Sahib, when he claims; "you need to ask people who know". However, it is typically demonstration in conjunction with explanation that is of greatest utility, as the *phanet* Dil Bahadur Shrestha makes clear when he remarks; "We show them how it's done".

The primary questions this chapter will address then are the closely related questions:

- What does competence in elephant handling entail?
- How does one acquire such competence (specifically in the context of DNPWC and BCC *hattisars*)?

6.3 Apprenticeship as Research Strategy

In light of these brief comments about the differences between discursive and practical forms of knowledge, I had from the very outset resolved to make my own apprenticeship as an elephant handler a central component of my methodological strategy. Of course, ethnographic research has always traditionally claimed for itself the virtues of participant

observation, but as stated in the introductory chapter, it seemed that my research project called for an unusually high degree of participation. Surveying ethnographic studies of apprenticeship learning and practical knowledge, I had found that the anthropologist's own apprenticeship was repeatedly endorsed.

Michael Coy has argued in an edited volume on apprenticeship that although adoption of the role of the apprentice, and hence an approximation of the subjective reality of the insider, may blur the boundary between observer and informant, it may be the only means to gain access to that which cannot be directly taught, to that which cannot be comprehended by observation alone. As such, it becomes a strategy for gaining access to implicit and embodied forms of knowledge; the idea being that through practical experience one will 'get the feel of things for oneself' (1989:112). To my great relief, this was a view shared by my informants, who were at great pains to encourage me to understand elephants for myself by working with them as they did. In fact, I believe that if I had not undertaken an apprenticeship to at least a limited degree, then I would never have achieved a sufficient sense of solidarity with my research informants with which to create a productive working relationship.

Indeed, the work of Jean Lave acknowledges just how crucial participation in a community of practitioners is in contexts of situated learning such as the *hattisar* (Lave and Wenger 1991, Lave 1993). Bourdieu's practice theory has provided the basis for work such as Lave and Wenger's, and his elaboration of the concept of habitus as a system of both acquired and improvisational dispositions (Bourdieu 1977:214) provides justification for my faith in apprenticeship as a useful research strategy. In his account of Pierre Bourdieu's contribution to social theory, Richard Jenkins remarks: "It is not possible to read other minds, but it may be possible to step into other shoes" (1992:50).

6.4 Knowing Your Elephant

As an apprentice handler at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center, my task was very much one of stepping into somebody else's shoes, ones of a design and fit with which I was very unfamiliar. Amongst a plethora of tasks and topics with which I needed to

become both familiar and competent, one key challenge was getting personally acquainted with the elephant to which Section Sahib had allocated me to apprentice on. This was a 20-year-old female called Sitasma Kali, originally acquired from Thailand, who was always accompanied by her two-year old son Kha Prasad, and who was chosen for me on the basis of her especially calm and obedient temperament². I was told that I was being given an ‘easy’ elephant, which seemed entirely appropriate since I was not only a novice, but also an outsider not yet fully conversant with the predominantly Tharu tenor of *hattisar* life.

Getting to know Sitasma Kali also entailed getting to know how she was socially integrated with the other elephants at the stable, in other words; what place she occupied in the intra-elephant portion of this symbiotic social domain of humans and animals. Although the elephant demographics of a *hattisar* entail humanly-controlled group selection and formation (elephants allocated to locations primarily according to criteria of utility rather than consideration for their social integration) which mitigate against the development of natural herd structures, there are nonetheless communities of interacting elephants, whose dispositions towards each other comprise an essential component of the practical knowledge a handler must acquire³.

So when I took Sitasma Kali grazing for example, I knew that I should avoid approaching Lakshmi Kali, since these elephants were not on cordial terms with each other and had previously fought (one could even make out on Sitasma Kali’s haunch the site of an old

² Kha Prasad was separated from his mother and subjected to the procedures of training in November 2005, but sadly died as a result of a neck injury that failed to respond to medical treatment (*Lama pers comm.*). I have no doubt that the loss of Kha Prasad would have been especially traumatic for his *phanet* Ratan Lal as well as the Khorsor community in general, just as Ram Bahadur admitted to crying when his prestigious male Sher Prasad died from injuries received after an attack from a wild male at the Sauraha *hattisar*.

³ The rehabilitative Pinnawela Elephant Orphange in Sri Lanka is distinctive for its mode of management that keeps its elephants in a state intermediate between wild and captive. Mahouts care for the elephants, but they do not ride them, and the elephants graze freely in a collective group. As a consequence, despite the capricious manner by which the population is constituted, they come close to mimicking natural herd structures with a social hierarchy headed by mature and experienced matriarchs and a support network of allomothers. Furthermore, these are not expressly kept as working elephants, so the contrast with a Nepali *hattisar* is marked.

wound acquired after receiving a goring from Laxmi Kali)⁴. This was just the type of knowledge I picked up whilst chatting with my mentors, and for which there was ample opportunity whilst out grazing, making *dana*, and relaxing between work and meals, what is commonly referred to as ‘time pass’ throughout Nepal and India. The handlers understood that this kind of biographical information about elephants was essential for ensuring that I made prudent decisions whilst in charge of Sitasma out in the jungle grazing with the group.

Although most elephants at the stable would allow any member of staff to approach them, there were a few renowned for having fractious temperaments, and one had to be especially circumspect in approaching them, as I myself learnt firsthand through my own foolishness. I already knew that five years previously Puja Kali had been responsible for the death of her *mahut*. It was said that he had been somewhat negligent, having apparently fallen asleep on her back and then slipped off the elephant, who then trampled him (it is not uncommon for handlers to acquire the knack of sleeping on their elephants’ backs, especially in the case of elephants that cannot be trusted to graze without their rider, as is the case with males like Birendra Prasad)⁵. It should be stressed that it was considered more of a tragic accident than an act of malice on the part of Puja Kali, but nonetheless I was cautioned about her unpredictability.

One morning, having just greeted Sitasma, I walked close to Puja Kali tethered at her post under the corrugated tin roof of her stable. To my surprise, I received a swift swipe from her trunk. I was quite shocked by the obvious ease with which she had managed to knock the wind out of me. The speed with which she had charged forward and the

⁴ Hart also reports a case of a Nepali elephant who had a dislike for two other particular elephants, whom she would hit if given the chance (2005). This was an elephant called Chanchal Kali, a different one however than the Chanchal Kali at the BCC and the government’s *sano* (small) and *thulo* (large, implying relativity of age rather than size) Chanchal Kalis. Hart also cites the case of an elephant called Ratan Kali who hated all but two of the other elephants in her group. Both these elephants were from either the stable of the Chitwan Jungle Lodge or Gaida Wildlife Camp.

⁵ Occasionally, as we have seen in the discussion of *dana* in chapter four, an elephant will take a leave of absence from its handler (which we jokingly refer to as ‘*jangali bida*’ or ‘jungle holiday’; an implicit acknowledgement that even after training, elephants retain the natural urge to sojourn in their natural habitat, away from man). But, as we have also seen, this is rarely a cause for concern as the elephant’s routine and its preference for *dana* almost always serves to pull it back to the *hattisar* by nightfall.

accuracy with which she wielded her trunk provided an object lesson in the fierce potential that resided within her ordinarily docile manner. I was already familiar with the stealth by which an elephant can move through jungle, but had not realised that these skills could be used to such a cunning and violent effect. Never again did I approach an elephant unless I was sure of its disposition toward me, and always cognisant of which other elephant's scent I carried with me.

Events like this gave me cause to wonder how the elephants understand us as well as how we understand them. I knew for example, that elephants have poor eyesight and that it is one's smell that an elephant will use to identify you⁶. So when Sitasma Kali probed me with her trunk I knew she was engaging in an act of recognition, one that I also took as a greeting⁷. Sitasma always engaged with me by means of this procedure of greeting more thoroughly than the other elephants would (since I did not regularly drive them, they had less cause to). Such social behaviour also lent support to the handlers' conviction that elephants are best treated by thinking of them as persons, a view also being increasingly accepted in professional discourse on the implications of animal sentience for welfare issues (see the appendix two; 'Humanist and Scientific Approaches to The Personhood of Elephants and Their Ethical Implications' and also Fuentes 2006 and Varner 2007).

No other elephant had developed such an intimate relationship with me as Sitasma had, and I could not avoid reading her probing as an act of affection. It also seemed to affirm a bond of trust between us since she could easily pick me up and violently cast me aside with her powerful trunk if she so wished. I was knowingly submitting myself to her as if there was an unspoken social contract between us. One further implication of this was

⁶ Similarly, Vitebsky tells us that domesticated reindeer distinguish people primarily by smell. According to his Siberian Eveny informants, unlike elephants, reindeer only sometimes learn to recognise their own name. Furthermore, one of his informants notes that *uchakh*, those reindeer that have been trained to be ridden, know their own riders well, and that if several people ride them, then they will be spoiled and might mutiny (Vitebsky 2005:161). It should be clear from my own discussion that in Nepal, there has traditionally also been a preference for continuity in the elephant-handler partnership. However, for reasons of flexibility in human resource management, the Temple Tiger safari lodge has pioneered a novel approach in its *hattisar* whereby all the handlers drive all the elephants on a rotating basis (Mishra *pers comm.*).

⁷ Hart also reports how two Nepali handlers explained that their elephants would demonstrate their bond of loving trust by their intimate trunk greeting (2005).

that I was marked by scent as Sitasma Kali's handler, and it was suggested that Puja Kali's knowledge of this might have provoked her violent response towards me (Sitasma and Puja were not close grazing partners).

My experience in becoming Sitasma Kali's 'person' (just as she was 'my' elephant), and the way that this acquired status affected my interactions with Lakshmi Kali and Puja Kali, reveals the extent to which 'knowing' in the personal sense, is a crucial component of the 'knowledge' one must acquire in order to become a competent handler. Tim Ingold's remarks on the importance subsistence hunters attach to knowledge and its acquisition are also pertinent to Nepali elephant handlers: "This is not knowledge in the natural scientific sense, of things and how they work. It is rather as we would speak of it in relation to persons: to 'know' someone is to be in a position to approach him directly with a fair expectation of the likely response, to be familiar with that person's past history and sensible to his tastes, moods and idiosyncrasies. You get to know other human persons by sharing with them, that is by experiencing their companionship" (2000:72).

In J M Coetzee's third Tanner lecture, in which he embeds a philosophical disquisition within the utterances of his fictional protagonist Elisabeth Costello, she engages a philosopher in a debate on animal rights, yet proves unwilling to refute Thomas Aquinas' claim that friendship between humans and animals is impossible. The primatologist Barbara Smuts, in her reflections on Coetzee's 'Lives of Animals' lectures, is surprised by Costello's (and perhaps therefore also Coetzee's) silence on this matter, and argues for the validity of her personal experience of companionship with animals, understood as an interaction between persons, therefore claiming that 'person' need not be restricted merely to its use as a synonym for an individuated human (in Gutmann [ed] 1999:107-8). Similarly, a conception of non-human personhood is also utilised by Nepali elephant handlers to make their social interaction with elephants meaningful. If I am permitted the luxury of an analytic reification, then I would argue that to the extent that I was able to acquire the dispositions and schemas comprising the group habitus of Nepali elephant handlers, then I too incorporated this mode of engagement in my daily practice of living with elephants.

Considering the importance of the handlers' sustained companionship with their elephants, it came as no surprise to me then when Bukh Lal, the *patchuwa* of the occasionally *badmash* (or 'naughty') male Birendra Prasad, explained: "We know our elephants better than our own families. I understand my elephant's every quirk and habit. I live with him every day, but I only see my family for a few days at a time, on a few occasions each year!"

Further to this issue of personal knowing, throughout the *hattisar*, not only is one known according to which elephant one works with, but the affiliation of specific men with specific elephants also contributes to a practitioners' sense of professional identity and reputation amongst his colleagues. One's own reputation is tied to that of one's elephant, of whether one has an 'easy' elephant or a 'difficult' elephant, how one has distinguished oneself in responding to the extent of the challenge one accordingly faces, as well as the degree of commitment one demonstrates. This then raises the issue of how participation in a community of practice is also intimately bound up with the formation of one's identity and reputation (see Wenger 1998).

6.5 Learning to Drive

The growing familiarity and trust between myself and Sitasma Kali, as well as her handlers, especially *phanet* Ram Ekval, were a crucial foundation for me to make the transition from merely accompanying Sitasma and her handlers, to actually attempting to drive her for myself. On numerous occasions I had ridden with Sitasma for grass-cutting and grazing merely as a passenger, but after a while we agreed that I should take the driving seat and try to make her respond to my command. Before I could attempt to take control of her for myself I needed not only her trust and familiarity, but also to acquire confidence in my own bodily comportment around elephants such as Sitasma. After a few weeks I had grown accustomed to crossing rivers, to clambering up and down river banks, and to walking through dense forested foliage. This growing confidence meant that I no longer had to put such conscious effort into clinging on. My body seemed to

have 'learnt' the rhythm and tempo of riding on an elephant, and responded accordingly. I was acquiring a bodily proficiency.

Like Connerton, as previously mentioned, Sheets-Johnstone (2000) seeks recourse to the ideas of Merleau-Ponty in order to illuminate the acquisition of practical skill, and her ideas seem pertinent to some of the very fundamental aspects of an elephant handler's skill, specifically the ability to ride his elephant and to manoeuvre himself upon it with confident ease (see figure 6.1). Since Merleau-Ponty noted that such skills find their basis in habituated bodily dispositions, which are autonomous in character and anonymously acquired, Sheets-Johnstone finds cause to seek the basis of apprenticeship learning in ontogeny, specifically focusing on the fundamental infant social interactions of joint attention, imitation and turn-taking (2000:343-344). She argues that each of these interactive modalities can contribute to the acquisition of discerning bodily capabilities, precisely the faculties acquired by apprentice elephant handlers (including myself) in learning to drive.



Figure 6.1: Patchuwa Aite Ram comports himself upon Chitwan Kali with confident ease as he lets her bathe

Bourdieu discusses this same topic of learned bodily disposition by reference to the Greek term 'hexis', which he defines as a pattern of postures, rooted in our motor functions, linked to a system of practical techniques, inflected with specific social meanings and values, which are acquired through imitation (1977:87). This 'body schema', as an acquired sense of bodily proxemics, can be applied not only to the subconscious proficiency at typing that Connerton cites, but also to the way in which handlers incorporate a sense of their elephants bodies when driving, and thus a confidence in manoeuvring upon them. This is such that the elephant's body almost becomes an extension of their own, enabling them to make discerning evaluations regarding its displacement and their need to respond accordingly so as to maintain their balance. In my own apprenticeship joint attention, imitation and turn-taking were important in that my handler teacher and I, while riding together, had to mutually observe and synchronically adjust to each other upon the elephant.

Whilst seated behind my teacher, I closely observed his posture as he drove, and the way he applied his toes to the elephant's ears and the way the elephant responded. Then we would swap positions and I would take my turn, attempting to replicate his actions. When I made errors in the way I physically comported myself I would receive admonishments, and when I made progress I would receive compliments. But in addition to this, my teacher would sometimes manipulate my body into the correct positions, pulling at my shoulders to adjust my posture, pushing my bottom so that I adopted an appropriate position, and even reaching down to make me place my feet and exert pressure in appropriate ways. Now more than ever I felt like I was authentically participating in a community of practice.

6.6 Participating in a Community of Practice

Despite my status as an outsider with a foreign cultural background that had therefore inculcated my attitudes toward animals through different experiences, it was evident that my attitudes to Sitasma Kali were not atypical, and seemed to result from my participation in a community of practice as much as from my own prior sentiments in

relation to elephants⁸. I could readily observe the same trust, affection and manner of engagement in the relations between the Nepali handlers and their elephants. They did not conceive of their relationship primarily as one of domination, of merely forcing the elephant to submit to their will, so much as one of mutual trust, even of a symbiotic accommodation to each other's needs. Not only was the human-elephant relationship I observed intensely social, but so was the way in which *hattisares* learn with their elephants and amongst their colleagues.

Participating in a community of practice implies a social perspective on learning. Wenger is primarily concerned with the way in which social participation is a process of learning. This leads to an initial inventory of four components to a social theory of learning:

1. Meaning- learning as experience. "A way of talking about our (changing) ability- individually and collectively- to experience our life and the world as meaningful" (1998:5).
2. Practice- learning as doing. "A way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action" (1998:5).
3. Community- learning as belonging. "A way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence" (1998:5).
4. Identity- learning as becoming. "A way of talking about how learning changes and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities" (1998:5).

This should be evident in the previous section where I recount my acquired ability to drive an elephant. A sense of triumph was derived not just from this acquired mastery, but also in the knowledge that I was effectively interacting with an elephant, and was

⁸ Consider again the comments from the introduction about apprenticeship as a research strategy: "The fieldworker, by becoming immersed in joint action with fellow practitioners in a shared environment is able to experience the components of the environment as they do, not because he/she has learned to construct them in his/her mind according to the same categorical conventions, but because he/she has learned to attend to them in the same way according to what those components afford in their respective situational context" (Ingold in Palsson [ed] 1993:222).

only able to do so by virtue of the relationship I had developed with her as well as with my *hattisare* colleagues. I was interested in the contrasts between mine and their experiences in the progressive acquisition of elephant handling mastery, always cognisant that I remained a novice and would never progress much further (since my time with the elephants and the handlers would be limited). The experience of learning was meaningful for me in ways not entirely dissimilar to the ways it was for the other novices. The *hattisares* were people with whom I was engaging less as an outsider and more as someone who belonged to their specialised world (and their comments seemed to confirm their changing estimation of me and my place in their world). I was no longer experiencing myself just as an anthropologist, but also as a *hattisare*, and my motivation to share in their work-talk (topics such as the exploits of handlers and the changing temperaments of elephants) was not the purely mercenary one of the data-hungry researcher.

6.7 Appropriate Attitudes Towards Elephants and The Attribution of Personhood

As I was repeatedly told, ‘elephants are just like people’ (*hatti manchelai jasto pani ho*). Handlers would always stress both their material dependency upon the elephants for their livelihood, as well as the need to be able to empathise with their elephants, of being able to read their mood and act accordingly. They were also keen to explain to me that the exercise of punitive force had to be tempered by acts of affection and generosity, and that those whose practice lacked the appropriate balance between punishment and reward (what they call ‘giving trust’ or *bishwas dine*), could face dire consequences. Wenger’s third and fourth components of learning as a process of belonging and of becoming are evident here in that the peer pressure to conform to standard attitudes and practices were clearly marked. Other handlers’ perceptions impinge heavily on evaluations of one’s prowess and prudence, and hence on one’s standing within the community of practitioners.

6.7.1 Elephant Handling, Manliness and Bravado

This helped me to realise what kind of attitude is considered appropriate in working with elephants, serving to rectify my naïve and romantic notion that elephant handling might

prove to be a domain in which one's prowess in mastering potentially dangerous animals could make one a hero. If this had ever been the case, I came to realise that such notions primarily derived from an orientalist literature that admired native mahouts in the course of celebrating the exploits of 'great white hunters' during the Raj (see Lahiri-Choudhury 1999). Now that I found myself living the daily routine of an elephant handler, the mundane reality was far more salient to me than those occasional peak experiences that would provide 'profitable' anecdotes, the telling of which might 'earn' one kudos (or the accumulation of cultural capital).

Some informants did claim that there is a degree of prestige to be had from working with males, since they provide opportunities to participate in special events, called *mahatsabh* (but pronounced in the handlers' Tharu-inflected Nepali dialect as *mashap*). For example, on one occasion during my stay at Khorsor, *patchuwa* Bukh Lal had the opportunity to drive Birendra Prasad into the town of Narayanghat to participate in a parade promoting and celebrating an anti-tuberculosis healthcare initiative. This was a much-appreciated break from routine during which the crowds admired the sacred majesty of the elephant, buoying Bukh Lal's spirits by making him feel that he was discharging a privileged duty⁹. Similarly, as we have previously seen, Bhagu's experiences driving for royalty have given him a formidable reputation from which he continues to profit (in both material and symbolic ways).

In addition to the opportunities provided due to the special value accorded to males, informants also mentioned the added challenge presented by musth (*mada* in Nepali)- a condition that occasionally affects males, in which the temporal glands on their foreheads secrete a sweet, honey-smelling liquid, typically characterised by a heightened sexual drive (visibly evident by the frequency of penile erection), and during which they exhibit dangerous and unpredictable behaviour¹⁰. Nonetheless, despite the degree of domination

⁹ Similarly, in relation to mahouts in Karnataka, South India, Hart remarks: "Mahouts still speak with great pride about appearing on their bull elephants in full regalia for processions" (2005).

¹⁰ This preference for using males for ceremonial occasions is not limited to Nepal. In Kerala, South India for instance, wealthy temples like Guruvayur, maintain stables exclusively housing male, tusker elephants, which are utilised in religious festivals and processions, both Hindu and Christian. Incidentally, the Nepali word for honey (*maha*) is surprisingly similar to the term for musth (*mada*).

the handler-elephant dynamic undeniably entails, there is no evidence of 'machismo' as one might expect¹¹. Whilst Garry Marvin describes the Andalusian bullfight as a public spectacle in which the bullfighter, by attempting to demonstrate his supremacy, epitomises esteemed qualities of manliness that include courage, dominance, control and assertiveness (1988:145), the challenges facing the Nepali elephant handler are not conceived in such a way as to afford similar opportunities to demonstrate one's manliness. Despite some similar dangers and the occasional need for bravery, the case of Nepali elephant handling, with the calm and reverential attitude displayed by the handlers provides a distinctly contrastive counterpoint.

Handlers' practices afford little or no opportunity to profit from one's achievements in controlling a potentially dangerous elephant- that is something only occasionally celebrated in the private lore of handlers. It is only the accounts of but a few remaining elders recalling the prior era of *shikar* and of capture and training from the wild, that suggests a time when Nepali elephant handling could bring one something close to fame, fortune and prestige, but again, not in terms of an idiom of manliness (see Bhagu's reminiscences in chapter three). It is true that managing an elephant in musth requires skill, bravery and expert judgement, but the boastful attitude of laying claim to male potency suggested by 'machismo' seems thoroughly alien and inappropriate to the practice and ethos of the Nepali *hattisares*.

In my experience, only a few men on a few occasions exhibited bragging behaviour, and even then it was only manifest in a state of drunken intoxication. In such a situation, a handler's boasting breeds disharmony within the community of *hattisares*, is met with silent disapproval, and will only serve to damage his reputation. In fact, an excessive appetite for alcohol is widely considered an undesirable habit in handlers, both amongst

¹¹ In using this term, I am referring to its demotic usage in English as a Hispanic-derived term that feminist ideologues have succeeded in infusing with the negative connotation of a brazen and unduly demonstrative assertion of masculine pride and dominance, often at the expense of female autonomy, a set of connotations absent in Cuba and Mexico for instance, (Corbin, *pers comm.* Gutmann 1996). Indeed, in such Hispanic contexts 'machismo' refers to those aspects of masculinity that are believed to derive from male physiology, specifically expressed through the idiom of 'having balls' and the ability to control one's 'animalistic' urges (Corbin 1978 in Marvin 1988:144).

hattisares and their employers. As *Subba Amerko Prasad Chaudhary* of the Sauraha and latterly Bardia *sarkari hattisars* put it: “If you cannot control yourself, how will you control your elephant?” Control of one’s elephant then is considered a measure of one’s skill and experience in a way that is not expressly associated with gendered notions of power, but which is connected to the way one comports one’s self.

Indeed, unusual as it may traditionally be, India’s most renowned contemporary elephant trainer is a woman; *Parbati Barua*, the subject of *Mark Shand’s* book “Queen of the Elephants” (1996)¹². Her skill and experience have won her respect in India, and outweigh the prejudices against women working with elephants, even if this remains a job associated with men. In Nepal, this is evident in the idea that the presence of women during elephant training may bring bad-luck. Women could be menstruating, which is polluting (*jutho*) at a time when the maintenance of purity is crucial to the success of training, since this liminal phase for elephants and handlers alike makes it especially important not to anger the deities (see chapter five).

In discussions of fatal incidents involving handlers and their elephants (thankfully rare according to recent Nepali records), there is a much greater readiness to put the blame on a handler’s negligent attitude, on their excessive use of physical admonishment, rather than on condemning an elephant as irredeemably bad. Behaviour akin to ‘macho arrogance’ does not then make for a good handler. As already intimated, those few whose use of the stick (*kocha*) is deemed excessive will be condemned as bad handlers, both disrespectful to and ignorant of their elephant (with whom, as we have seen, one ought to develop a bond of trust and empathic understanding).

6.7.2 Cooperation and Respect Rather Than Domination

Hattisares would frequently emphasise that although conditioned to a routine imposed by man, the elephant’s compliance must be secured by winning its cooperation. Obvious as it may be, one should not forget that elephants are stronger than man and cannot be

¹² Her surname, ‘Barua’, was traditionally given to elephant overseers as an honorary title by the Ahom kings of Assam.

beaten into submission, a fact that many of the handlers, out of a concern for my progress as an apprentice, never tired of reminding me. Consequently, those aspects of elephant handling practice which do provide opportunities to emphasise one's manly prowess are underplayed in favour of the far more significant cultural attitudes of respect and veneration for the elephant as the embodiment of *Ganesha*.

The sociocentric way in which handlers incorporate elephants into their lifeworld raises the issue of why this research on human-animal working relationships required such a particularly active form of participant observation. By realising that elephants as well as humans comprised my research subjects, it also presents a challenge to some of the preconceptions implicit in ethnographic fieldwork. In so doing, it raises questions about the anthropology of personhood, whilst also serving to make salient some of the problems inherent in the conceptual architecture of modernist epistemology that distinguishes nature from culture and hence natural from social science.

6.7.3 Epistemological and Methodological Implications of Elephant Personhood

In my research, I found that the typically western nature-culture dichotomy as embodied by the human/animal distinction was relevant for understanding the environmental managerialism of the park authorities. Formulated in Kathmandu offices under the influence of the research and policy-making practices of INGOs, conservation policy is influenced by the 'western' environmental and developmental discourses on 'participatory conservation' and 'sustainable development' in which the natural environment, as a 'pristine' place, supposedly untouched by human intervention, is conceived according to the utilitarian imperatives of nature as both a resource to be conserved and a commodity to be exploited, a balance between which must be sought. This stance in respect to human-environment relations conforms to the second in Gísli Pálsson's threefold typology, namely that of 'paternalism', in which humans conceive of themselves as the masters of nature, which it is their responsibility to protect, a corrective to the similar stance of 'orientalism' in which humans again conceive of themselves as the masters of nature, but consider it theirs to exploit (1996:63-81). However, this conceptual rupture between natural and human domains was of little relevance for the

elephant handlers, for whom nature had not been stripped of its sacred character, and for whom only a weaker distinction between wild and socialised was evident (placing them, in Pálsson's terms within the third stance of 'communalism', in which humans reject a radical distinction between nature and society, and between science and practical knowledge)¹³. Whilst this wild/socialised distinction could be inferred, a more thoroughly elaborated opposition between nature and culture could not. Indeed as I shall argue, the ontological co-ordinates of the elephant handlers' cosmology suggest continuum and ambiguity rather than rupture with regard to the conceptualisation of relations between the various orders and modalities of life.

With regard to methodology, one of the disciplinary outcomes of dualist epistemology is that it separates the domains of natural and social science, ideally pursued by practitioners trained in specialisations from one field or the other. According to this logic (and I recognise that what follows is something of a crudely essentialised caricature in which ethology is deployed as little more than a rhetorical foil), humans should be studied by social scientists, perhaps by means of the distinctively ethnographic approach of participant observation, with its interactionist ethos. In contrast, animals should thus be studied by natural scientists, perhaps by means of the distinctively observational approach of ethology, with its positivist ethos¹⁴.

However, in my research it was not only the handlers but also the elephants who comprised my ethnographic subjects. Neither myself nor my informants, aspects of whose habitus I believe I had acquired in the process of participating in their community

¹³ 'Western' is of course problematic as a generalising category and cannot be definitively mapped. Therefore, following Bowman (1997), I would suggest its use as a shorthand to mark out the thought of those communities "which invested their identities in projects of inflicting a particular conception of 'truth' born out of a melding of Platonic philosophy, Judaic metaphysics and the *realpolitik*s of the collapsing Roman Empire not only on 'unenlightened' members of their own societies but also upon the rest of the world". Typically then, when we invoke the West in its adjectival form we are referring to an epistemological hegemony which the loosely defined intellectual shift known as 'post-modernism' has dedicated itself to deconstructing. Similarly, the category of 'nature' has also been subject to critical deconstruction (see Ellen 1996, Descola & Pálsson [eds] 1996, Horigan 1988).

¹⁴ The discipline of Ethology was initially defined by its practice of observing animals in their respective environments, but over time its burgeoning range of concepts and modalities of practice have made it less distinct from the neighbouring disciplines of comparative psychology, neurophysiology as well as the experimental study of animal behaviour (Harre and Lamb 1986:45).

of practice (see Bourdieu 1977, 1990 and Crossley 2001), understood our elephants according to the observational and ideally disinterested dictates of ethology, but rather from something akin to an anthropomorphic perspective¹⁵. This then served to blur the dichotomized boundary of animal and human, and thus of nature and culture, and thereby also reconfirmed the outmoded dogma of differentiating topics according to whether they are most appropriate to either natural or social science¹⁶.

Handlers engaged with elephants as intentional agents possessed of personhood and biography (see Carrithers *et al* 1985), and I had to engage with the symbiotic relation between handler and elephant by means of a unitary methodology. So I could not utilize one approach for elephants and another for humans. I did not learn about elephants just by observing them, but by interacting with them and developing intensive relationships, just as one does in classic participant observation with humans (by participating in the handlers' community of practice I incorporated some of the habits and dispositions of their group habitus, see Bourdieu 1977, 1990, Descola & Palsson 1996:6, Lave 1993, Wenger 1998). These elephants, though neither fully tame nor domesticated in a technical sense (see Lair 1997:3, Clutton-Brock 1987:1 and discussion in section 1.7 of chapter one), were nonetheless socialised. So they could not be observed as 'wild' animals behaving as they would in their 'natural' habitat, thereby making the ethological method inapplicable¹⁷.

¹⁵ Positivists might claim that such anthropocentric projections are merely indicative of a non-scientific folk conception of nature. However, Ellen reminds us that knowledge of nature can never be independent of our relations with it (1996:12). Therefore we must realise that even the supposedly value-free objectivist account of an exogenous nature characteristic of modernist epistemology is itself the product of an intellectual and practical history of engagement, which is also infused by cosmological notions (see Horigan 1988).

¹⁶ Indeed, in my own academic department, one of the justifications for Anthropologists 'co-habiting' with Conservation Biologists has been that nature conservation cannot ignore people, and that social science methods should therefore be as important as those from the natural sciences (epitomised in the slogan of 'participatory conservation').

¹⁷ However, it is also worth noting that even when natural scientists are engaged in observational studies of wild mammals in natural environments, they frequently develop such an emotional commitment to and concern for their subjects that they too will talk about them in anthropocentric terms. Isenberg notes that American "wolf biologists invested the animals they studied with personalities; they followed matings and pack formations like a soap opera" (2002:59). This is testament to the fact that it is not just popular televisual representations of wildlife, but also professional scientists during the course of ethological fieldwork, who make human sociocentric projections.

6.7.4 A Sociocentric Conception of Nature

Having noted that handlers tend to emphasise cooperation rather than domination when speaking of the way they relate to their elephants, and noted how they attribute personhood to them, I have also intimated a schism between the park authorities' officially dualistic conception of the natural environment, and the handlers' sociocentric conception. This relates to a distinction made by Philippe Descola (1992 & 1996:82-102). He noted that all conceptualisations of the environment share the common feature of being predicated by reference to the human domain, from which emerge two very general possibilities: 1. Sociocentric models ("When social categories and relations are used as a kind of mental template for the ordering of the cosmos"). 2. Dualistic models ("Where nature is defined negatively as that ordered part of reality which exists independently of human action") (1996:85-86). As we have seen, both of these countervailing perspectives on nature are at play in the management of the Royal Chitwan National Park, with the park authorities operating within a dualist epistemology of nature, and the elephant handlers a sociocentric one.

With regard to the handlers' own conception, we must remember that in Hindu cosmology, the world is the body of god rather than a creation separate from a divine principle, and that consequently Hindu ontology posits a permeability between the conditions of animality, humanity and godhood since they all partake in the divinity immanent within a material and transcendental reality (see chapter five and Fuller 1979). This is evident in the way that handlers relate to their elephants and speak about the Hindu and Tharu deities of significance to them as elephant handlers. The primary implication this has for the handlers' relationship with elephants, which are considered sacred representatives of the god *Ganesha*, is that they simultaneously act as the master of an animal whilst also acting as servant to the god inherent within it. With regard to the jungle, this is the domain of *Ban Devi*, a fierce Tantric goddess whose potential wrath has to be appeased, just as the goodwill of *Ganesha* has to be petitioned by conducting sacrificial rituals. Only if *Ganesha*, *Ban Devi*, and *Bikram Baba*, the local God in whose territory the handlers and myself operated, are propitiated in the right way can one's safety be assured and misfortune averted.

6.7.5 Animal Personhood

It should be clear then that this non-dual, sociocentric conception of nature, in recognizing a continuum between the wild and the socialized, which provides a rationale for the symbiotic conception of relations between man, elephant and jungle, also has implications for the way in which *hattisares* attribute values of personhood to their elephants. Following the 'ethnology' approach of McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden (1977, see also Mines 1988), it can be argued that as the living embodiments of *Ganesha*, elephants contain something of the god's divine substance. Inhering within this substance are some of the qualities of this theriomorphic god, who as the son of *Shiva*, is subject to familial obligations and social imperatives just as humans are. It is my contention that these notions, implicit in elephant handlers' thought and ritual practice, helps us understand why 'elephants are people too'.

Although this only provides an ideological, and hence normative basis for the attribution of personhood (see Mines 1988:570), I found ample supporting evidence to suggest that ideas akin to the ethnological notion of 'coded-substance' were integral to the elephant handlers' thought. For example, when performing a ritual (*puja*) to ensure *Ganesha*'s goodwill, and appease *Ban Devi*'s wrath, Section Sahib, as the chief elephant handler at Khorsor, would tell me that it was important to ingest the consecrated leftovers (*prasada*) from the sacrificial offering, since it contains the impurities (*jutho*) of the gods (*deva*), and hence also its inhering qualities of divine power. Human impurities comprise unwanted and defiling bodily products such as hair and nail-clippings, and those who perform jobs concerned with their extraction have consequently been defined as unclean (the ritual and ideological basis for untouchability). However, since Gods occupy a superior position within the hierarchy of the cycle of life (*samsara*), not subject to the same vicissitudes of life as ordinary mortals, it follows that the substances they discard (the consecrated leftovers or *prasada*) will contain some of the god's qualities of divine power, which will thereby help to ensure one's safety and protection.

It would seem then that at least one reason why ‘elephants are people too’ is that they are the earthly representatives of *Ganesha*, a god who is conceived in anthropocentric terms. However, I believe that such an ideological explanation is not exhaustive and sufficient in itself. The practical efficacy deriving from the projection of personhood also deserves attention, and one cannot discount the brute fact of the sheer intimacy of the relations between handler and elephant. Handlers repeatedly emphasize the phenomenal commitment they have to make to their elephants. I was regularly reminded that ‘this is a twenty-four hour job’, and that ‘we know our elephants better than our own families’, since ‘we live with our elephants all year round, but only get to visit our families once or twice a year’.

6.8 Conclusion

This treatment of apprenticeship has by no means been exhaustive, instead choosing to focus on *hattisares*’ relationship with elephants. Indeed, there are many other topics worthy of consideration. For example, Schank and Abelson’s ideas about scripts (1977) could be very useful for developing an account of handlers’ habituation to the daily routines intrinsic to elephant management. Furthermore, the topic of handlers’ acquisition of geographic knowledge, its interplay with the elephants’ own spatial knowledge, and their ability to orientate themselves within the landscapes of Chitwan also warrants consideration. Handlers’ expert environmental knowledge has not received any significant coverage either (see appendix five however for a table of commonly recognized plants and their uses), and the issue of modern veterinary practice displacing traditional medicinal knowledge deserves urgent attention. During my research I found that whilst elders possessed a vast inventory of plant knowledge, medicinal recipes and knowledge of how to diagnose and treat illness in elephants, this was no longer being comprehensively transmitted to juniors, and was in danger of extinction. However, in this chapter I have explored the limitations of anthropological approaches to practical skill and bodily knowledge, the increasing political imperative to standardize practice and exert regulative control over practitioners, the acquisition of bodily proficiency in riding elephants, the attribution of personhood and its ideological basis, and the relationship between participation and identity.

7. Hattisare Relations with Higher Status Outsiders

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I investigate the character of social relations between *hattisares*, their institutional superiors and other outsiders, specifically those who are typically considered to be higher in status. Whilst this requires historical consideration of how a coded system of ranked social categories developed under the auspices of the Nepali state (Burghart 1984, Höfer 1979), I also consider the way in which this aid-dependent country's pre-occupation with developmental goals (Bista 1991, Pigg 1992) has affected notions of modernity and tradition, arguing that they have come to serve as a new idiom of social difference, variously displacing and overlaying the previous one of purity and pollution (Pigg 1992 & 1996:160-164, Guneratne 1999, 2001).

This more recently acquired basis for Nepalis to position themselves within the fabric of their heterogeneous society both coincides with the previously established pattern of social segmentation according to a ritually inflected hierarchy of ranked castes (and incorporated ethnic groups or 'tribes'), whilst also holding out the possibility of disrupting caste-based differentiation. This becomes clear not only through my claim that both the prior ritual-moral idiom and the contemporary socio-economic idiom are operative within the social context of the *hattisar*, but also through its multi-ethnic composition, such that the key opposition tends to be the broader one between the ethnic groups or *janajati* and the 'twice-born' or orthodox castes (the Bahun and Chhetri who are eligible to wear the sacred thread or *tagadhari*), rather than the narrower one between Tharu and Bahun (as in Guneratne's Chitwan village ethnography). The salience of both variants of this opposition is explored through the issues of land loss, in-migration, illiteracy and ethnic stereotyping.

I begin this chapter with three illustrative vignettes of encounters between agents of unequal status that prompted me to consider the character of social inequality in both Chitwan and the wider sphere of Nepal as a whole. My initial reactions to these encounters and the subsequent analysis of these observed experiences provides an

ethnographic basis to develop an interpretative account of the social position of elephant handlers, their sense of institutional enclavement (*cf.* Parkes 1998, 2000) and their consequential strategies of coping with the perceived intrusions of high status outsiders (see Scott 1985, 1990, Guneratne 1999, 2001).

Next, this analysis of unequal social interactions is more specifically related to the relationship with the authorities responsible for the use of captive elephants in Chitwan. I consider the ways in which the two parties tacitly collude in enacting stereotyped forms of interaction that confirm their mutual relationship of domination and subordination (a 'public transcript' of power relations). This is then contrasted to the ways in which they circumscribe their own relatively autonomous domains of action (thereby facilitating the handlers' sense of enclavement) in which the 'hidden transcript' of power relations can be expressed (Scott 1990). Finally, I consider the authorities' relatively underdeveloped attempts to both standardise and regulate elephant handlers' practice and conduct, as it pertains to their actual and potential role in current and future park management and conservation strategies (*cf.* Scott 1998).

7.2 Nepal Television Comes to Khorsor

The film crew from the state-sponsored channel Nepal Television (NTV) was due to arrive from Kathmandu in order to interview some local handlers and their sons. As requested, Section Sahib had chosen two handlers from among the few whose families actually live close-by. *Phanet* Dil Bahadur Shrestha, a Newar, and *phanet* Poorna Bahadur Thapa, a Magar, both well-respected handlers, had taken their sons out of school especially for the occasion of representing Chitwan's *sarkari hattisares* for the nation. On inquiry, I subsequently learnt that the proposed feature was intended to focus on elephant handling as a distinctly Tharu job traditionally passed on from father to son.

Since it was so rare to be receiving media attention, I expected to detect a palpable sense of anticipation throughout the *hattisar*. But it seemed that it was only I, the enthralled researcher, who was falling prey to such excitability. It felt more like the visit was just another interruption that had to be accommodated. Was I somehow naïve in assuming

that this would be a great opportunity for the handlers to have their profile raised nationally? After all, on many occasions they had told me that they felt they rarely received the recognition they deserved. Were the handlers merely hardened cynics then, or was there a deeper explanation for why they were so apparently disinterested in outside attention?

At about 9.30am on this overcast day blighted by persistent drizzling rain, little Kale, the young lad whose *patchuwa* father had fallen prey to a tiger a few years previously, came running from the riverbank, signaling to us that the TV people were coming. Satya my research assistant and I wandered towards the river and saw a small crew and their equipment in the wooden ferryboat loaded to such capacity that it wobbled precariously and only just floated above the waterline.

Upon arrival, the crew found respite from the rain by congregating under the four-pillared, corrugated tin-roofed shelter where the night duty usually sat warming itself around the beacon fire. Here the crew began assembling their cameras whilst Section Sahib introduced them to their prospective interviewees, surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers composed of myself, Satya my research assistant, the *khardar* and the *raut*, and those handlers with a few minutes to spare. However, our Kathmandu visitors soon expressed their dissatisfaction- they had expected to be interviewing Tharu handlers!

Evidently, they had not realized that other ethnic groups were involved in driving elephants. There was no indication that the journalists felt free to represent whatever elephant handling realities they encountered. They were at a loss as to what to do, and were unwilling to proceed with non-Tharu interviewees without securing the approval of their superiors. Attempts to call head office on their mobile phones came to naught, and so they promptly decided not to proceed further.

On many other occasions I had encountered this reluctance to take responsibility for decisions that went beyond the purview of the ordinary. Was there some kind of rampant

culture of blame extinguishing the flame of initiative? Perhaps this exemplified the suffocating constraints of bureaucracy that so many Nepalis lamented when discussing with me their explanations for their belief that the country had failed to develop successfully (echoing Dor Bahadur Bista's sentiments in his seminal diagnosis of a culture of fatalism besetting Nepal's attempts at development- see Bista 1991).

Without even apologizing to either Section Sahib or the handlers who had gone to the effort of removing their sons from school and bringing them to the *hattisar*, the TV crew left rather abruptly. Myself and the *hattisares* were left feeling rather perplexed and a little offended, although a few were amused by the operational straitjacket in which the crew were obviously working- it proved to them that even ostensibly empowered urban folk were also mere minions like themselves. However, it was obvious that it was I who was most surprised by this rude departure, prompting me to wonder if this might be indicative of a typical pattern of expectations regarding interactions with outsiders. Clearly, the handlers' had been proven right in their disinclination to expect much from this event¹.

7.3 The Khorsor Hattisar Plays Host to Kathmandu Students

Although Section Sahib spent most of his time at Khorsor, most weeks he would return to his family home in Sauraha and stay for a night (a 40 minute cycle ride away). Such occasions also enabled him to visit the DNPWC office in Sauraha, where he could inform the local officials of any significant news from the *hattisar*, who in turn could brief him about new directives or forthcoming visits (and which saved them the effort of making frequent journeys to Khorsor). On one such occasion Section Sahib returned to Khorsor with the news that his men would have to host a visiting group of university students and their lecturer as part of a three day stay learning about the management of the National Park. This was to be an encounter that brought to the fore the cleavage between perceptions of the rural and the urban and their association with evaluations of the traditional and the modern, a division which is acutely felt in Nepali society.

¹ The elephant handlers of Chitwan subsequently received some media coverage in an article I wrote for The Nepali Times, in which I emphasise the crucial role of their traditional skills for the management of the national park and its attendant tourist economy (Locke 2006).

The next morning, before the elephants had been taken to graze, ordinary *hattisar* routine was interrupted by the arrival of a party of about 25 students and their lecturer. Seated on the outdoor benches where the *hattisares* typically take their *dal bhat*, the students listened attentively as Raut Sahib kindly gave them an introductory talk about the uses of captive elephants in park management and the basics of managing a government *hattisar*. The spatial layout was ideal for this impromptu lecture; the benches are positioned to comprise three sides of a square, leaving Raut Sahib with a central position from which to address his audience (see figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1: Raut Sahib (wearing the blue scarf) giving visiting students a lecture about the elephant stable and its role in park management (the figure on the right wearing a baseball cap is my research assistant Satya Lama)

Although undoubtedly well-qualified to speak on this topic, Raut Sahib was unfamiliar with such a formal and explicitly didactic mode of address. His performance seemed impressive, but he later confessed to feeling uneasy about adopting such a role of authority in the face of these wealthy, educated and urban outsiders, and was rather

disgruntled not to receive a tip (*baksis*) for his efforts (an opinion shared by Section Sahib and others). Whilst he had provided explanations which the students found enlightening, as several of them later told me, I realised that he either lacked the confidence to adopt a disciplinary authority or considered it unnecessary, even though this is exactly what his position officially entails with regard to the lower ranked *hattisares*.

Upon conclusion of his talk, the students were evidently keen to see the elephants, just as the *hattisares* have learnt to expect of visitors unfamiliar with elephants. However, the students immediately began to take grass from the piles that had been gathered that morning, and attempted to feed the elephants without any regard for the prudence of such actions. Whilst reflection on the content of the *raut's* talk should have made it clear that this was improper behaviour that could jeopardise one's safety, Raut Sahib had not explicitly laid down any guidelines. In my view, to do so would have entailed adopting an assertive authority with regard to people of a superior socio-economic status which very few elephant handlers feel comfortable with. This disinclination to stipulate appropriate behaviour also seemed consistent with the typically tacit manner by which practical skill is transmitted to apprentice handlers in the *hattisar* (see chapter six).

Myself and the other *hattisares* all stood agape as we watched the students run amok. For the handlers, this was not just foolish behaviour, it was also a disrespectful slight against them. Significantly though, the *hattisares* were loath to intervene, since to do so would have required them reprimanding the outsiders. I was a little surprised, and respectfully asked a Tharu handler why he did nothing. I was told that this was normal; most outsiders were ignorant about dealing with elephants, and rarely showed the handlers any respect. Furthermore he added; "We Tharu are a polite and timid people, we don't like conflict, we are used to hardship, and have learnt not to receive respect- they are high caste *paharis* (hill people) and we are just *janajati madhesis*" (lowland people, the extent of whose 'Nepali-ness' is often called into question, of whom many cannot even acquire a card authenticating their Nepali citizenship). I also came to realize however, that the handlers did not consider safeguarding visitors as one of their primary responsibilities. There was perhaps even an aspect of passive aggression evident: should someone

disregard any advice they did proffer, the outcome would most likely confirm the handlers' wisdom, and only then would an outsider acquire the humility to respect their expertise.

The next day, as part of their field programme, four students came back to Khorsor to observe and ask questions. The student party from the day before had been split into small groups in order to investigate different aspects of park management, and those that returned to Khorsor seemed pleased to have been allocated further involvement with the elephants. I watched them wander around, curious about the routines unfolding before them, but receiving minimal responses from the men. They observed the men making *dana* before taking their morning *dal bhat*, and then the prepping of the elephants before they took them to graze. After a while, by now frustrated with the absence of co-operation, the students came to talk to me. They were aware that I was a foreign researcher (I had been proudly introduced to their lecturer by Section Sahib the day before), and probably saw me as an option of last resort- if the men were unwilling to provide them with the information they had the task of collecting, then perhaps I could help.

I was happy to converse with them, and I noticed that they were considerably more polite and deferential in approaching me than they had been with the *hattisares*. I suspected I was witnessing something significant about the nature of interaction between Nepalis of differing social positions, and my researcher's conscience told me that this would provide very useful ethnographic material for my field notes. The students demonstrated just how oblivious they were about the offence they had caused the previous day, and expressed their bafflement as to why the handlers were so unwilling to act as informants for them. I doubted whether it would have been advisable for me to cast judgment on their behavioural (im)proprieties- I felt I had no business telling Nepalis how they should treat other Nepalis whatever my own personal loyalties and convictions might be. Perhaps if I had been more assured of my social place then I might have had the confidence to take a more assertive stand. Instead, I merely noted that most of the handlers were shy and wary of outsiders, and helped fill the gaps in their question sheets by providing them with

sorely needed answers.

However, there were further revelatory aspects of this event yet to emerge. That evening, the whole group of students returned, since Section Sahib had been informed that he and his men were to provide them with a decent *dal bhat* that should also include *tarkari* (vegetables, also frequently referred to by the Hindi word *sabji*). And so now the elephant handlers were additionally required to act as cooks and waiters for these people who had so disgruntled them, feeding them a better meal than the handlers themselves would expect on a daily basis. Kishan the quartermaster later confided to me that, along with Khardar Sahib and Section Sahib, he was a little irritated by this departmental directive since they had to feed the guests from their own limited stocks and petty cash, without the benefit of additional resources.

Dinner was served without any noticeable rancor though, and I suspect the group of students left the *hattisar* oblivious to the offence they had caused, just as the *hattisares* seemed unsurprised and resigned to being repeatedly made to feel low. I was sure that it was unintentional on the students' part, and was beginning to realise just how awkward it can be for privileged, cosmopolitan Nepalis to interact with the majority 'other' who are yet to reap the social and economic benefits of a largely imported process of modernisation. As a foreigner, I was unencumbered by the attitudes that result from Nepal's history of various groups defined by caste and ethnicity dominating others, and as such realised that I was in an advantageous position to develop an effective working relationship with the *hattisares*. I remember thinking at the time that there was a rupture at the heart of Nepali society that was impeding the nation-building endeavour, and that the phenomenal spread of the Maoist Insurgency was testament to the years of festering resentment such a stark division between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' had produced (an admittedly simplistic and banal explanation, but not without some validity).

7.4 Khorsor's Co-operation with the German Film-Makers and Their Nepali Assistant

Conducting research at Khorsor, I became familiar with the meagre precedents for my endeavours. Section Sahib had told me how they had converted the storeroom in order to accommodate a female researcher who had stayed for a month a few years previously (as a woman, special provisions had to be made for her to be able to stay in the all-male environment of the *hattisar*). So when I was also told about the occasional visits two German film makers had been making over the previous five years or so, I was immediately curious, especially since my research was bound up with my own documentary film project. Naturally, I was worried that their film making interests might conflict with my own, forcing us into competition.

Some months later, in the spring of 2004, before my colleague Mark Dugas arrived so that we could shoot 'Servants of Ganesh' together, I was able to meet the film maker Jurgen and also very briefly his colleague, whose visit had to be curtailed due to pressing demands elsewhere. Jurgen stayed nearby in a guesthouse and since he spoke no Nepali save for the '*namaste*' greeting, was entirely reliant on an assistant for negotiations with the *hattisar*. He explained to me how he and his colleague had been making sporadic visits for almost seven years. Jurgen told me that some of their footage had been utilized by The Discovery Channel, but that their work had not yet resulted in their own documentary exclusively about Nepal's captive elephants. I also learnt that they had not conducted any interviews with elephant handlers and had limited themselves primarily to footage of elephants being driven. Clearly they were working according to a nature documentary agenda rather than the intimate, ethnographic portrayal Mark and myself were planning.

I soon came to realize how Jurgen's dependence on his assistant hampered his work at the *hattisar*. Although he was recognized as polite and respectful, and as such was appreciated by the *hattisares*, the same could not be said for his assistant, a high caste Bahun, precisely the category of person that *hattisares* are wary of. But Jurgen did not seem to realise this; after all he was a professional filmmaker, not exclusively dedicated

to documenting Nepal, but somebody who worked in many different countries. My discussions with him revealed his lack of knowledge about the culture of Nepal, specifically the social and political history of its ethnic and caste composition.

One day he happily participated in a *puja*, daubing *tikka* upon his forehead and making the appropriately reverential gestures, ignorant of its specific significance. For me, it revealed not only his desire for acceptance in order to facilitate filming access, but also served as a mirror for my own endeavours and aspirations, giving me renewed cause to wonder about the authenticity and sincerity of my own mimicked participation. How must I seem to the *hattisares*? Was I still merely considered a well-meaning outsider like him, or had I really been admitted into the private world of the handlers as I liked to believe?

Anyway, Jurgen told me how wonderfully helpful his assistant had been, but seemed oblivious to the potential problems that could occur as a result of the social difference between his mediator and the handlers. I though, was not surprised to learn that the *hattisares* were ill disposed to his assistant. Then, one evening after Jurgen and his assistant had left, Section Sahib explicitly stated the *hattisares*' shared opinion of the high caste Nepali assistant; they did not like him, he was rude and arrogant, and treated them as if they were 'low' and inconsequential. He was especially keen to convey this information to me in light of the fact that my own colleague would be subsequently arriving to film. He went on to tell me that I could be assured of the absolute cooperation of him and his men for my film, since he knew I understood their world and he trusted me to represent them honestly. I was truly touched by this show of faith, conscious of both my responsibility to the *hattisares* as well as the privileged situation I now found myself in.

Later, Khardar Sahib, who is himself from the higher status Newar Shrestha *jat* from Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu valley, explained how they had subtly obstructed the Nepali assistant by such acts as delaying making phone calls to inform him of the birth of a new calf. I understood that whilst they bore no malice to Jurgen and his colleague, they felt

that the offensive attitude of the Nepali assistant could not go unpunished, at least in small ways that would not incur the wrath of the local DNPWC officials².

Interestingly, Khardar Sahib, as an administrator and non elephant-driver, was one of the very few people I met who never displayed a disdainful attitude toward the handlers, as others would often do when talking to me outside their presence. The chief wildlife technician of the KMTNC, Bishnu Lama was another such person, and like Khardar Sahib, seemed to be truly accepted and trusted by the handlers. But then again, both these men were from *jats* which have members in the *hattisare* profession, unlike Jurgen's Bahun assistant and the Bahun and Chhetri DNPWC wardens and rangers (*jats* who would never deign to work as handlers)³.

Again, as with the visiting Kathmandu students, the benefit of my access to the ordinarily hidden interior world of *hattisare* life presented me with a dilemma. But again, I chose to keep my counsel. My understanding of my ethical responsibilities to research informants obliged me to take a position of allegiance- I was their guest and should not betray their confidence. And so Jurgen left Khorsor unaware of the actual situation existing between his assistant and the *hattisares*, unaware also that petty enmities had negatively affected his access to significant filming opportunities.

7.5 The Bases of Hattisare-Outsider Social Difference

7.5.1 Television as Focus for Social Aspirations

In my account of the visit of the NTV crew, it is evident that the news report was not produced because the reporters were unable to fulfil their directives, which it would seem were to represent elephant handling as an ossified tradition performed exclusively by one particular 'backward' (*pachari*) ethnic group. Why then might they be so concerned to portray elephant handling in this manner, rather than perhaps emphasizing how

²As a point of contrast, the recent WWF Humane Elephant Training Programme has utilised a Tharu interlocutor, and one who even has relatives amongst the *hattisares*. I have no doubt that this has played an important role in helping to establish effective rapport and co-operation.

³A Shrestha had even previously reached the rank of *adikrit*. Now retired, I met Kale Shrestha at Dumravana, the previous site of a major *sarkari hattisar*, during a trip to a Mahout's wedding in Bara district (see chapter three).

traditional skills are being utilized to fulfil modern imperatives, and how in the process (bearing in mind the role of in-migration to the Tarai for the economic development of Nepal, see chapter three) the demographics of recruitment to elephant handling might also be changing? Besides the difficulty of expressing such complexity in a brief news segment, an appreciation of the social demographic at which Nepal Television is aimed may provide a clue.

Access to television in Nepal remains highly prized in a country comprising such a predominantly rural and isolated population, with television ownership at the highest in its few urban areas⁴. A relatively recent introduction to Nepali society, television still engenders a novel excitement perhaps comparable to its proliferation through British society during the 1950s, when the privilege of ownership often brought a communal responsibility to allow neighbours to congregate around it and share in the viewing experience (for which owners would of course accrue prestige or cultural capital). Television is also an ideal medium for promoting the virtues of modernity; connection to a wider world of cultural goods, practices and news-worthy events of global significance, as well as the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the discriminating consumer⁵.

Indeed, in a country that has been explicitly dedicated to modernization through a programme of foreign-assisted development ever since the overthrow of isolationist Rana rule, modernity, as the exotic other (Pigg 1996:163), has been a seemingly unobtainable object of desire (Liechty 2003:xi). So then, the intention to portray elephant handling as outmoded tradition could be understood to serve as a foil for Nepal's modernising aspirations; showing a quaint slice of 'pre-modern' Nepali life, with which the ideally urban, educated and *bikasi* ('developed') viewer will most likely have little if any connection. If NTV had been able to represent the Tharu elephant handlers exclusively as *jangali* and old-fashioned, as men whose sons dutifully follow them into this demanding

⁴ The Nepal Television channel (NTV) was first established in 1985 with the assistance of Finnish expertise, at the invitation of King Birendra (see Nepali Times issue 337).

⁵ In his analysis of the emergence of a middle class consumer culture in Nepal, Liechty acknowledges the limited penetration of television in Nepal and consequently feels able to legitimately ignore its role in favour of a consideration of video-viewing practices (2003:152).

profession for want of any better opportunities, then viewers could have asserted their own relative attainment of modernity in contradistinction to the elephant handlers' failure to do so. Representation of the actually encountered reality of mixture and change would then, have contravened the televisual desire for a clear-cut polarity between modernity and tradition.

7.5.2 Modernity as Idiom of Social Difference

This then reveals how reified notions of modernity, as determined by access to the fruits of development, have come to serve as an idiom of social difference⁶. Pigg notes that in societies that consider themselves to be the home of modernity, it is the traditional that becomes exotic and 'other', but in Nepal, it is the modern that is 'other' (1996:163). "Nepalis experience modernity through a development ideology that insists that they are *not* modern, indeed that they have a very long way to go to get there" (Pigg 1996:163). Indeed, in contemporary Nepal, it is not uncommon to hear members of particular social groups or residents of particular locations describe others as either 'very developed people' (*dherai bikasi manche*) or 'not very developed people' (*thorai bikasi manche*), as exemplified by the Nepal TV crew and Kathmandu students in relation to the *hattisares*. From the point of view of such supposedly *bikasi* Nepalis, the *hattisares*' disgruntlement at the lack of *baksis* for Raut Sahib, would confirm their view of them as *thorai bikasi manche*, since in theory the disbursement of complementary gifts from superiors to inferiors is a mark of the previously patrimonial Nepal (demonised in Maoist propaganda as 'feudal'), a practice that should have no place in a modern state (despite the tarnished image of Nepal's experiments with electoral democracy, characterised by corrupt politicians taking bribes in exchange for favours). By this logic, to expect *baksis* is to reinforce one's subordinate position as a powerless person dependent on the favours of the powerful (which is very much how many of the *hattisares* still typically conceive their relation to power holders). Even if the giving of *baksis* is acknowledged as thriving

⁶ One might argue that such changes should put to rest 'outmoded' caste-based arguments about Nepali society, but Liechty (2003), with his focus on an emergent middle class in the city of Kathmandu, is one of very few social scientists to utilise a class-based analysis. Elsewhere in Nepal such an analytic approach would be untenable since caste-like differences remain very much evident, even if the idiom through which they are articulated has changed. Even though Maoist propaganda fervently advocates a class based perspective on Nepali society, it is still seen through the lens of caste.

in the political microcosm of the village, it should be inappropriate in the city, which most strongly embodies Nepal's aspirations to modernity.

7.5.3 The Hegemony of Development

Analyses of the colonial encounter, as exemplified by the political ethnography of James Scott (1985, 1990) and the historical readings of Ranajit Guha, David Arnold and other members of the Indian Subaltern Studies group, have argued that the colonised appropriate and internalise the colonial vision, even while resisting it (e.g. Guha [ed.] 1997)⁷. Pigg suggests this framework can also be applied to the context of contemporary international development. In the era following the autocratic rule of the Ranas (1846-1951), Nepal reversed its previously isolationist foreign policy strategy by allying itself to the newly emerged international apparatus of foreign aid in order to meet its declared objectives of modernisation (as in the malarial eradication programme discussed in chapter three). In so doing, Nepal submitted itself to the status of being 'underdeveloped' and hence to the intervention of foreign organisations, whose directives had to be followed in order to receive promises of investment (Pigg 1992). Development then ultimately originates from outside of Nepal, and we find that "development institutions are among the most important forces brokering ideas of modernity" (Pigg 1996:163).

In Nepal we find that this largely imported modernity is negotiated through the opposition of the village not only to the city, but also to development itself, one as the locus of 'backwardness', the other as a process offering 'emancipation'. Development links village to nation, and poses the question of how a place comes to stand for a kind of people, and in so doing, plays a key role in the politics of difference as it pertains to the construction of a national society (Pigg 1992). With the institution of the *hattisar*, we find it to be constituted by people who come from this very locus of backwardness (and

⁷ For a critical overview of approaches to resistance, see 'Resistance and The Problem of Ethnographic Refusal' (Ortner 1995). In this paper, as a counterpoint to Geertz's notion of 'thick description' (1973b) Ortner argues that resistance studies are characterised by 'thinness'; in terms of the internal politics of dominated groups, of the subjectivity of actors within such groups, and of the significance accorded to culture, which is rarely utilised in any sense but the hegemonic one of 'mystification' or 'false consciousness'. As such, she claims that such studies are refusing to submit to the richness that an ethnographic perspective should ideally yield.

whose habituated attitudes, expectations and world view are taken to confirm it, *cf* Pigg 1996 on Nepalis' beliefs regarding traditional healers). The *hattisares* therefore exemplify this condition that must be remedied. However, as we have seen, the traditional practices of these representatives of 'backwardness', as the only people to possess the requisite skills, are crucial to modern projects of national policy that are integral to the closely connected aims of sustainable development and natural resource conservation.

To be developed, and hence 'modern' is to be able to claim connection to an urban, educated, technological, and globalised world. To be seen to possess such cosmopolitan qualities brings social prestige. This cultural capital (*cf* Bourdieu 1990) can be used to position oneself in relation to those considered to lack the qualities of modernity; to live in villages, to pursue rural livelihoods, to be illiterate, to lack formal schooling, to be ignorant of modern technology, and limited in the breadth of ones social and geographical experience, as is typically the case with most of the Nepalis who go into the elephant handling profession.

With regard to formal schooling, besides the non-handler *khardar*, whose administrative duties require literacy; only two handlers at Khorsor have passed their SLC (School Leaving Certificate), the basic requirement for securing clerical and administrative jobs with the prospect of promotion (the *phanets* Satya Narayan Hujdar and Shiva Chandra Chaudhary). Both are Tharu, and both recognised their schooling success as atypical. These handlers stated that they would have liked to exploit their educational achievement to advance the economic position of themselves and their families. However, both of them cited a lack of opportunity, partly resulting from the discrimination 'backwards' castes face in a nepotistic job market. They claimed that this consequently forced them to take up a traditional job for which Tharu like themselves can expect to encounter no obstructions. Their *jat* then, rather than their capabilities, may have prevented them from securing the type of job that entitles one to claim to be 'modern', or in the Nepali idiom; 'not to have to carry loads'.

7.5.4 The Increasing Obsolescence of Caste and Its Exceptions

To be able to affirm one's modernity is then what most, if not all, Nepali *jats* aspire to, whilst being considered 'traditional' can be cause for embarrassment and perceived inferiority, as expressed by my informant when I inquired as to the *hattisares'* reluctance to intervene when the Kathmandu students began to act inappropriately in the *hattisar*. In discussing the mediating role of Bahun tourist guides on the Tharu village walk, Guneratne argues that; "the ideology of modernity has replaced that of caste as the way in which Tharus and Brahmans in rural Nepal understand inter-ethnic relationships" (2001:527).

With regard to this displacement of prior idiomatic understandings of social difference, Guneratne further notes that the 'book view' of South Asian (and especially Hindu) societies suggests that the ritual understanding of caste in terms of purity and pollution is crucial to understanding status in South Asia. However, this does not always accord particularly well with many observed ethnographic realities- in general, caste purity is no longer always the primary idiom by which social difference is evaluated (Guneratne 2001:528). This should not suggest that the history of caste should be ignored though, since we are dealing with its transformation rather than its dissolution, such that both idioms of social difference can simultaneously retain signifying relevance.

Indeed, redolent of Nepal's patrimonial past in which handlers performed their duties relatively autonomously, albeit at the sponsorship of the state, and as custodians of its property (hence the widely shared perception of the *hattisar* as a place of enclavement), the *sarkari hattisar* remains an institutional location where concerns with purity and pollution continue to inflect relations between the dominant and the subordinate, even as social inequality is registered in the alternate modality of modernity⁸. For example, when a *puja* has been performed on occasions such as elephant training and elephant births, a

⁸ In the past, the state's appetite for acquiring elephants was fulfilled through their proxy agent the *raut*, or chief of elephant capturing operations, in much the same way as the *jimidar* was responsible for recruiting local people to cultivate land in order to generate revenues for the state. Similarly the *raut* would be rewarded with land grants (Krauskopff & Meyer 2000, and see also chapter two), thereby illustrating the structure of indirect rule, dependent on the enticement of personal reward and additionally reliant on the cultural conventions of purity and pollution.

feast of consecrated food (*prasada*) will be held at which it is appropriate for the local warden to partake (since these events are integral not only to the life of the *hattisar*, but also to broader practices of park management for which he is responsible). But on every such occasion I observed, he only ever ate with status equals, never in the immediate presence of handlers, even including the *subba* or *khardar*.

Even if informants were most inclined to explain this in legitimate terms of institutional status disparity, customary explanation in terms of the traditional higher caste avoidance of impurity (*jutho*) was never entirely effaced either. It seems that the legacy of the *Muluki Ain* lives on, with the distinction between pure Bahuns and Chhetris as wearers of the sacred thread, or *tagadhari*, and impure Tharu (and Tamang) as enslaveable alcohol drinkers, or *masine matwali*, continue to influence social relations (Höfer 1979:45, Guneratne 2001:529). The concern with avoiding impurity (*jutho*) is of course also evident in the ritual prohibitions a *phanet* is traditionally bound to during elephant training, when he temporarily adopts some of the ascetic practices or *tapasya*, of a *samnyasi* or renouncer (see chapter five). Thus we find that in the *hattisar*, both the ritual and the socio-economic idioms of status difference are operative.

Whilst each mode of differentiation largely coincides with the other in the sense that they divide the same groups according to differing rationales, this is not always the case. It must be emphasised that the new idiom of status difference permits greater social mobility than did the prior one of state-sanctioned, ritual rankings. Thus in the national apparatus, where modern forms of political and economic power are primary, it is possible for members of the historically disadvantaged groups (the *janajati* and the *dalit*) to become what Nepalis frequently refer to as *thulo manche*, or 'big men'. For example, with regards to the local Tharu Culture Museum, a project for engendering ethnic solidarity as well as social and economic empowerment of the Tharu community by means of transforming Tharu heritage into a commodity for tourist consumption and scholarly investigation, there were enough powerful Tharu people involved to maintain control, despite attempts at intervention from local Bahuns (see figure 7.2).



Figure 7.2: The recently completed Tharu Culture Museum, built to mimic the architecture of the traditional Tharu house, and awaiting internal fittings

7.5.5 Claims to Modernity as Aggrandising Tactic

Just as Bahun tour guides are able to associate themselves with the modernity typified by their foreign tourists through the contrast with the Tharu as indigenous, ‘tribal’ jungle dwellers (Guneratne 2001:530-1), so too a similar dynamic is discernible in the relation between the German filmmakers’ assistant and the *hattisares*. Like the tourist guides, he was able to mediate between foreign outsiders and the object of their exoticising imagination, in this case, the elephant handlers as the living exemplars of an age-old tradition. In so doing, the Nepali assistant was able to aggrandise himself in the process. Prestige accrued to him by being seen to be associated with powerful foreigners (as was the case with my research assistant’s affiliation to my own endeavours), which enabled him to further distance himself from the handlers, who were acutely aware of his contemptuous sense of superiority (which was not the case with the handlers’ relationship to my *janajati* assistant).

Several other examples from my vignettes also exemplify the way in which social differences attributable to agents' estimations of their own relative attainment of modernity, inflect their relations with others they perceive as inferior. The disparity in polite and respectful deference I observed between the students' interactions with myself compared to the handlers testifies to the saliency of this rupture between those who feel they can legitimately lay claim to being modern, and those who can be dismissed as deficient in the acquisition of modernity. The rude and dismissive behaviour of the Nepali TV crew also supports this.

When the state of Nepal was comprised merely of subjects, the higher castes had no social obligation to address their inferiors in an expressly polite manner (since they were by definition lesser beings by virtue of their polluting qualities), and although in theory at least, Nepal is now composed of citizens with equal rights, social convention has yet to catch up with legal decree. Hence the high caste, non-*janajati* TV crew felt no compulsion to engage with the *hattisares* in a polite manner. The conventional decorum of addressing equals and superiors differently than inferiors is of course far from uncommon, and is encoded in linguistic modes of address in Nepali language.

For example, in using the second person pronoun to address a superior, or a stranger of equal status with whom you are unfamiliar, one would use *tapai*, but for a junior or an inferior, one would use *timi*, and for young children and animals *ta* (not dissimilar from the *vous* and *tu* in French). But of course, it wasn't so much the TV crew's chosen mode of linguistic address that irritated the handlers (they used *timi* to address the prospective interviewees), it was rather the attitude conveyed by what was not said (i.e. the lack of consideration for the handlers' wasted effort). Significantly for the handlers, the TV crew could have addressed them formally as inferiors without acting so impolitely.

7.5.6 The 'Jangali' Other Who Warrants Little Respect

There is of course another additional component inflecting this modern versus traditional dynamic, which has already been intimated, and which further facilitates the discriminatory treatment of the primarily Tharu *hattisare*. This is the closely connected

set of stereotyped representations of the Tharu as an autochthonous tribe and as a people whose 'natural habitat' is supposedly the jungle. Guneratne discusses how the Tharu have been characterised as a 'tribe' in the ethnographic literature in order to distinguish them from groups characterised as 'castes', and that the Indian concept of *adivasi* is its nearest equivalent in South Asian vernacular discourse. "Its convergence with the Western concept arises from the fact that the people to whom the term is applied occupy the frontiers of, and enclaves within, larger, more complex polities" (Guneratne 2001:530). He then quotes Skaria (1999:278): "The colonial trope of anachronism and the accompanying view of these communities as primitive were taken over and became deeply entrenched in the perceptions of dominant Indian groups. The tribes were the younger brothers of the more advanced plains nationalists, to be helped out of their primitiveness" (in Guneratne 2001:530).

Needless to say, Nepal's own dominant groups also developed similarly patronising and paternalistic attitudes to their own 'less civilised' peoples, evident in the analogous descriptive terms still employed today, such as *jangali* (of the jungle) as well as *banavasi* and *vanyajati* (dwellers in, or people of the forest)⁹. It is not surprising then that in contemporary Nepal, the Tharu have come to think of themselves as the *adivasi* of the Tarai (Guneratne 2001:531). And of course, the Tharu are seen to be qualified for the job of *hattisare* precisely because of the projection of these qualities upon them, even if they have been misrepresented historically as jungle-dwelling hunter-gatherers, rather than the domesticators of forested land and animals that they more properly seem to have been (Krauskopff in Krauskopff & Meyer [eds] 2000:42).

Guneratne considers the way in which the Tharu are objectified as an exotic other for the purposes of creating an experience for touristic consumption (which can also attract ethnographers and filmmakers), one which complements the nature tourism that is the

⁹ In addition to these stereotypes are more derogatory and insulting epithets. For example, many of the *pahariyas* (the *madesi* name for people from the hills) refer to the Tharu as '*ghoni khane manche*' ('snail-eating person'), to which the Tharu respond with '*bhaisi khane manche*' ('water buffalo-eating person'), or even '*pahariya nahariya*' ('pahari penis') or '*garib chusai barai*' ('bloodsuckers of the poor'), more likely to be applied to a Bahun or a Chhetri than a *janajati* from the hills like a Tamang, Magar or Rai (Muller-Böker 1999:83).

primary attraction for visitors to Chitwan. He quotes from a typical brochure from the early 1990s, noting the emphasis on the Tharu as primitive, close to nature and left behind by the 'tide of civilisation', living a life unchanged for centuries¹⁰. Furthermore, these high caste guides (and other interlocutors such as the German filmmakers' assistant) have tended to represent the Tharu as part of the area's natural history in contrast to their own place within a cultural history. The Tharu then, are not just othered for the tourists, but also for the Nepalis who create and sustain these representations for touristic consumption (Guneratne 2001:534). As Fabian has argued in 'Time and The Other' (1983) this tactic of dislocating object peoples from the now, of placing them in a different time frame from that of the observer, has been typical in representations of the other, a rhetorical tactic that the discipline of anthropology was complicit in for many years (Guneratne 2001:534-5).

7.5.7 'Backwards' Rather Than 'Low'

Whilst caste entailed a preoccupation with 'high' and 'low', modernity has introduced a preoccupation with 'backwardness' and 'forwardness', conceived as collective group attributes just as certain attributes of purity and pollution were for characterising caste (Guneratne 1999:164). Whilst low caste status arose from evaluations in the moral and ritual sphere, backwardness arises from evaluations of social, political and economic disadvantages suffered by groups as a whole (Guneratne 1999:165), which is further compounded when groups are perceived as *jangali*. For the Tharu (and also other *janajati* groups), it is illiteracy that is seen as the primary cause of their backwardness, propelling them towards professions such as elephant handling precisely because of their status as a 'backwards' group (*pachari jat*). Similarly Tharu ethnic associations and development NGOs like BASE (Backwards Society Education) are less concerned with sanskritising (as the adoption of high caste customs to justify the claim to a higher caste status- see Srinivas 1962) than they are with modernising (by promoting education and the

¹⁰ Muller-Böker similarly cites an essentialised characterisation of the Tharu from a book written with an eye to the tourist market: 'They are one of the most primitive races inhabiting Nepal...The Tharus are by nature sincere and simple-minded. This is especially true with the Tharus of Chitwan. They are steeped in the darkness of ignorance, and are rather obstinate' (Shrestha, Singh and Pradhan 1975:27 in Muller- Böker 1999:62).

abandonment of certain customs deemed 'backward' or economically irrational) (Guneratne 1999:164).

If the Tharu are a *pachari jat*, then elephant handling, as the traditional preserve of the Tharu, is by extension a job appropriate only to backwards castes (possibly posing a challenge to the reputability of those Newars from the Shrestha trading caste who have gone into the profession, for unlike the Tamang they were ranked higher than the Tharu in the *Muluki Ain*). In Chitwan, it was apparent to me that the park authorities conceived of themselves somewhat paternalistically as the modern custodians of their traditional-minded staff. Consequently, the handlers' beliefs and ritual practices, which are perceived by status superiors as old fashioned, are tolerated and even indulged for the sake of meeting management imperatives that depend on the use of captive elephants, for which only the 'undeveloped' and 'traditional' *hattisares* possess the requisite skills.

7.5.8 Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Ideological and Cosmological Mismatch

The use of captive elephants and their handlers in park management, conservation and tourism, are only relatively recent modes of deployment. Handlers and their elephants now facilitate the monitoring of rare species and provide a means of transport both for army patrols and for jungle-viewing safaris for tourists. These new uses retain their basis in a traditional culture of elephant-keeping practices originally fostered by a nascent state and their proxies, who also became wealthy landowners (see chapters two and three), whilst they derive from policies that are influenced by the foreign, imported environmental and developmental ideals of 'participatory conservation' and 'sustainable development' (an approach that gained credence for the management of Chitwan and other protected areas during the 1990s, see Dinerstein 2003:193). In such discourses, the natural environment is conceived according to the utilitarian imperatives of nature as both a resource to be conserved and a commodity to be exploited, a balance between which must be sought.

Such environmental managerialism, formulated in Kathmandu offices under the influence of the research and policy-making practices of INGOs, contrasts sharply with the cultural models (*cf* Holland & Quinn 1987) by which the elephant handlers themselves conceive of, and relate to 'the jungle', around which the socio-economic life of Chitwan revolves. We have seen that for the elephant handlers, the jungle is a place of danger, in which malevolent, unseen forces lurk, and which must be appeased through sacrificial rituals performed by those capable of communicating with them (see chapter five). So, this division between tradition and modernity not only affects social relations but also presents a challenge to management practice, as I will subsequently elaborate. Representatives of both the modern and traditional conceptions of Nepal are then bound up in what can seem an awkward relation of mutual dependence.

7.5.9 In-Migration, Lost Land and a Legacy of Distrust

So the rationalised and bureaucratic operation of park management relies on practitioners who not only conceive and engage with the natural domain covered by the Park in a differing way, but who are also relatively ignorant of the literate practices upon which the government apparatus of park management depends. Thus, the distribution of literacy, dividing park planners and regulators from practitioners who facilitate policy implementation, as previously alluded to, provides another component in the social differences between *hattisares* and their status superiors. The salience given to literacy is particularly intelligible when one considers the Tharu experience of in-migration, since Tharu illiteracy enabled immigrant Bahuns to dispossess Tharus of their land, often by dubious means (Guneratne 2001:531, 1999:160, see also McDonough 1997 for Dang Tharus, for whom this experience was far more pronounced).

Guneratne elaborates on the distrust this legacy has engendered between Bahun and Tharu. After the USAID malarial eradication scheme of the 1950s (see Muller-Böker 1999:28, McLean 2000, McLean & Straede 2003), the Tarai became a more feasible prospect for habitation for hill people (*pahari*), but immigration in Chitwan only became significant by the 1970s, comprising mainly Bahuns, but also Chhetri and Tamang (see chapter three). Some of these migrants gained control over village land in frequently

dubious ways, forcing Tharus to sell land to them in order to repay debts, whilst some, in collusion with government officials, forged title deeds to Tharu land. Memories of this have left a legacy of distrust that continues to afflict relations between Tharus and Bahuns (Guneratne 2001:531-2).

7.5.10 Stereotypes of Cunning Bahuns and Gullible Tharus

In addition to Tharu distrust of the Bahun and Chhetri *jats*, which surely compounds the tensions implicit in the relationship between *hattisares* and their predominantly Bahun superiors, who post written regulations in the *hattisar* fully aware that most will be unable to read them (see figure 7.3), there is also some admiration (Guneratne 1999:172). The Bahuns are characterised as clever and capable, and able to advance themselves in the modern economy by thrift, cunning and hard work, providing for the Tharu a model for successful modernisation (Guneratne 1999:172). In contrast, Tharus conceive of themselves as generous, hospitable and more hedonistic, all of which are detrimental to business success and prudent economic management (Guneratne 2001:532, and also 1999:168-9).

7.5.11 Minimal Socialisation Between Bahun and Tharu Neighbours

Unsurprisingly then, interaction between these two co-habiting groups is typically limited. Whilst children attend the same schools, they are not prone to playing together, and similarly adults from the two groups have only limited social interaction, separated by ritual practice and only jointly engaging in commensality and social functions in special circumstances, and usually primarily among the local elite (such as committee members of local forest user groups). Typically, those from the poorer sections of society mix with each other the least (Guneratne 2001:532).

Relations between *hattisares* and DNPWC officials mimic the pattern of mutual exclusion Guneratne describes for village populations, as will become clear in the subsequent section on dissimulation and resistance. However, in this case, where interaction occurs, it is not between the elites from each group. At this point more needs to be said about the internal structure of Tharu society. Traditionally there were three

classes: indebted, landless Tharu families, or *bahariya*; peasant tenants, or *raiti*; and the revenue-collecting landowners, or *jimidar* (see chapter three). Social mobility however was relatively fluid since they all occupied the same moral sphere. Only more recently, with the onset of modernisation have boundaries become more fixed as a protean class-consciousness emerges (Guneratne 1999:166). At the *hattisar* though, the handlers primarily come from *bahariya* families, making occasions of commensality unusual, as we have seen with regard to the local warden accepting *hattisar* hospitality in ritual celebration of pivotal events such as elephant training and elephant births (albeit segregated from the handlers).

7.6 Power, Dissimulation and Resistance to Authority

I have shown that in the *hattisar*, understandings of social inequality primarily derive from *jat* based differences according to both the conventional idiom of purity and the more novel idiom of modernity, yet are additionally inflected by a more complex set of considerations specific to the history of the Tharu and the Tarai (as further elaborated in chapter three). As yet though, I have not explicitly related these to the coping strategies of the *hattisares*, who conceive of themselves as disempowered when interacting with most categories of outsider. Nor have I specified those outsiders with whom handlers interact without a sense of inferior status, who are mainly limited to the category of 'local villager'. Handlers typically interact with such people as equals since they recognise that they too are subject to similar imperatives of fulfilling subsistence needs as their own families, and similarly possess very meagre socio-economic attributes with which to claim the cachet of being modern. In fact, it should be stressed that there are occasions when handlers even feel confident enough to adopt a tone of authority, or to experience a sense of prestige by virtue of their profession. This is especially so when handlers are mounted upon their elephants, towering above pedestrians, for then, by virtue of the special duty they are discharging as custodians of a sacred creature, they can identify in themselves a superior cultural capital in relation to 'mere' villagers.

7.6.1 Working Contexts Affording Handlers Power and Prestige

An example of handlers exercising their authority would be those situations in which handlers, on their elephants inside the Park, encounter locals contravening park rules, such as the illegal collection of grass and firewood, or engaging in unlicensed fishing. On the one hand, the handlers are generally committed to the agendas of park management, appreciative of the principle of natural resource conservation for the benefit of future generations. On the other hand though, they know that these people are usually forced to break the rules only in order to meet their subsistence needs, since sustainable development programmes are yet to provide all of the local population with viable alternatives (such as that of the BCC in helping install household biogas plants to relieve pressure on woodlands for supply of firewood)¹¹.

Consequently, they will most likely warn locals that next time they might not be so lucky, and that they should be vigilant of patrols by rangers and wardens from the DNPWC. As I myself witnessed, to be found infringing park regulations by such officials will result in being forced to discard purloined resources (in one case I witnessed this meant giving up the bundles of collected grass for our grazing elephants to consume), and having one's equipment like knives (*khukri*) and sickles (*hasiya/asi*) confiscated. Additionally, those who contravene park regulations will be escorted to the warden's office where one's offence will be recorded and a fine issued.

On another occasion, again whilst taking our elephants through parkland to reach favoured grazing sites, we encountered a man with a bundle of fish, freshly caught from the Narayani River. As representatives of the park regulatory apparatus (albeit lacking formal powers of enforcement), this situation gave the handlers the opportunity to profit from their position. And so the handlers agreed not to report the guilty party in exchange for a share of his fish, which would provide a prized culinary treat as well as a valuable

¹¹ Narayan Dhakal's plans for a 'Hattisare Education Programme' (2001) recognise the handlers' potential role as ambassadors for the agendas of the park, and additionally envisages maximising their role in reporting on illegal activities.

nutritional supplement. Besides the material benefit, it was obvious that there was a certain pleasure in being able to exercise authority instead of merely being subject to it¹². Similarly, sometimes handlers can be lucky enough to find themselves discharging duties that not only provide a break from the usual routine, but which also enable them to take pride in their professional capabilities. For instance, towards the end of a juvenile elephant's training, it must be taken into the towns to familiarise it with potentially alarming sights, sounds and smells (see chapter five). On such occasions, the spectacle of the men upon the elephants, only occasionally seen outside the confines of the jungles and villages adjacent to the park, not only attracts the bemusement of passers-by, but also a degree of reverence and awe- for these men are recognised as skilled custodians of a potentially dangerous creature imbued with sacred qualities. A few handlers even cited observed instances such as these as providing them with the inspiration to become a *hattisare*, noting that it seemed preferable to the limited available alternatives, such as life as an indentured agricultural labourer (*kamaiya*).

Another instance I observed during the period of my research involved a ceremonial occasion (*mahatsabh*) requiring a regal tusker (the type of duty Ram Bahadur so appreciated up until the demise of his elephant Sher Prasad, as recounted in chapter four). This time, the elephant was needed to lead a procession celebrating a drive to prevent tuberculosis (in humans rather than elephants)¹³. Section Sahib duly allocated Birendra Prasad for the job, and on this occasion his *patchuwa* Bukh Lal, rather than his *phanet* Nagendra, had the privilege of taking his elephant to the market town of Narayanghat. Bukh Lal later told me how much he enjoyed sitting astride Birendra Prasad at the head of the procession, for once able to revel in feeling a little bit special, happy to have all

¹² However on another occasion, whilst out grazing we discovered masses of dead fish floating on the surface of a river's tributary, along with a reddish taint to the water- a tell tale sign of poisoning. Although the dead fish were not wasted, even the handlers themselves were displeased and made sure this incident was reported.

¹³ The prevalence of TB in elephants, contracted originally from humans, has now been recognised as a crucial issue to be addressed, since the health of both elephants and handlers is threatened (see chapter three). The organisation Elephant Care International, in conjunction with the Nepali government, has now initiated a programme to investigate and remedy this problem that potentially afflicts elephants and handlers throughout Asia. See: <http://www.elephantcare.org/tbnepal.htm> (accessed on 10/11/06).

those people looking up at him on his powerful elephant¹⁴. As he explained, it was a pleasant respite from a demanding routine that rarely yields much recognition. The crowds may not have fully appreciated the nature of his work, but for that short time he could be seen as a man with a serious responsibility and the ability to discharge it.

7.6.2 Hattisare Public Behaviour as Performance

In the account of the visit of the Nepal Television crew I noted the absence of excited anticipation amongst the handlers as well as their low expectations regarding the outcome of the intended report for broadcast. Similarly, in the account of the visit of the Kathmandu students I noted the lack of surprise on the part of the handlers regarding the students' behaviour, as well as their disinclination to intervene. Both of these insights into handlers' public behaviour when confronted by more cosmopolitan outsiders can be related to James Scott's ideas about the performative aspects of relations of domination and resistance (1985, 1990).

In his analysis of social situations involving subordination, Scott argues that the greater the disparity in status and power, the greater the tendency for the 'public transcript' of conventionalised modes of interaction to take on a stereotyped and ritualistic cast (1990:3). He further suggests that such contexts typically reveal the following characteristics: strategically circumspect behaviour; the avoidance of candour; and the deployment of a strategy of impression management, in which it will typically be in both parties' interest to tacitly conspire in dissimulation and misrepresentation (Scott 1990:1-2). Consequently, what Scott designates as a 'public transcript' will most likely provide an indifferent guide to the real opinion of the subordinate. The portrayal of deference and consent will thus be tacitly acknowledged as merely tactical, and in so doing the dominant agent will discount the authenticity of such performances, which can lead them to conclude that their subjects are deceitful by nature (1990:3), thereby sowing seeds of distrust that help reinforce an inclination to bifurcate the social world, distinguishing an

¹⁴ Similarly, whilst discussing elephant handlers from the former logging camp of Bale in Karnataka, South India, Hart notes: "Mahouts still speak with pride about appearing on their bull elephants in full regalia for processions" (2005).

'us' from a 'them', again contributing to the perception of the *hattisar* as an enclaved place.

Thus Scott encourages us to consider the role that a dialectic of disguise and surveillance plays in power relations, and hence the need to discern the 'hidden transcript' of power relations. In the performance of deference and consent, the subordinate will attempt to divine the real attitudes and intentions of the dominant agent. Similarly, whilst conveying an impression of mastery and command, the dominant agent will attempt to peer behind the mask of his subordinates in order to divine their true inclinations. Situations of domination demand theatrical imperatives that conform to how the dominant agents wish things to appear (Scott 1990:4), evident in the formalised manner local wardens are served *prasada* on completion of a sacrificial puja.

7.6.3 Differential Access to Hidden Transcripts

In the case of my research, I am limited by the fact that whilst I had many opportunities to divine the handlers' hidden transcript; to understand how their public performances disguise their private sentiments, I had very limited opportunities to gain insight into the hidden transcripts of their superiors, especially those of the institutional authorities of the DNPWC. In fact, I realised that the handlers' were actively incorporating me into their enclaved, private world, thereby circumscribing my perspective. They adopted an almost 'paternal' role with which to 'protect' me from the 'undesirable' intrusions of their superiors (which they believed might interfere with my freedom of access to learning opportunities), an extension of their own notions of boundaries demarcating insider and outsider, private and public.

Although the DNPWC had authorised me to conduct the research, and had allocated Kamal Gaire, the chief departmental veterinarian in Chitwan, as my local supervisor, it soon became apparent that for all intents and purposes my real supervisor was Section Sahib. That the most eligible person to oversee my research had not formally been given this responsibility only served to further emphasise the clear-cut distinction between the managerial and the working strata in the park's institutional apparatus; he was still only a

hattisare and therefore lacking in the seniority and breadth of learning and experience befitting someone allocated to supervise a foreigner. The handlers were acutely aware of this, as well as the consequent fact that they were not under any official compulsion to cooperate with my research endeavours. My authorisation could not guarantee this; to conduct the research I had to secure their goodwill.

Thus, it was clear to me that I was expected to commit myself to an allegiance to either one party or the other. In committing myself to the handlers, as I surely had to in order to understand their lives, I not only represented a potentially valuable resource over which they could secure primary rights, but I also closed the door on gaining greater insight into the hidden transcripts of their superiors¹⁵. The cases of the Nepal TV crew, the Kathmandu students, and the German filmmakers were slightly different though; I could interact with these outsiders without jeopardising my perceived loyalty to the handlers.

7.6.4 The Hattisares' Hidden Transcript

The *hattisares'* public responses to visits from outsiders that I have already mentioned serve then as clues toward their private sentiments, clues that can be deciphered by virtue of my prolonged intimacy living with the handlers. When the Nepal TV crew arrived (as with the Kathmandu students), the handlers' relative candour when interacting with me was substituted by a rather more guarded demeanour (which also presented me with the dilemma as to what it would be appropriate for me to disclose). More significant though was their low set of expectations, despite their avowed desire to receive greater recognition. This is indicative of what I consider a mentality of enclavement, whereby one feels able to act freely amongst one's elephant driving colleagues and a few others accorded the privilege of relaxed and 'authentic' social interaction, such as Khardar Sahib, but not when in the presence of those deemed to be 'outsider', about whom one cannot be entirely sure of their sentiments toward handlers, and about whom one may hold negative suppositions about their likely attitudes and dispositions.

¹⁵ On reflection, it perhaps seems surprising that the local DNPWC officials showed such little interest in my research, since they could have tried to utilise me as an informational conduit with which to provide a more intimate perspective on the *hattisar*. This might be indicative of their estimations as to my capabilities as a researcher, their complacency, or even of a limited appreciation of the aims and methods of my research.

As I have shown, the reasons for these low expectations may be attributed to the legacy of relations between individuals from different *jats*, but it also needs to be more specifically related to attitudes resulting from the designation '*hattisare*'. That this has been a job deemed fit only for Tharu and equivalent people is crucial, since it results not only from the conviction that only the supposedly 'jungle-dwelling' Tharu had the sufficient capability, but also that few others would desire such a job. This became clear to me as I realised the disparity between my admiration for the handlers, based on my awe at their traditional skills in capturing, training, driving and caring for large, dangerous and intelligent wild animals, compared to the prevailing attitudes of most Nepali people towards the profession; as a job only undertaken by a backwards caste lacking other opportunities. Historically, to own an elephant has been a source of prestige, but actually having to care for one is rather hard, even demeaning work, best left to underlings.

The handlers are acutely aware that historically this job wasn't merely undertaken by a *janajati* group considered to be the *adivasi* of the Tarai, but most typically by those members of the *jat* who were forced to work other people's land in exchange for the means of subsistence and perhaps a small share of the harvest (those of *bahariya* status within Tharu society who might otherwise be forced into lifelong servitude as a *kamaiya*). And in the past, whilst people like themselves would have captured elephants as *phanets*, receiving a meagre wage, it would have been the *raut* who would receive rewards of land grants from the state, which may even account for how the profession of *raut* became a *thar*, or family name, accorded the superior, and non-Tharu status of belonging to the *Chhetri jat* (see sub section 2.4.2 on the Panjjar Documents in chapter two).

For similar reasons, contemporary handlers look back to the era of state-sponsored *shikar* with some nostalgia. Retired handlers like Bhagu who worked during the final years of the royal hunts, are the subject of jealousy as well as respect, since such occasions provided ample opportunity to receive generous awards of *baksis* (see section 3.5 in chapter three). Everyone knows that Bhagu's good favour with the Royal Family resulted

in him becoming quite wealthy by local standards, even if he is reputed to have squandered much of it on branded, foreign beer brewed under licence in Nepal (confirming the Tharu's self-characterisation of hedonism and financial imprudence). In the era of national parks and biodiversity conservation the same opportunities to prove one's bravery and consequently accrue financial reward from *thulo manche* just don't exist. On one occasion, whilst interviewing Bhagu Subba about the old days of elephant handling, he wistfully remarked; "We got rewards and medals. We got a lot of things then." Handlers are now exclusively dependent on their salaries (compounded by the fact that new recruits are no longer even guaranteed pensions after 20 years of service), and cannot expect to profit from the largesse of 'big men' (see section 4.8 on *hattisare* employment status in chapter four).

Thus handlers appreciate (and to some extent also resent) the evaluation of lowly social status that others typically project onto them, and which persists in the way they are treated by their DNPWC superiors (who would often articulate to me the very same stereotypes of the Tharu as reported by Guneratne). In this context, the handlers' pessimistic expectations regarding the Nepal TV crew make perfect sense. By contrast, the handlers also realised that a foreigner like myself would likely arrive without such preconceptions (confirmed by my continued avowals of respect for them and my acknowledgement of them as skilled practitioners from whom I wanted to learn). Consequently, the handlers were much more enthusiastic about the possible outcomes of my film (which would not only comprise more than a few brief interviews, but would also reach an international audience), which they believed would better represent to the world their true capabilities, and perhaps even encourage the Nepali establishment to re-evaluate their estimations of the human resources which ensure the success of its captive elephant management programme, which is so crucial to the work of the National Parks¹⁶.

¹⁶ The Humane Elephant Training Programme, dependent as it is on the collaboration of the handlers, may be taken to be indicative of a positive appreciation of the role of human resources in captive elephant management, and hence a more committed stance from the DNPWC than in the past.

7.6.5 Subtle Forms of Resistance

The handlers' expectation of being accorded a lowly social status can thus help explain the taciturn and reticent demeanour they displayed towards the inquiries of the Kathmandu students. Informants tended to gloss over these awkward moments of social status disparity by alluding to the stereotyped self-characterisation of shyness frequently employed by members of their Tharu *jat* (and indeed of many *janajati* groups in the presence of those from *tagadhari jats*, especially those who were previously of *masine matwali* rank). And on this point it's worth reminding ourselves that *jat* is not merely the indigenous synonym for caste and ethnicity, but that its root meaning refers to type, species or kind (Burghart 1984), suggesting that different social groups are conceived in essentialist terms as possessing their own distinguishing traits.

But equally, these encounters and the accounts of them can be understood as knowing performances in which agents conform to preconceived roles. Thus the handlers' disinclination to engage with the questioning students may be understood as a coping strategy, by which they ostensibly play out the role of the polite and deferential subordinate, albeit inflected with a sufficiently tight-lipped manner to tacitly convey their displeasure at being patronised. This of course recalls James Scott's discussion of everyday forms of resistance as the 'weapons of the weak' (1985).

By feeding grass to the elephants indiscriminately, the students also seemed oblivious to the foolish way they were behaving in the *hattisar*, which confirmed the handlers' expectations of outsiders' ignorance. By reinforcing the distinction between those who know how best to act and those who do not, it thus also served to underline the handlers' wisdom in contradistinction to the students' lack of it (and most educated visitors displayed similar behaviour, eventually prompting the erection of barriers to help separate visitors from elephants). Thus, this experience did not merely entail the handlers feeling patronised, but also subtly affirmed their expertise, reinforcing the conviction that only they truly belong in a world of human-elephant sociality.

The *hattisar* is their domain, in which they know best, so it might seem that they lack the confidence in their own authority with which to admonish misbehaving visitors, which would thus confirm their deeply entrenched state of conditioned subordination. However, as previously suggested, this disinclination to intervene might alternately be understood as passive aggression. The presence of those who often assume they need no advice on how to comport themselves in the *hattisar* seems to be resented by the handlers, since they have expertise in this domain but formally lack the authority to police those who enter it. Only when outsiders are absent can they feel truly empowered, as they would remind me in emphasising how crucial their mastery of the elephants is for the management of the national park, even if their superiors rarely acknowledged this.

However, in other contexts the handlers do feel able to more actively assert their power, such as in the way they withheld their co-operation from the German filmmakers' Bahun assistant, reminding us that acts of resistance are tactically determined. In this case, the handlers recognised their power as gatekeepers, the implications of barring those gates, and the fact that this defiance could be undertaken with impunity. By obstructing the filmmakers' assistant, they were in effect also defying their own DNPWC superiors who expected them to extend their co-operation. So long as the assistant was oblivious to the way his access was being obstructed, then so too would be the DNPWC officials. Although this exercise of power was covert in that the knowledge of it, and hence the pleasure, was limited to the handlers and close confidantes such as myself, it was nonetheless effective since they were able to police access to *hattisar* business.

7.7 Authorial Attempts at Standardisation

Having considered the character of inequality evident in social interactions with outsiders, as well as the coping strategies and private sentiments of the handlers, I now finally consider the relative institutional autonomy of the *sarkari hattisar* and its regulation by the DNPWC.

7.7.1 DNPWC Regulation of Elephant Stables

At Khorsor a set of staff rules was posted to a door (see below). This was primarily a bureaucratic fiction since most of the staff are unable to read them. These rules are clearly a duplicate of those for DNPWC staff such as wardens, rangers and game scouts. Their lack of relevance to *hattisare* staff seems to have gone unquestioned, and there has been no suggestion that a more appropriate set of rules tailored to their needs should be formulated. The stable couldn't function if its staff had to be at the office by 10am as stipulated in the rules, nor is it appropriate to refer to their place of work as 'the office' (*karyalaya*). The issue of absence is also emphasised, without acknowledgement of the fact that the men live and sleep at the *hattisar*, and hence their opportunities for absenteeism are more limited than for other categories of staff (and this has been a major problem in the civil service, in which there are cases of officials continuing to draw their salaries after years of absence).

Figure 7.3: Hattisar Rules as Posted at Khorsor

Hattisar Rules

His Majesty's Government Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation Division

Royal Chitwan National Park Office

Letter no: 9078/60

Dispatch no: 1700

Received letter no and date:

Subject: implementation of terms of reference

Shree

Purwa Sakatar Sauraha

RCNP Office

As per the decision of His Majesty's Government, the terms of reference regarding the responsibility, facilities, and penalty for the government officials to be followed while undertaking the job has already been in practice. The terms of

reference that declares the major aforementioned points has been received by the National Park and Forest conservation Division on 2059/11/6 date with the dispatch no 1387 along with the memorandum. This is to inform that all officials are requested to follow every point of the terms of reference. It is requested that those officials who do not follow the rules must be brought to the office.

Terms of Reference

1. It is the duty of officials to be present at the office by 10:00 am and to start the work with good behaviour as allocated or follow the instructions from senior officers.
2. At all times government officials are under the authority of His Majesty's Government. Officials are not allowed to be absent without giving prior notice. In order to take time off, the concerned person must submit a written application and receive acceptance before taking leave of absence.
3. Regular attendance is required at the office.
4. An employee must behave as per his service and position.
5. If an employee does not abide by the following points then he/she will receive an official warning, salary increments will be cancelled for up to a maximum of two years, and the possibility of promotion will be curtailed for a maximum of up to five years:
 - a. If the work is not satisfactory
 - b. If the person does not attend at a new office to which he or she has been transferred within the given time.
 - c. If the person is absent without prior consent.
 - d. If the person engages in immoral behaviour.
 - e. If the person breaks the rules with regard to the behaviour required of their role.
 - f. If the person does not regularly report to seniors as required.
 - g. If the person receives three warnings in a year.

- h. If the person cannot properly fulfil the allocated job according to the post.
- i. If the person is absent without giving notice, is regularly late and leaves early, and leaves the office except for reasons associated with his or her job, then the person shall be considered absent. The absent days will not be counted in the service period.
- j. If the person does not show due consideration to the requirements of time, to his or her boss, is not conscientious in discharging the duties of his or her work, or delays the discharge of duties, then the employee's supervisor can issue a warning.

Chief Conservation Officer

Reminders

1. Let's protect the park from fire.
2. Let's not disturb wildlife.
3. Let's not leave domesticated animals free.
4. Let's drive vehicles slowly.

Thank you for your help

Royal Chitwan National Park Office

This is indicative of the historical legacy of the *hattisar* as a state-funded institution that operated almost entirely under Tharu autonomy, with the status of the *subba* akin to that of a sub-contractor. In fact, in some ways the *subba's* authority seems not dissimilar from that of the *jimidar*, who was responsible for recruiting Tharu farmers to put land under the plough in order to raise tax revenues for the state. Similarly, in the past a *subba* would be responsible for recruiting and maintaining staff, with the authority to administer punishment and make promotions. In the modern era, the *hattisar* is in theory much more closely regulated and the authority of the *subba* has been circumscribed such that he can

now only make recommendations for promotion, which must be ratified by the Chief Warden (as previously mentioned in chapter four).

The *adikrit* and the *nasu subbas* have lost their prior power and authority in other ways too. The *adikrit* is supposedly responsible for all six government stables, but the DNPWC does not provide him the resources to actually discharge this duty (such as providing the funds with which to enable him to visit and inspect the stables which are distributed right across the Tarai). In theory he still has this authority, but in operational reality he does not (consequently choosing to manage Khorsor as the largest and most prestigious stable, which also enables him to oversee the Sauraha stable).

On the one hand this is indicative of the way in which the DNPWC is undermining the *subbas*- removing their power but not their responsibilities. They remain crucially dependent on the *hattisares*, but manage to perpetuate the patrimonial relations that defined the employer-employee relationship when *hattisars* were maintained at the whim of the Rana rulers. As such they give credence to its institutional autonomy, which is very much appreciated by the handlers. When a warden, ranger or vet visits the *hattisar*, there is a tacit acknowledgement that culturally he is in their domain, where their elephant-related cultural practices must be respected, even if he formally wields superior authority. On the other hand, the gulf in literacy can be seen to justify the DNPWC's continued reliance on the *subba* and the *khاردar* as the primary intermediaries between park management as it pertains to captive elephant management, and the handlers who make the stables work in pursuit of these goals. This gulf consequently helps perpetuate the institutional autonomy of the *hattisar*, problematising efforts to more closely integrate it with park agendas.

Thus we can see why the *hattisar* retains much of its traditional character and why its staff still conceive of the stable as an institution relatively discrete from the broader park apparatus. However, this should not suggest that the DNPWC takes its captive elephant resources for granted. On the contrary, it has been keen to put foreign-funding into infrastructural development (evident in the building and fencing programmes at Khorsor

and Sauraha initiated by the Dutch aid agency SNV during 2004). Similarly, management has recognised that more can be done to professionalise elephant handling by regulating elephant care and giving handlers a greater stake in the park's stated commitment to participatory natural resource conservation and sustainable development (even if the abolition of pension rights mitigates against this). The Hattisare Education Programme conceived by the KMTNC, is one such example of the attempt to further integrate handlers with park activities.

7.7.2 The Hattisare Conservation Education Programme

This proposed programme developed by Narayan Dhakal in 2001 whilst serving as the Director of what came to be renamed the BCC (then named the Nepal Conservation Research Training Center or NCRTC), and which sadly has never been fully implemented for want of funds, was intended to both further integrate handlers with the agendas of the park's continuing development and to boost their working morale¹⁷. It is considered imperative that *hattisares* understand the ecological impact of their elephants. According to the planning document, each day an elephant consumes somewhere in the region of 200kg of fodder, which involves two hours of early morning grass-cutting, in addition to five or six hours open grazing within the park according to the whims of the driver. Throughout the park this adds up to roughly 16 tons of fodder removed daily for feeding, presenting a potentially detrimental impact for the park's biodiversity, of which the *hattisares* are considered to be relatively ignorant. For example, handlers have disturbed important vulture habitats while lopping *simal* trees for fodder during the winter season (see figure 7.4).

¹⁷ Although never implemented, the spirit of the Hattisare Education Programme was at least evident in the new mahout induction programme, as mentioned in chapter six, which provided orientation sessions to enable new mahouts appreciate their function within the park management strategy.



Figure 7.4: BCC Mahout climbing Simal tree to cut branches for fodder

(The thorns of the tree have to be removed before it is possible to climb. The problem arises when *hattisare* sever the trunk in addition to the branches)

Dhakal and others realized that since *hattisares* spend more time inside the park than any other park and research staff, they could play a vital role in park protection and

management by providing valuable information on wildlife sightings and poacher activities. The elephant handling staff still represent an under-exploited resource in this respect, and with sufficient training they could act as frontline conservation messengers. Whilst undertaking their typical daily activities within the park, the following inputs to park management have been envisaged for handlers (although what the realisation of these aims might entail is not always made clear):

- Monitoring endangered species (rhino, tiger, elephant, blue bull or *nilgai*)
- Preparing a daily journal of animal sightings and listing bird species
- Reporting on adverse environmental activities, and providing information on poaching activities (sadly on the increase during the escalation of political violence between Government and Maoist forces)
- Enabling visitors to make better wildlife sightings whilst minimising damage to flora and fauna
- Providing better care for domestic elephants to ensure they are healthy and happy for work
- Collecting fodder selectively by considering habitat protection
- Reporting any human activity that is offensive to the rules and regulations of the park

The programme would both impart to elephant staff a greater knowledge of biodiversity conservation and aim to improve standards of elephant care. Training was envisaged as being informal and participatory, with instruction by wildlife technicians, botanists, and veterinary assistants. The key components of such a training package would include:

- The concept of ecosystem
- General plant ecology and physiology
- Seed dispersal and its importance for maintaining forest habitat
- Environmental considerations in selecting trees for lopping for fodder
- Risks associated with wild animals in their natural habitat
- Environmental considerations for the collection of forest products

- Understanding of the adverse impact of fire in grassland and forest habitats
- The role of *hattisares* in anti-poaching and monitoring activities
- Better maintenance and care of domestic elephants
- Saving elephants from transferable diseases transmitted by domestic livestock

One further aspect of the Hattisare Conservation Education Programme was the intention to produce a standardised training manual, the sale of which might produce additional revenue. At the time of drafting, Nepali park managers were unaware of "Practical Elephant Management: A Handbook for Mahouts" produced by the Elephant Welfare Association (EWA) of Kerala in conjunction with the Zoo Outreach Organisation in 1997 (Namboodiri [ed], 1997), a manual expressly developed as a reference tool for elephant handlers themselves, intended to help ensure that recommended practices are adhered to and high standards of care maintained.

As such, the Keralan and Thai manuals (as mentioned in chapter six) represent an effort to impose a standardised regime upon elephant handlers. Efforts such as these have become core concerns of the emergent, multi-disciplinary profession of captive elephant management and the various animal welfare organisations whose agendas and resources drive such work.

7.8 Conclusion

We have seen that the institutional inequality between *hattisare* and their superiors and its implications for social interaction is quite complex, inflected by the legacy of the *Muluki Ain*, with its distinctions between the primary ranked *tagadhari* Bahun and Chhetri and the tertiary ranked *masine matwali* Tharu, as well as the distinctions resulting from perceptions regarding differential access to development and the attainment of modernity. This is further compounded by stereotypes of the *jangali* and *pachari* Tharu, and the history of in-migration and land loss, which bred distrust between autochthonous *madhesi* and migrant *pahari*, especially with those who were wealthy, high status, and literate. These issues have influenced attitudes of mutual evaluation between *hattisares* and their superiors, leading me to develop an analysis of the performance of power according to

social and institutional role, involving the dissimulation of the 'public transcript' of conventionalized decorum, which occludes the 'hidden transcript' of agents' authentic attitudes and behaviours, freely expressed only when not in the presence of high status others, institutional or otherwise. This also led to a consideration of the covert strategies of resistance deployed by the handlers as a means to mitigate their disempowered status, and the way in which they assert their autonomy in the *hattisar* as a domain of their own. Finally, I have also considered the imperative to exert regulatory control over practice in the *hattisar*, and the various programmes and strategies that have been implemented to advance this aim.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Analytic Themes

This thesis has examined the specifically Nepali institution of the *hattisar* in both synchronic and diachronic perspective, locating it within its contemporary context as an integral part of Nepal's apparatus for protected area management and nature tourism. In addition to the intimate relation between man and elephant, this has entailed consideration of the distinctive skills, practices, and lifeworld of its practitioners, whose lives are fundamentally shaped by the total institution of the *hattisar*. I have made three key arguments in the course of exploring the principal themes of history, practice and identity:

- **A History of Co-Option and Integration**

In chapters two, three and seven I have argued that the institution of the *hattisar* that developed under Shah and Rana rule was relatively autonomous, albeit maintained under royal sponsorship, but that as the rationale for deployment of captive elephant resources has changed, the *hattisar* has become subject to increasing regulatory control.

- **Enskilment Through Participation**

In chapters four, five and six, in describing the performance of daily duties, the involvement in collective ritual, the tenor of social life, and relations between seniors and juniors, I have demonstrated that the process of skills acquisition entails progressive participation, and that explicitly didactic scenarios are typically avoided.

- **Enclavement and Identity**

In chapters four, five, six and especially seven, I have shown that the *hattisar* is an enclaved space that engenders a specific set of attitudes and dispositions that may be taken to constitute a specific group habitus, and that this becomes particularly evident during instances when outsiders enter the handlers' domain, as the *hattisares* strategically modify their demeanour in response.

8.2 History, Co-option and Integration

By providing a schematic history of captive elephant management, I have demonstrated not only the antiquity of the practice of keeping elephants, but also the

various uses to which they have been put. Furthermore, by tracing the initial codification of knowledge about captive elephant management in a literature known as *Gaja Sastra*, I have been able to demonstrate the continuities throughout South Asia in the practice of keeping captive elephants. Despite the specificities of the Nepali system (with its probably recently evolved three man care team in contrast to the two man team found in many parts of India), it has nonetheless been informed by the same Sanskritic body of literature as that which is at the root of Assamese, Bengali and South Indian traditions. In these regions, as in Nepal, an originally Sanskrit literature has been translated into or at least inspired versions in local vernaculars, which can be understood by practitioners as well as learned scholars who do not manage elephants for themselves.

Following Edgerton, I have argued that the *Gaja Sastra* most likely represent a codification of practical knowledge, and not merely an invention of elite, learned scholars. Despite the rhetorical flourishes that garnish works such as the *Matanga Lila*, they nonetheless display evidence of a knowledge that can only derive from prolonged experience spent in close proximity to elephants. As such, the *Gaja Sastra* represents the first instance of an ongoing political struggle for institutional hegemony that Scott cites (1998:311), and which I have argued characterises the relationship between the typically state-like agencies that maintain stables, and the practitioner handlers they employ.

More recent evidence of this imperative towards the exercise of ever-greater degrees of regulatory control is cited in later chapters. For example, in chapter four I explain how the *subba* or stable manager, and *adikrit subba* or section officer, have had their powers of autonomy progressively circumscribed in the new era in which the *sarkari hattisar* (government elephant stable) is managed to facilitate park management. This claim is possible by virtue of the rich historical materials contained in the Panjiar Documents, which enabled me to consider the significance of the *hattisar* in 18th and 19th century Nepali Tarai society, and thereby make contrasts between then and now. Of course, this change in the power of the *subba* should come as no surprise since Nepal has been explicitly dedicated to modernisation ever since it emerged from the isolation of Rana rule in the early 1950s. This has meant that state institutions that

were once run on patrimonial and nepotistic lines have been transformed in order to function according to the modern values of rationality, efficiency and accountability.

Another aspect of this change, so evident in the contrast between the recollections of the King's elephant driver Bhagu, who rode in the days of *rastriyako shikar* (royal hunts), and his successors like Section Sahib, who no longer have the same opportunities for personal reward and other gratuities, lies in the imperative to ideologically integrate elephant handlers with the ethos of conservation and natural resource management. In the past, the Tharu elephant handlers could be left virtually alone to manage the *hattisar*, only occasionally called upon to provide service to the King. In the modern era of the national park by contrast, the elephants and their handlers play a more regular and involved role in managing the national park, thereby necessitating their greater ideological integration. The induction and Hattisare Education Programmes I have described, represent attempts to further explain the aims and objectives of protected area management to handlers and to persuade them of their desirability. Finally, it should be appreciated that this is a two-way information exchange. It does not merely involve an attempt to ensure handlers appreciate the motivating aims of the national park and the sanctity of the habitats and wildlife within it, it also involves attempts by the authorities to better appreciate the work performed by the handlers. This is evident in the WWF commissioned booklet on *hattisars*, which has enabled many officials to learn more about what was previously a closed world to them.

8.3 Enskilment and Participation

The argument about enskilment and participation is closely related to the argument about enclavement and identity. The *hattisar* is a place where, from the outset, new recruits are expected to engage in the duties allocated to them by their seniors, almost irrespective of the skills and knowledge they may be yet to acquire. The induction programme I describe was an exceptional occasion in that new recruits will not typically expect to receive explicitly didactic and collective training sessions such as these. Answerable specifically to the *patchuwa* and *phanet* that service the elephant to which he has also been allocated, a new recruit will usually begin to engage in core tasks involving his elephant from the beginning, albeit under the supervision of his more experienced elders. The apprentice will observe proper procedure, ask

questions, and begin to practice for himself. Once his seniors deem him proficient, then the apprentice will be trusted to perform duties without supervision.

Whilst many apprentices were recruited at the youngest age at which one can officially draw a salary, namely the age of 18, the vestiges of a prior, traditional form of apprenticeship were still discernible. Most of the new recruits who joined in mass during my research period had no prior experience with elephants, and had merely acquired the opportunity to try for the job on the recommendation of a *hattisare* relative or co-villager. However, there were others who had begun working with elephants from a far younger age. Some of these handlers, now in their mid 20s and early 30s, had followed a previously popular pattern of recruitment, in which the sons and nephews of *hattisare* would begin helping out around the stable in exchange for meals and a place to sleep. Most of these handlers had begun working in the stable at the age of 13/14, having to wait 4/5 years until they were eligible to claim a salary. Many of these would have assumed the full duties of a *mahut* before their working status was formalised. In the *hattisar* of today, there are stable boys who help out and run errands, but none who have made a substantive commitment to apprenticing as an elephant handler, all of whom still attend school.

Although I have acknowledged that handlers acquire a wide range of expert and environmental knowledge in the course of becoming a *hattisare* and receiving promotion, I have focussed on the distinctive relationship between man and elephant. As is evident from my account of the *Kamari Puja* performed at the beginning of an elephant's training, this relationship is heavily inflected by the elephant's status as an incarnation of the god *Ganesha*. However, I have also argued for the relevance of the elephant as a prestigious symbol of royal property, and the kudos that *hattisares* can receive in being seen to be the guardians of this esteemed royal property in which divinity dwells, and which traditionally helps to ensure the welfare and prosperity of the polity.

But handlers do not merely see themselves as the custodians of a sacred animal, they also develop very personal and intimate relationships with their elephants, whose quirks and foibles they become intimately familiar with, perhaps more so than their families' own, as the *patchuwa* Bukh Lal noted. Since elephants have been trained to

respond to vocal commands, I found that many of the handlers chat with their elephants, convinced that their responses can be taken to be indicative of their comprehension. This personal relationship even extends to playful admonishment, so that if a handler is displeased with his elephant, or if it is not adequately responding to his commands, he might shout something like “*bur Chaudhary agad!*” which means ‘forward you Chaudhary cunt!’ In socio-linguistic terms, the relaxed informality of the swearing can be taken to be indicative of the sense of solidarity handlers feel in relation their elephants. Furthermore, it’s interesting that this wording implies that the predominantly Tharu handlers consider their elephants to be of the same *jat* as them. If the elephants of the Tarai are Tharu like them, then it also serves to reinforce their claim to be the traditional custodians of Nepal’s elephants¹.

8.4 Enclavement and Identity

My historical argument has made it clear that even if the *hattisar* operated under royal sponsorship, it was in the past nonetheless a thoroughly Tharu institution, staffed and managed by Tharu people, and subject to minimal interference from outsiders. That situation is less pertinent today, since the *sarkari hattisar* is now an integral component of the national park apparatus, subject to the regulatory oversight of the Chief Warden and the ancillary officers of whichever park territory a *hattisar* is located in, and contributes its services to. Nonetheless, the *hattisar* remains an institution with its own distinct professional identity and sub-culture. Not only does shared practice serve to inculcate a similar set of attitudes, dispositions and forms of know-how, in other words a group habitus specific to *hattisare*, it is also a total way of life with its own specific ritual practices that bond a man to his elephant and dramatise the passage to a new status as a handler. Finally, the notion of enclavement is relevant to the *hattisar* because it is a place in which distinctions between insider and outsider, between those who belong and those who merely visit, is strongly emphasised.

¹ Although a few other *jats* have become handlers (Shrestha, Tamang, Magar), and even Mlecch, or European (myself), the prospect of a *tagadhari* Bahun or Chhetri becoming one remains rather absurd.

Appendix 1: Glossary

<i>aajivan subba</i>	'subba for life', honorary position given as reward for outstanding service.
<i>abhisheka</i>	the act of bathing, part of the procedure for Hindu worship, intended to please the deity that the ritual is trying to attract.
<i>accha</i>	relish or chutney
<i>adikrit subba</i>	'Section Officer', chief elephant handler responsible for all Nepali government elephant stables.
<i>adivasi</i>	term of reference for indigenous or 'tribal' groups, in contradistinction to those possessing a recognised caste, typically applied to groups at the fringes of the state, often believed to pursue more 'traditional' modes of subsistence.
<i>Airavata</i>	the celestial elephant, the mount of the Hindu god <i>Indra</i> .
<i>Aitevar</i>	Sunday, a day associated with the dead in Tharu culture, on which salt and molasses are traditionally left out of the elephants' <i>dana</i> .
<i>alankara</i>	the act of clothing and decoration, part of the procedure for Hindu worship, intended to please the deity that the ritual is trying to attract.
<i>andolan</i>	people's movement
<i>asi/hasiya</i>	sickle (Nepali <i>bhasa</i>).
<i>asrama</i>	the four stages of life through which one passes in traditional Hindu culture.
<i>atman</i>	the essential self that transcends material existence, whose future incarnations are determined by the accumulation of merit and demerit, unless one succeeds in escaping from <i>samsara</i> , and achieves <i>moksa</i> .
<i>Atargal</i>	the braided stirrups through which one puts one's feet in order to give driving commands by applying pressure

	from one's toes.
<i>avatar</i>	earthly incarnation of a god, of which <i>Vishnu</i> is said to have had ten.
<i>bagh</i>	tiger
<i>bahariya</i>	a landless person in Tharu society.
<i>Bahun</i>	the Nepali vernacular form of the <i>Brahmin varna</i> . One of the twice born, <i>tagadhari</i> -wearing castes that has politically and economically dominated Nepali society.
<i>baisi</i>	buffalo
<i>bakhro</i>	goat
<i>baksis</i>	complementary reward or tip, or even 'bribe'.
<i>Ban Devi</i>	the Tharu forest goddess
<i>begar/begari</i>	forced labour
<i>bhai</i>	younger brother
<i>bhajan</i>	song of devotional praise
<i>bhakti</i>	devotion. In Hindu thought, one of three paths (<i>marga</i>) by which one can achieve enlightenment (the others being <i>karma</i> , action and <i>gnan</i> , knowledge).
<i>bhale</i>	cockerel
<i>bhasa</i>	language
<i>bhat</i>	cooked rice
<i>bhauju</i>	elder brother's wife
<i>bhupu</i>	retired
<i>bhut</i>	ghost (see also <i>pret</i>)
<i>bikas</i>	development
<i>bikasi</i>	developed
<i>Bikram Baba</i>	Tharu territorial god of Chitwan.
<i>bida</i>	holiday/vacation/time off work
<i>birta</i>	a grant for a form of tax-free, heritable land tenure.
<i>bishwas dine</i>	'giving trust', an important component in a handler's efforts at building a trusting relationship with his elephant, often entailing the rewarding gift of a protective massage of earth on the elephant's scalp.
<i>boksi</i>	witch

<i>bora</i>	sack (Nepali <i>bhasa</i>), specifically the sack that one uses whilst sitting on an elephant's neck in order to drive it.
<i>brahman</i>	the total principle of existence, encompassing the cosmos and all life within it.
<i>caraune</i>	to graze (take an elephant to)
<i>camal</i>	unhusked rice
<i>chang</i>	'beer', made from fermented rice or maize (corn).
<i>chaudhari</i>	a man in Tharu society, not unlike a <i>jimidar</i> , with juridical and revenue-collecting authority for a <i>praganna</i> . Widely adopted as a Tharu surname.
<i>chautariya</i>	a man in Tharu society with juridical and revenue-collecting authority for a village, subject to a <i>mahato</i> and <i>chaudhari</i> .
<i>Chhetri</i>	the Nepali vernacular form of the <i>Ksatriya varna</i> . One of the twice-born, <i>tagadhari</i> -wearing castes that has politically and economically dominated Nepali society.
<i>chittal</i>	deer
<i>chituwa</i>	leopard
<i>chiya</i>	tea
<i>dai</i>	elder brother
<i>dal</i>	lentils, typically cooked into a curried soup.
<i>dana</i>	religious gift/package of grass, rice, salt and molasses given to elephants (called <i>kuchi</i> in North India).
<i>dalit</i>	means 'the oppressed', and is the appropriate term of reference for groups that were previously called 'untouchable'. The name change was originally encouraged by the Indian activist B R Ambedkar in the 1950s.
<i>daroga</i>	deputy elephant stable manager
<i>darshan</i>	the receipt of a gaze infused with divine power, either that of a consecrated image (<i>murti</i>), or of an enlightened being, a yogic <i>guru</i> or ascetic.
<i>Dashain</i>	major Nepali religious festival in the month of <i>Kartik</i> that celebrates the goddess <i>Durga</i> slaying the buffalo

	demon (<i>Mahi-asura</i>), typically involving the sacrifice of buffalo along with five days of feasting and drinking.
<i>deva</i>	god
<i>devanagari</i>	the script in which Sanskrit, Hindi and Nepali are written, literally meaning 'the writing of the gods'.
<i>devi</i>	goddess
<i>dhan</i>	rice paddy
<i>dharma</i>	the moral order of the cosmos, determined for individuals according to their <i>karma</i> , <i>varna</i> and <i>asrama</i> .
<i>dherai</i>	a lot
<i>dipradhana</i>	the display of lamps, part of the procedure for Hindu worship, intended to attract the deity that the ritual is trying to attract.
<i>dipti</i>	duty
<i>dori</i>	the ropes used to attach <i>gada</i> and <i>hauda</i> to an elephant.
<i>dudh</i>	milk
<i>gada</i>	a special cushion, made of sacking and filled with dried grass, tied to an elephant to provide a comfortable seat or to anchor a <i>hauda</i> .
<i>gaja</i>	the Sanskrit term for elephant
<i>Gaja Sastra</i>	a body of literature, chiefly in Sanskrit, concerned with the management of elephants.
<i>gaida</i>	rhinoceros
<i>Ganesha</i>	Hindu elephant headed god
<i>gaun</i>	village
<i>ghar</i>	house
<i>gita</i>	song/music with lyrics
<i>gotra</i>	lineage
<i>gurau</i>	in Tharu society a man who can perform rituals on behalf of his community.
<i>gusti</i>	a trip or journey
<i>hatti</i>	elephant
<i>hattisar</i>	elephant stable
<i>hattisare</i>	someone who works in an elephant stable i.e elephant

	handler.
<i>hauda</i>	a balustraded seat attached to a <i>gada</i> , enabling passengers to ride comfortably and securely on an elephant.
<i>Indra</i>	Hindu god of the sky and also king of the gods.
<i>jaghiya</i>	a method of capturing an elephant involving chasing, tiring, lassoing and tethering.
<i>janajati</i>	term for the ethnic groups of Nepal who are not members of orthodox Hindu castes.
<i>jangal</i>	Jungle
<i>jagir</i>	form of taxable land tenure received as reward for service to the state, now used to refer to a salaried job.
<i>jagirdar</i>	a holder of <i>jagir</i> tenure
<i>jat</i>	caste group
<i>jhara</i>	compulsory labour (sometimes provided in lieu of agricultural revenues).
<i>jharahi saghauni</i>	Tharu vernacular for <i>jhara/begar</i> , meaning 'to stop work', since their own work had to be put on hold whilst they discharged their labour obligations to state functionaries.
<i>jimidar</i>	government revenue collector eligible for local land and labour privileges. Also possessed juridical authority.
<i>jirayat</i>	a <i>jimidar's</i> dispensation to land in exchange for revenue collecting service to the state.
<i>jutho</i>	dirty/unclean, literally or ritually.
<i>Kali</i>	the Hindu goddess of death
<i>kam</i>	work
<i>kamaiya</i>	bonded labourer
<i>kamari</i>	a tall post used to secure an elephant. Used during training and otherwise primarily on males.
<i>kambha</i>	the short post, used primarily to secure female elephants
<i>kammal</i>	blanket, part of the official kit issued to a <i>hattisare</i> .
<i>kanugoye</i>	a functionary who kept records of cadastral surveys, assisting the revenue-collecting work of the <i>mahato</i> and

	<i>chaudhari</i> in Tharu society.
<i>karma</i>	the principle of action, according to which one earns merit (<i>pun</i>), and demerit (<i>pap</i>), which determine one's future incarnations in the cycle of existence (<i>samsara</i>).
<i>kasni</i>	the metal chain around an elephant's neck to which is attached the <i>mathiya</i> and <i>atargal</i> .
<i>khana</i>	food
<i>khardar</i>	government administrator (and specifically functionary involved in managing elephant stables).
<i>khola</i>	river
<i>khor kheda</i>	a form of elephant capture in which large numbers are herded into a corral.
<i>khukri</i>	the distinctly curved Nepali knife, part of the official kit issued to a <i>hattisare</i> .
<i>khursani</i>	chilli pepper
<i>kir</i>	supplementary diet for elephants composed of cooked rice and molasses.
<i>kirtan gaune</i>	hymn singing
<i>kocha</i>	stick, specifically the sharpened bamboo sticks used for elephant training.
<i>koonkie</i>	North Indian term for elephants that are used to train other elephants.
<i>kukhuro</i>	chicken
<i>Lahure</i>	name for Nepalis who went to Lahore for work as mercenaries, originally for the Sikh ruler of the Punjab Ranjit Singh, and later for the British.
<i>Lakshmi</i>	Hindu goddess of wealth
<i>lohauta</i>	a wooden truncheon applied to the haunches of a training-giving elephant in order to make it work harder.
<i>mada</i>	Nepali term for musth
<i>madesi</i>	a person from the plains
<i>Magar</i>	a <i>pahari janajati</i> group of the second, <i>namasine matwali</i> (non-enslaveable alcohol drinker) status in the

	<i>Muluki Ain</i> . Along with the <i>Gurung</i> , <i>Rai</i> and <i>Limbu</i> , and unlike the <i>Tamang</i> , they were accredited with martial qualities by the British, and consequently allowed to serve in Gorkha regiments.
<i>mahato</i>	in Tharu society, a man with juridical and revenue collecting authority for a <i>mauja</i> . Also adopted as a Tharu <i>thar</i> .
<i>mahatsabh</i>	a ceremonial or processional occasion
<i>mahute</i>	junior elephant handler in Nepali three man elephant care team.
<i>makka</i>	maize (corn)
<i>manche</i>	man/person
<i>mandir</i>	temple
<i>Mangalvar</i>	Tuesday, the day of Mars, associated with <i>Ganesha</i> . Like Sunday, a day on which it has been traditional to leave salt and molasses out of elephants' <i>dana</i> .
<i>masine matwali</i>	the third rank in the five-fold scheme of the <i>Muluki Ain</i> , meaning 'enslaveable alcohol drinker', comprising groups such as the Tharu and the Tamang.
<i>masu</i>	meat
<i>mathiya</i>	the large metal ring by which the strands of the <i>atargal</i> are attached to the <i>kasni</i> .
<i>mauja</i>	a subdivision of a <i>praganna</i>
<i>mela</i>	commercial fair
<i>moksa/mukti</i>	soteriological state of liberation from the round of rebirth, said to result from realisation of the consonance between <i>atman</i> and <i>brahman</i> .
<i>Muglan</i>	Nepali term for India
<i>Muluki Ain</i>	state ordained civil code, which included a system for ranking the social groups of Nepal and regulating their interactions according to the principle of purity and pollution.
<i>murti</i>	the image of a god
<i>musth</i>	a state of hormonal excitement in male elephants

	characterised by glandular secretions from the temples, frequent penile erection, urinary dripping, and unpredictable and even violent behaviour.
<i>Newar</i>	the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley. A distinctive civilisation with its own caste system, its own syncretic mix of Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism, its own kings, language, as well as styles of art, craft and architecture. Politically displaced by the Gorkhas in the late 18 th century.
<i>nivrttibharan</i>	pension, from the Sanskrit, although the anglicised <i>pensan</i> is more common.
<i>nun</i>	salt
<i>oozie</i>	the term for an elephant handler in Myanmar.
<i>pachari</i>	backwards, i.e not developed
<i>pagari</i>	a headdress worn by officials as reward for service to the state in 19 th century Nepal.
<i>pahari</i>	a person from the hills
<i>pakhuwa</i>	sickle (<i>Tharu bhasa</i>).
<i>pandit</i>	a Brahmin scholar
<i>parampara</i>	tradition
<i>paryatak</i>	tourist
<i>patchuwa</i>	median ranking Nepali elephant handler, officially responsible for grass-cutting.
<i>patera</i>	the sacking from which a <i>gada</i> is made
<i>patuka</i>	sash worn by <i>hattisare</i> on special occasions, which designates their rank according to its colour.
<i>phand</i>	the noose thrown over an elephant during the <i>jaghiya</i> form of capture, from which the designations <i>phand</i> and <i>phanet</i> are derived
<i>phandi</i>	term for an elephant capturer in North India.
<i>phanet</i>	driver and senior ranking handler in Nepali three man elephant care team. Originally designated an elephant capturer.
<i>praganna</i>	an administrative district comprising several villages,

	under the authority of a <i>chaudhari</i> .
<i>prasada</i>	consecrated sacrificial leftovers infused with divine power and ingested or otherwise taken upon completion of a <i>puja</i>
<i>pilkhana</i>	elephant stable (North India)
<i>pret</i>	ghost (see also <i>bhut</i>)
<i>puja</i>	ritual
<i>pujari</i>	ritual officiant
<i>Purusa</i>	the cosmic man whose sacrificial dismemberment in Hindu myth gave rise to the four <i>varna</i> of <i>Brahmin</i> , <i>Ksatriya</i> , <i>Vaisya</i> and <i>Sudra</i> .
<i>raja</i>	king
<i>raikar</i>	the land tenure system in which <i>raiti</i> had the right to work land provided they submit agricultural revenues to the state, through its local proxies.
<i>raiti</i>	in Tharu society, a peasant with rights to taxable land.
<i>raksi</i>	‘wine’, a spirit made from rice or corn.
<i>Rama</i>	the hero of the <i>Ramayana</i> , and eighth <i>avatar</i> of <i>Vishnu</i> .
<i>Ramayana</i>	the sacred Hindu story in which <i>Rama</i> is pitted against <i>Ravana</i> , who kidnaps his lover <i>Sita</i> .
<i>rasa</i>	rope
<i>rastriya</i>	royal
<i>rati</i>	night-time
<i>raut</i>	chief of elephant care teams, previously responsible for elephant capture operations.
<i>Ravana</i>	the demon king of Lanka, key protagonist in the <i>Ramayana</i> .
<i>sabji</i>	Hindi word for vegetables commonly used in the <i>Tarai</i> .
<i>sadhu</i>	colloquial term for an ascetic renouncer, meaning ‘good man’.
<i>sakkhar</i>	molasses
<i>samdhi</i>	a congenial term reserved for a comrade from a <i>gotra</i> into which one is eligible to marry (according to the

	principle of lineage/clan exogamy).
<i>samnyasi</i>	ascetic renouncer (see also <i>sadhu</i>).
<i>samsara</i>	the cycle of existence involving birth, death and rebirth, determined according to action (<i>karma</i>) relative to one's moral obligations (<i>dharma</i>).
<i>sano</i>	small
<i>sarkar</i>	government
<i>sastra</i>	a Sanskrit treatise
<i>sathi</i>	friend
<i>Shakti</i>	the goddess principle, also meaning power
<i>shakta</i>	a devotee of the goddess
<i>shikar</i>	a hunt
<i>shikari</i>	a hunter/tracker
<i>Shiva</i>	Hindu god, who lives as an ascetic on Mount Kailesh, and takes many forms, including <i>Bhairavi</i> and <i>Pashupati</i> (Lord of the Beasts).
<i>shuddhikaran</i>	procedures of purification performed during a <i>puja</i> .
<i>sikri</i>	chain, most commonly used to refer to the one that attaches an elephant to its post.
<i>sthyai/asthyai</i>	employment status, referring to a situation with (<i>sthyai</i>) or without (<i>asthyai</i>) guaranteed employment and pension rights.
<i>subba</i>	elephant stable manager
<i>tagadhari</i>	the sacred thread eligible to be worn by the twice-born castes.
<i>talim</i>	training
<i>Tamang</i>	<i>pahari janajati</i> group that occupied <i>masine matwali</i> status in the <i>Muluki Ain</i> . The Tamang are Tibetan Buddhists thought to have migrated from the Tibetan plateau about a 1000 years ago.
<i>Tantra</i>	a non-vedic set of religious practices with its own textual traditions, associated with worship of the goddess and the principle of power inhering within her (<i>shakti</i>), as well as antinomian tendencies that often

	reverse the norms of purity and pollution. Broadly contrasts with the religious conventions of <i>Vaisnavas</i> (followers of <i>Vishnu</i> in his various <i>avatars</i>).
<i>tapasya</i>	asceticism/austerities.
<i>taraha</i>	the sacking upon which one sits whilst driving an elephant (<i>Tharu bhasa</i>). See also <i>bora</i> .
<i>tarkari</i>	vegetables
<i>Tarai</i>	a swathe of lowland running east-west, at the foot of the Himalayas in Nepali, Indian and Bhutani territory.
<i>tat</i>	the dried grass filling of a <i>gada</i> .
<i>tekhdar</i>	government contractor
<i>thar</i>	family name
<i>Tharu</i>	heterogenous ethnic group indigenous to the Nepali and Indian <i>Tarai</i> , composed of multiple sub-groups with differing dialects and cultural practices (hence a <i>madeshi janajati</i> group). Occupied the status of <i>masine matwali</i> in the <i>Muluki Ain</i> .
<i>thorai</i>	a little
<i>thulo</i>	large
<i>tol</i>	a neighbourhood within a village
<i>topi</i>	cap, a baseball cap is part of the official kit issued to a <i>hattisare</i> .
<i>tumlet</i>	water-bottle, part of the official kit issued to a <i>hattisare</i> .
<i>upavar</i>	gift
<i>vahana</i>	the vehicle or mount of a Hindu deity
<i>varna</i>	the four functional orders or classes into which Hindu society is traditionally divided, comprising the priestly class (<i>Brahman</i>), ruling warrior class (<i>Ksatriya</i>), merchant class (<i>Vaisya</i>) and labouring class (<i>Sudra</i>).
<i>Vikram Samvat</i>	(also <i>Bikram Sambat</i>). Nepali solar calendar with 12 months, that is about 57 years ahead of the western calendar.
<i>Vishnu</i>	along with <i>Shiva</i> and <i>Shakti</i> in her many forms, one of the three most important gods of Hinduism. Like <i>Shiva</i>

	and <i>Shakti</i> , he takes many forms, of which the most renowned are <i>Rama</i> , <i>Krishna</i> , and also the Buddha.
<i>yajna</i>	sacrifice
<i>yantra</i>	a sacred Tantric diagram that alternately represents the cosmos or the goddess, utilised in the <i>hattisar</i> for sacrificial rituals performed in honour of <i>Ban Devi</i> .
<i>Yama</i>	Hindu god of the dead who plays an important role in ensuring that one's <i>atman</i> goes to its next destination.
<i>yuga</i>	age, part of the four-fold cycle of time in Hindu thought, through which the universe progressively acquires and loses form and order.

N.B For elephant command words see figure 5.15

Appendix 2: Humanist and Scientific Approaches to The Personhood of Elephants and Their Ethical Implications

We have seen that Nepali elephant handlers treat elephants as persons for reasons that seem to them both practically self-evident and culturally conventional. This is reinforced by their attribution of a notion of a society and culture specific to elephants (an idea with which many animal behavioural scientists will concur)¹. This attribution relies on the intellectual form of argument by analogy. Since the contention is considered so demonstrably obvious, Nepali elephant handlers consequently have little cause to question the basis of their convictions. However, they are by no means idiosyncratic in the belief that it is appropriate to treat elephants as persons, and western science and philosophy, for reasons both intellectual and practical, is now also engaged in a rigorous and reflexive investigation of the bases of a putative elephant personhood (and indeed of animal personhood in general).

Animal behavioural science (a development from the primarily observational prior discipline of Ethology) has been rather late in acknowledging the significance of intra-specific variation however (the conceptual starting point for animal personhood). Until recently this mode of scientific endeavour was more concerned with the typical behaviour of a species as a whole (Clutton-Brock 1994:33). By contrast, ethnographic and historical accounts of animal husbandry have, for a long time, testified to the importance practitioners attach to paying attention to the varying temperaments and proclivities of individual animals. And this is not restricted to such intimate relations as obtain between a handler and his elephant, a rider and his horse, or even an Eveny herder and his riding reindeer or *uchakh* (see Vitebsky 2005), but to humans and livestock more generally (see Clutton-Brock 1994:33).

As with Nepali elephant handlers, many animal welfare activists and animal behavioural scientists have begun to promote the idea of animal personhood and hence animal rights on the basis of a humanistic argument by analogy (such as the

¹ Bradshaw *et al's* recent disturbing claims about increasingly dysfunctional behaviour being displayed by the beleaguered elephant in both Africa and Asia, rely on the assumption of elephants not only possessing society, but also culture in the sense of transmitted knowledge (2005, see also Redmond 1996).

primatologist Barbara Smuts in 'The Lives of Animals', Gutmann [ed] 1999). Agustin Fuentes cites Smuts' suggestion that it is our sympathetic imagination (which other animals lack) that allows us to extend personhood to animals in order to accord them the right to humane treatment (which Smuts in turn has borrowed from J M Coetzee in her commentary on the fictional protagonist Elizabeth Costello from his metafictional novella). For Smuts, any animal that has the ability to participate in personal relationships with themselves or humans or both, deserves to be considered a person, which of course begs the question of how to define a 'personal relationship' (Fuentes 2006:125).

This ethical pre-occupation with the suggestively named 'humane' treatment of animals, owes rather more to the civilising project of the Enlightenment however, than to a scientific challenge to the anthropocentric range of our ideas about ethics and personhood. Indeed, Peter Singer (1985), in his radical argument for the extension of Jeffersonian equality to animals in addition to fellow humans, has suggested that animal rights have emerged as a consequence of the drive toward human rights, whilst Katherine Kete (2002) has argued that prevailing evaluations of the treatment of animals came to be seen as an index of varying degrees of civility attained by social classes and foreign nations (in Fuentes 2006:129). Kete's thesis is exemplified by Nigel Rothfels' commentary on the opinions of the 18th century naturalist Buffon. Regarding the elephant as a being of the finest distinction, and writing in the context of pre-revolutionary France when issues of slavery and subjugation were becoming significant, it made perfect sense to Buffon "that they would deny themselves their deepest desires in order not to perpetuate the slavery of their kind" (Rothfels, *forthcoming*). At the same time though, he considered them wise and moderate enough to accept their captivity and to comport themselves as 'model citizens', capable of enthusiastically obeying instructions (Rothfels, *forthcoming*). And Buffon was by no means the first to remark upon the apparent empathic reasoning displayed by elephants. In 4th century Greece, Megasthenes claimed that elephants whose drivers were killed in battle would carry them to burial and that one bull who slew his driver in a fit of passion was later so overwhelmed by grief and remorse that he died! (Chadwick 1992:326-327 in Hart 2005).

More recently however, a scientific basis to argue for animal personhood and its implications for appropriate treatment has emerged. Rather than attempting to persuade by making arguments by analogy, this approach persuades by homology, drawing on claims of shared phylogeny, physiology, and behaviour (Fuentes 2006), often also entailing experimental studies, as utilised by Gary Varner in his argument for elephant personhood (2007). What follows then, is a general argument for the 'humanity of animals' made by Agustin Fuentes (2006), followed by a more specific discussion of the basis for attributing personhood to elephants, and the profound ethical implications this implies. This latter component draws primarily on 'Personhood, Memory and Elephant Management' by the philosopher Gary Varner, a chapter in the forthcoming edited collection 'Never Forgetting: Elephants and Ethics' to be published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2007.

An Argument for Animal Personhood by Biological Homology

In arguing for a scientific basis for 'shared personhood', Fuentes notes that the capability to exhibit complex social interactions and patterns of social tradition are not limited to humans (citing Galef's 'The Question of Animal Culture' 1992, McGrew's 'Culture in Non-Human Primates?' 1998, and Tomasello's 'The Human Adaptation for Culture' 1999). He further notes that studies show many mammals (and some birds) are capable of cognitive mapping of their physical and social environments, such that they can tell 'what' is 'where' and who and who is not in their social group and range (citing Tomasello again, and Pepperberg's paper on Grey Parrot cognition, 1987).

Fuentes develops this point, adding that many mammals can recognise individuals, engage in vertical relationships of power and dominance, as well as horizontal relationships of cooperation and affiliation, and that some can predict the behaviour of conspecifics through detectable cues and as a result of accumulated life experience. The claim of social structures of interaction applies to elephants for both their matriarchal and affiliative herd structures, whilst the claim about behavioural predictive ability is supported and surpassed by our emerging understanding of elephant infra-sonic communication (see Payne 1998). With regard to social tradition in the sense of the non-phylogenetic transmission of behaviours within specific

groups, this is well documented in non-human primates (McGrew 1998), but may also occur in other social animals (Galef 1992).

Fuentes notes that the physiological response to stress, or what we call 'fear', is basically the same in all mammals (even if the ways in which humans experience fear are culturally and psychologically unique) (2006:126). "The same basic physiological reaction occurs in a zebra when being attacked by a lion, a baboon when surprised by a leopard, and a human when involved in a car accident... However, individuals- both humans and other animals- vary in the extent to which they are affected by chronic stress under similar situations. This variation appears tied to elements of an individual animal's temperament and personality style" (2006:126). The variation in temperament and personality style in elephants has of course been discussed in the main body of this thesis.

Fuentes develops this argument for personhood by homology by noting that it is not only among humans that complex webs of interpersonal relationships emerge as a result of interactions between caretakers and infants (2006: 126). This clearly applies to elephants, renowned for the way in which 'aunties' or allomothers, provide additional care for young in their own herd. Calves learn that they have more than just a mother upon whom they can depend, but a whole network of extended family that has a vested interest in their safety and wellbeing. The support of allomothers has even been demonstrated to radically improve the survival chances of wild calves (Lee in Eltringham [ed] 1991:50).

For Fuentes then, the various physiological and behavioural aspects shared by humans and other animals, amounts to a pattern of interactions sufficient to be described as participation in personal relationships. This then provides a firm basis for a broad definition of personhood not limited to humans, in which interactive commonalities arise from similar physiologies and shared sensory modalities (Fuentes 2006:126). "*Personhood*, then, is recognition of a shared interpretation of and response to interactions with environmental and social stimuli caused by common physiological and related biological systems" (Fuentes 2006:126).

Autonoetic Consciousness

Gary Varner's approach to arguing specifically for the personhood of elephants and considering the ethical implications this raises, relies on the concept of 'autonoetic consciousness'. Varner notes that in the course of debating human ethical issues like abortion and euthanasia, various criteria for personhood are utilised; the metaphysical assertion of possession of a soul, biological membership of a species, or the acquisition of consciousness/possession of particular cognitive capacities. According to the latter view, abortion of a foetus or euthanasia of a cognitively impaired individual can be justified on the basis that they have not yet become, or are no longer fully 'persons' (2006:1).

The criteria of cognitive capacities are also pertinent to debates in the field of animal ethics, even allowing for the possibility that non-humans can be considered 'persons'. Despite its lack of consensus, Varner characterises this approach as the *autonoetic consciousness paradigm* (ACP), where 'autonoetic' refers to self-knowledge and is used by some psychologists as a label for conscious awareness of one's past, present and future. "These authors all agree that individuals with a robust, conscious sense of their own past and future deserve a special form of respectful treatment" (Varner 2007). Incidentally, the animal rights philosopher Peter Singer, in his own metafictional response to Coetzee's 'The Lives of Animals' utilises the same criterion of anticipation of the future in his discussion of animal rights with his daughter (in Gutmann [ed] 1999:85-92). Since elephants have been popularly attributed with a remarkable capacity for remembering, then they might be worthy of being treated with greater respect than other animals lacking such elaborated capacities. For example, if they are more than 'merely' sentient in the sense of capable of suffering pain, then it might not be ethical to cull elephant populations as one might deer populations.

Varner introduces the distinction made by the philosopher James Rachels (1986) between *biological* and *biographical life* in his discussion of life and death decisions in medical contexts. He characterises 'biographical life' as "the sum of one's aspirations, decisions, activities, projects, and human relationships" (Rachels in Varner 2007). Rachels argues that if life in the biographical sense has been lost then there may be little point in prolonging life in the merely biological sense.

With regard to animals, in the auto-noetic consciousness paradigm a similar status is afforded to animals with a robust conscious sense of their own past and future, even if the narrativising implications of Rachels' biographical category may not be entirely applicable. Biography implies a story and this may be a more uniquely human characteristic than the typical candidates of tool making and language use. "As individual humans, our identities are tied to a story we can tell about ourselves, which begins with where we came from, explains where we are now, and includes both aspirations for the future and an understanding of our own mortality. Communities, too, have biographies, and part of our identities as humans is a function of being able to tell and understand these stories. For this reason, we are unlikely ever to find full-blown *biographical* life in any non-human animal: telling stories about ourselves and others requires far more than the simple syntax that has been taught to some great apes and dolphins. Without something very much like a human language, it may be impossible to represent one's life as a story, even to oneself" (Varner 2007). Proponents of the auto-noetic consciousness paradigm argue that a more limited form of this criterion for personhood would make animals *near-persons*, and therefore deserving of a more special treatment than merely sentient animals.

What emerges from ACP then, is a moral hierarchy. At the bottom of this hierarchy are organisms that can consciously experience pain, but without a robust sense of their past and future, merely living in the present, and at the top are full-blown *persons*, with a biographical sense of their lives as wholes. The median role of the *near person* would have superior rights vis a vis the merely sentient, but inferior to full-blown *persons*, a category most likely restricted to humans.

Evidence of Auto-noetic Consciousness in Elephants

"If auto-noetic consciousness exists at all among animals, it probably comes in degrees, and perhaps no sentient animal lives *entirely* in the present. Perhaps some conscious sense of at least the immediate future is necessary for having any conscious desires or yearnings at all, since to desire something is to want something to change. So in between normal humans and the merely sentient there may lay a continuum of animals with varying degrees of conscious awareness of the future and past" (Varner 2007).

Varner identifies three kinds of research relevant to answering this question as it pertains to elephants:

1. Episodic memory (the backward looking portion of auto-noetic consciousness).
2. Mirror self-recognition (a sign of auto-noetic consciousness in the present).
3. Use of a theory of mind (relevant to the forward looking portion of auto-noetic consciousness).

Unfortunately there have been very few of these consciousness tests conducted on elephants; none on episodic memory, two on mirror self-recognition, and one very incomplete study on theory of mind. So, the point is that these *are* questions amenable to scientific investigation and that elephants are *likely* candidates for auto-noetic consciousness.

Episodic Memory

There is striking anecdotal evidence regarding elephants' memory. Field researchers such as Cynthia Moss (2000:270-1) have remarked on the apparently significant manner by which elephants will linger among and examine the bodies of long deceased kin. Similarly, elephant handlers have often reported that an elephant will retain memories of an abusive handler from many years previously (a view endorsed by my own Nepali informants). "A classic study (Rensch 1957) showed that zoo elephants remembered which of up to 20 pairs of cards were the correct ones to choose for a reward as much as a year after initially learning them, and when field researchers broadcast recordings of the calls of family members that had been absent from their groups for up to 12 years (either because they had died or emigrated to other groups), the remaining family members displayed 'a strong affiliative response'" (McComb et al 2000:1108 in Varner 2007).

Cognitive Scientists typically distinguish between *procedural* and *propositional/declarative* types of memory, analogous to knowing *how* and knowing *that* (see Ryle in Crossley 2001, Scott 1998, Bloch 1991). However, since the 1970s it has been realised that propositional /declarative memory need not rely on mastery of language, thereby leading to a further distinction between *semantic memory*, which entails symbolic representation, and *episodic memory*, which entails the remembrance of personally experienced events, but which is possible without symbolic

representation.

Endel Tulving (1972, 1985) developed an account of episodic memory which along with his colleagues he later elaborated into an account of 'autonoetic awareness': "It occurs whenever one consciously recollects or re-experiences a happening from a specific time in the past, attends directly to one's present or on-line experience, or contemplates one's existence and conduct at a time in the future. Autonoetic awareness of the subjective past constitutes episodic retrieval. It represents the major defining difference between episodic and semantic memory" (Wheeler, Stuss, and Tulving 1997:350 in Varner 2007). Elsewhere, they note that it's like 'mental time travel' and that it provides the 'characteristically phenomenal flavour of the experience of remembering' (in Varner 2007).

The question arises then whether we can infer that an elephant's arousal around the dead body of a deceased relative or in the presence of a formerly abusive trainer is actually indicative of the conscious recall of past events rather than merely a behaviour that serves to communicate this to us. Testing episodic memory without relying on language use is not easy, but Clayton (1998, 2001) has published work on animal memory that may lead the way. Her work has enabled the testing of memory not just in terms of *where*, but also *when*, and involves scrub jays and their food caches. This study is careful to speak of *episodic-like memory*, and shows that the birds are 'time-stamping', in the sense that they know in the present that food has been placed, but not necessarily that they are consciously re-experiencing prior memories (Varner 2007).

Besides behavioural inference, Varner notes that a physiological argument by homology is also possible. Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scanning reveals that when human subjects are asked to solve episodic memory problems (recall of previously shown lists of words) then the Pre-Frontal Cortex (PFC) of the brain displays intense activity, in the left section of the PFC during encoding, and in the right section of the PFC during recall. Only in mammals is this action-oriented portion of the brain particularly enlarged, and is largest in primates, measurable by the encephalisation quotient (EQ), which compares brain development to body size. Estimates of elephant EQ suggest they are similar to those of the higher primates (Varner 2007).

So; “If elephants could be presented with problems which (like those the scrub jays faced) could only be solved using knowledge of *when* events occurred, and if, while solving those problems successfully, similar information on brain activity could be obtained, a strong argument by analogy could be made for the claim that elephants have episodic (and not just episodic-like) memories” (Varner 2007). It is also worth remembering that even in other humans, conscious states cannot be observed, only inferred, and, as in Fuentes’ article, we must rely on arguments by homology that draw on similarities in 1) behaviour 2) neurophysiology and 3) evolutionary history. The ideal test for elephants’ possession of episodic memory (from which to infer auto-noetic awareness), just as in humans, would then also entail the demonstration of a correlation between problem-solving behaviours and neurophysiological structures and activities (Varner 2007).

Mirror Self-Recognition

The classic confirmation that the great apes recognise themselves in mirrors was provided by psychologist Gordon Gallup in 1970 (see also Gallup et al 2002). Observation of chimpanzee behaviour in response to mirrors revealed an initial response of aggression suggestive of non-recognition, but subsequently self-directed behaviour became apparent, suggestive of self-recognition. This was then tested under controlled conditions by applying non-irritant, non-odorous coloured markings to chimpanzee faces whilst anaesthetised and then observing the frequency differentials of facial touching with and without mirrors upon recovery. In the presence of mirrors the chimpanzees touched these areas far more often, taken as proof that they recognised their images as representations of themselves. Repeated on macaques, he contrastingly found that they believed they were seeing an unfamiliar conspecific. The great apes could recognise themselves but monkeys could not (Varner 2007).

Reiss and Marino (2001) have confirmed dolphins’ ability to recognise themselves, and Daniel Povellini first attempted the test on two female Asian elephants at the National Zoo in Washington in 1989. The elephants failed the Gallup test, initially reacting with trunk raising behaviour which is associated both with aggression and nasal detection of other elephants, behaviours which were not replaced by evidently self-directing behaviours. However, some have objected that animals might merely

lack the ability to adjust their movements in light of the reversed image provided by a mirror. Thus, Povellini tested the same elephants' ability to find food that they could not smell and could only see in mirrors, at which they were very successful, so this could not explain their failure at the Gallup test (Varner 2007).

“More recently, Hyatt et al. (2003) informally observed circus elephants when first exposed to large mirrors. Most of them ‘approached the mirror curiously and without encouragement’ and continued to exhibit various behaviours, including ‘looking at the mirror, reaching toward it, touching it with the trunk and head, looking behind the mirror, social interaction with other elephants near the mirror, vocalizing, bringing food near the mirror, and the opening of the mouth’ (Hyatt 2003:14). However, the mouth opening was associated with eating and did not clearly evince self-inspection, and when marks were applied in a Gallup-style test, ‘No mark directed behaviours were observed.’ Therefore, the authors conclude, ‘no behaviours firmly indicated the presence of self-exploration through the use of mirrors as reflective tools’ (Hyatt 2003:15), and they claim only that mirrors can help with environmental enrichment of captive elephants” (Varner *forthcoming*). However, Varner also mentions an uncorroborated claim by Simonet and her students at a Sierra Nevada college of an elephant passing the Gallup spot test (Varner 2007).

Again though, we must consider the applicability of the Gallup test for several reasons:

1. Although elephants use branches as manipulative tools they do not groom themselves as do primates, so they are less likely to examine the coloured marks used in Gallup tests.
2. Elephants' eyesight is notoriously bad, they lack colour vision, and skin colour changes noticeably upon spraying, meaning they might simply disregard the colour marks of the Gallup test (Nissani and Nissani 2001).

Therefore, despite the failure to pass the Gallup test in two studies it may still be premature to dismiss their putative capacity for mirror self-recognition (Varner 2007).

However, the results of a more recent mirror self-recognition test lend greater support to the contention that elephants possess auto-noetic consciousness. These results were

recently reported in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. In this study, three elephants inspected an eight foot tall mirror and tried to look behind it, and one of them, an elephant named 'Happy' repeatedly responded to a cross painted on her head, whilst ignoring a colourless cross also applied, thereby ruling out response according to smell or feeling. Unlike previous tests, a much larger mirror was used, which the elephants could approach, touch and try to look behind. Although only one of the three elephants passed the mark recognition test, it should be appreciated that only about 50% of chimpanzees typically pass this test, and this was again only a small test sample. The elephants used in this experiment came from the Bronx Zoo in New York, and the study was conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) under the auspices of a team including psychologist Joshua Plotnik of Emory University and renowned primatologist Frans de Waal (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6100430.stm> accessed on 31/10/06 and http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1935538,00.html accessed on 02/11/06).

Use of Theory of Mind

Tulving has argued that the evolutionary function of autothetic consciousness is to imagine the outcomes of interactive scenarios, and this is comparable with ethologists' interest in theory of mind in animals. "Long-lived, large-brained, and complexly social animals are thought to benefit from the ability to understand, predict, and manipulate the behaviour of other members of their species" (Varner 2007), a point also utilised in Fuentes' argument. Although proboscidean phylogeny suggests divergence from other mammals about 55 million years ago (Shoshani 1991:13), as social animals, they have in this functional sense a similar evolutionary history. This forward-planning ability is associated with an enlarged pre-frontal cortex as found in humans, higher primates and elephants (Varner 2007).

Some of the problems concerning the attribution of episodic memory, the backward-looking aspect, also apply to the theory of mind, the forward-looking aspect. "What we need to demonstrate is not just anticipation of the non-immediate future, but *conscious* anticipation. Just as it is possible to have semantic memory without episodic memory, it is possible to arrange things to serve one's long-term interests without any conscious awareness of one's long-term future... Probably no animal makes plans as complex and for as distant a future as humans do when they arrange to

provide for their children's education, their own retirement, and their heirs' interests. It may be that language is necessary for this level of complexity in planning for the future" (Varner 2007).

Varner notes that use of a theory of mind is an area of research currently of great interest to animal behavioural scientists. "To use a theory of mind (ToM) is to interpret others' behaviours in light of their beliefs and desires. This constitutes 'using a theory' insofar as the beliefs and desires are not observable, but theoretical constructs about what is 'inside the others' heads'" (Varner 2007). Varner summarises the current understanding of the developmental process of acquisition of theory of mind in human children, noting that animals are unlikely to acquire a similar degree of sophistication, as for example understanding a faux pas, which entails knowing that someone did not know they should not say something and that the audience would be offended by it (Varner 2007).

He then cites Joyce Poole, who has been observing the elephants of Kenya's Amboseli National Park since 1976: "The evidence available on cognitive empathy, understanding death, sense of humour, imagination, the ability to teach, to imitate, and to deceive, are all very suggestive that elephants have a theory of mind" (Poole 1998:107 in Varner 2007). According to Varner there has been only one experimental test on elephants, on one of the more rudimentary aspects of theory of mind, that of understanding what others are looking at. Moti Nissani (2004) repeated a test Povinelli had previously conducted on chimps, on both chimps and elephants, in which subjects have the opportunity to beg for food from two experimenters, only one of whom can see the test subjects. His chimps fared better than Povinelli's, whilst his test on elephants was on a statistically insignificant sample of only two elephants at the Detroit Zoo (Wanda and Winky). However, the tests were suggestive that the elephants understood who could and could not see them. Incidentally, this ability to recognise to what others are directing their attention is a capacity that emerges in humans at about 18 months of age, and it must be emphasised is but one minor element in the attribution of a theory of mind (Varner 2007).

One study performed on chimps that could be adapted for elephants involves two experimenters and two boxes. One experimenter puts food in a box then leaves the

room. The second experimenter enters, moves the food to the other box, after which the first experimenter returns, and the subject is then given the opportunity to ask one or the other experimenter for food. If the test subject asks the second experimenter for food, then it is inferred that he or she has remembered the switch, and therefore performed the 'mental time travel' indicative of the forward-thinking aspect of Tulving's auto-noetic awareness (Varner 2007). From an evolutionary perspective this has clear adaptive implications, and again on the basis of neurophysiological structure and observed behaviour elephants would seem to be ideal candidates. Their physiology and behaviour correlates strongly with other known exemplars of long-lived, highly social organisms that grow up in shifting social environments involving complex interactions with multiple generations of related individuals (as also argued by Fuentes as criteria for non-human personhood). "Such animals would benefit both from understanding others' intentions and being able to predict behaviours in light of them, and from being able to actively manipulate others' behaviours by manipulating their beliefs" (Varner 2007).

Implications of Elephant Personhood for Management

Having established not only that it is possible to investigate the three aspects comprising auto-noetic consciousness (AC), namely episodic memory, mirror self-recognition and theory of mind, and discussed their as-yet limited application to elephants' putative possession of AC, Varner has nonetheless made the case that elephants are worthy candidates. On this basis then, it is also worth considering the practical and ethical implications of attributing auto-noetic consciousness to elephants, it being as near a proxy for personhood as is currently defensible from a positivist standpoint.

Varner is primarily concerned with the issue of culling wild populations, although his position also has implications for captive elephants. Varner cites the position of Tom Regan (1983) who condemns the hunting of mammals for population control irrespective of their species. He rejects the utilitarian view that it is better to cause suffering to the few by culling in order to prevent the suffering of the many through starvation as a result of overpopulation. Contrary to Regan's absolutism, advocates of the utilitarian position additionally justify it on the basis of improving living conditions for future generations by preventing long-term habitat degradation. Such a

position represents a point at which some animal conservationists and animal welfare activists might diverge.

Some elephant researchers such as Cynthia Moss (2000:317) and Joyce Poole (1998:107-8) however, argue that whilst culling can be condoned for species such as deer, which they consider sentient but not autoethically conscious, it should not be condoned for elephants. Indeed, recent research to which they have both contributed suggests that when juveniles witness traumatic events, such as those arising from the often violent conflicts that result from human activity, then not only are their attachments disrupted, but the behaviour and even 'culture' of entire groups can be affected for generations. Evidence for this 'Elephant Breakdown' thesis includes observations of unprecedented behaviour with disturbing implications, such as males attacking rhino (see Bradshaw *et al* 2005). Admittedly, recognition of the psychosocial impact of culling has led to approaches in which whole family groups are eradicated. However, 'problem' loner bulls are often eradicated as a result of their encroachment upon and depredation of human resources. This affects sex ratios and can result in young males being deprived of their apprenticeships with elder mentors, leading to the abnormal behaviours being increasingly reported. This recognition of the significance of the transmission of knowledge and of patterns of congregation has led advocates of the elephant breakdown thesis to endorse a perspective of elephant 'culture' and 'society' not merely out of rhetorical expediency, but as necessary analytic tools. These arguments for elephant culture and society further support the cognitive arguments for elephant personhood, especially since the latter is understood to be fundamentally implicated in the former.

In the moral hierarchy of cognitive capacities, advocates argue that elephants, unlike deer, rate as near-persons, and thus must be accorded special rights at the level of the individual, not just at the level of the species. Elephant population dynamics are not radically dissimilar from those of ungulates since it is possible for a population to double within a decade and to rapidly transform habitat from woodland to grassland. Elephant populations can easily overwhelm the carrying capacity of a given habitat (Varner 2007). Herein lies the dilemma for those conservationists who adhere to the conviction that elephants possess autoethic awareness and thus deserve special individual rights. If culling is ethically prohibited and mankind wishes to retain the

role of being an active agent in biodiversity and habitat preservation (what Pálsson [1996] defines as the paternalist type of human-environment relation), then the other options are contraception or translocation (Varner 2007).

If we permit ourselves a more passive role, as Regan for one advocates, then we would have to stand by and watch elephants starve and habitat for other biodiversity degrade. Interestingly, the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' interventions has been especially significant in the field of human medical ethics, where sometimes the passive withdrawal of life-support is legally permissible, whilst a more active initiation of euthanasia for the terminally ill is not, irrespective of the individual's suffering.

With regard to culling, there are differences in implementation of policies for deer and for elephants. In North America, whilst not uncontroversial, deer culling is permitted by licensing sportsmen, but for elephants in southern Africa, where practiced, a more costly and highly co-ordinated approach is utilised, one which ensures family groups are taken out in their entirety so as to avoid creating helpless and traumatised orphans. Furthermore, Kruger National Park in South Africa has modified its culling policy in response to a campaign by an animal welfare organisation so that wildlife managers must now justify culls on a case-by-case basis rather than according to the prior policy of establishing an annual number to be culled according to estimates of ideal population density. These may both be seen as indicative of the higher moral value attributed to elephants (Varner 2007).

Varner takes the stance that the attribution of auto-noetic consciousness should not militate against the keeping of elephants in captivity, and argues for the positive value of the intimate relationship that often obtains between handler and elephant (Varner *forthcoming*). Indeed, it would seem to be the elaboration of auto-noetic consciousness in elephants that facilitates the phenomenally intimate and enduring relationship that I myself encountered amongst Nepali handlers and their elephants. He cites Lynette Hart's observation, which derives from research conducted in Nepal and Karnataka, South India, that handlers spend more time with their elephants than any Euro-American person would typically spend with a family member save for a newborn (Hart 1994:310), a point also made by my informant Bukh Lal. He also claims that

Nepali training practices succeed without abuse and that elephants' lives might even be enriched by their partnership with humans.

It is perhaps the issue of elephant training that causes the greatest controversy in the ethical discourse on captive elephant management. Traditional forms of elephant training give primacy to punitive forms of conditioning over that of positive reinforcement. However, the WWF Humane Elephant Training Program, currently being tested at the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Center in Nepal, aims to reverse this situation. Early reports suggest not only that positive reinforcement can play a greater role without loss of efficacy, but also that the handlers have been receptive to this intervention aimed at modifying their traditional, established forms of practice. This may be attributed to the emotional bond most handlers develop with their elephants and the remorse they feel in using force to control elephants, even if they do acknowledge that it will surely always remain integral to captive elephant management.

Furthermore, Varner makes reference to anecdotes from the experience of Ted Friend (1999) amongst circus elephants. Whilst I myself personally find the idea of elephants performing for the pleasure of humans distasteful and something of an imposed indignity, he does make the pertinent point that keeping elephants engaged may well be crucial for their wellbeing (Varner 2007, supported by Dudley 1986, and Moore and Doyle 1986). By contrast, there are many zoo elephants starved of intimate contact with their handlers and prone to mental anguish as a result of boredom. My discussions with elephant keepers at Port Lympne Zoo, Kent in 2002 for example, revealed that they felt deprived of the pleasure of contact and the possibility of sustaining a meaningful relationship. As a result, the keepers were resentful of the health and safety regulations to which they were subject. My own opinion, and that of a Captive Elephant Management Consultant with whom I discussed these issues, was that these prohibitive, anti-contact regulations might even make the job of elephant keeping more dangerous by failing to accustom elephants to human contact. The Port Lympne keepers were most sympathetic with this view. It would seem that if elephants are kept captive then it is ill-advised to perpetuate the fiction that one is keeping wild animals. It is much more preferable to keep elephants as socialised animals receptive to humans, for the wellbeing of elephants as well as the safety of

handlers.

Unfortunately, in the current prevailing consensus on the ethics of captive elephant management, at least for the western contexts of zoos, safari parks and circuses, a hands-on approach has now become so associated with acts of cruelty, that a hands-free approach is advocated (see Clubb and Mason's RSPCA-commissioned report, 2002a & 2002b, and Endres et al's European Elephant Group report, 2003). However, it should be noted that the RSPCA does not condone the keeping of elephants in zoos and circuses at all, finding the scientific and conservationist justifications unconvincing.

Conclusion

To conclude, it would seem that we are succeeding in persuading ourselves that personhood is not a condition exclusive to humans, and that elephants are among those also in possession of this complex and contested attribute (even if not so elaborated as in humans). Although this may provide a guiding certainty for some as to questions of human involvement with non-human persons, for others it serves only to further entrench the ethical dilemmas they face in reconciling their conscience with current scenarios resulting from prior moral values and practices. With regard to captive elephant management, the dilemma is compounded by the diversity of conditions in which elephants are kept, the uses to which they are put, and the cultural values of those involved. It should be appreciated therefore, that the pronouncements of concerned professionals from a particular culture regarding particular practices, may not be applicable to other contexts. Organisations dedicated to the welfare of captive elephants must demonstrate sensitivity and understanding when operating in foreign contexts.

Appendix 3: Documents From the Panjiar Collection Pertaining to Elephants

From: “The Kings of Nepal and The Tharu of The Tarai”, Gisele Krauskopff and Pamela Deuel Meyer [eds] (2000). Documents translated by Tek Bahadur Shrestha and Gisele Krauskopff.

These documents, as well as others pertaining to other aspects of Tharu life, were recovered from *Tharu* families by a *Tharu* man named Tej Narayan Panjiar over a period of 20 years, and provide valuable evidence in reconstructing the relationship between the state and the *Tarai*-dwelling *Tharu*. What follows are translations of those documents concerning elephants as well as an explanatory commentary for each based on the commentaries of Shrestha and Krauskopff.

Document 5 (Saptari District) (page 121)

Issued by: The court of Rana Bahadur Shah, 1783 (*v.s* 1839)

Topic: gift of an elephant

“To Hem Chaudhari: We give you the baby female elephant that Madhuram Chaudhari captured in the jungle in 1782. You can raise and ride it. December-January, 1783 (*v.s* 1839, the 7th day of the bright fortnight of *Paush*)”

Commentary

This is an administrative order of a kind known as *rukka*, which unlike other types such as *lal mohar*, does not include a eulogy and a list of honorific titles for a king (*prashasthi*), instead it simply states that ‘His Majesty orders’. The reward of an elephant (*baksis*) reminds us that all wildlife and land was considered property of the King. It seems that in the *Tarai* at this time, elephants were not an uncommon form of compensation for services rendered (*jagir*).

Document 24 (Mahottari district) (page 142)Issued by: Surendra Bir Bikram Shah, ca. 1867 (*v.s 1924*)

Topic: elephant stable management

Shri Durgajyu

(eulogy)

“To an office: Concerning the elephant stables (*hattisar*) in the Tarai, the revenue office of Raghunathpur in the district of Mahottari has reported to us that yearly amount has not been well used for the maintenance of the elephant stables from April-May to March-April 1867. Having not been properly fed, the elephants starved, ate earth and became sick. The elephant keepers have reduced the amount of food given. According to several reports, we also learned that the income borrowed from the treasury (*kausitosa khana*) and the military office (in charge of collecting income from *jagir* land, *kampu dafdar khana*) was not sufficient to pay the salaries of the employees of the elephant stables. So money has been taken from the employees who paid their respects to the king [for appointment or reconfirmation]. From now on, any amount that has been signed by the giver, the recipient and the salary payment officer should be checked by the military office and the audit office (*kumari chowk*). According to the daily signed documents of these offices, we received the amount from 1867 through *subba* Dewal and the clerk Janaki Tharu.”

Document 24a (Mahottari District) (page 143)Issued by: Surendra Bir Bikram Shah, 1877 (*v.s 1934*)

Topic: elephant stable management

Shri

(eulogy)

“To *subba* Dewal: Concerning the elephant stables in the Tarai, the revenue office of Raghunathpur in the district of Mohottari [has reported to us] that the yearly amount [has not been well used] for the mainenance of the elephant stables from April-May 1866 to

march-April 1867. Having not been properly fed, the elephants starved, ate earth and became sick. The elephant keepers have reduced the amount of food given. According to several reports, we also learned that the income borrowed from the treasury and the military office [in charge of collecting income from *jagir* land] was not sufficient to pay the salaries of the employees who paid their respects to the king [for appointment or confirmation]. From now on, any amount that has been signed by the giver, the recipient and the salary payment officer should be checked by the military office and the audit office. According to the daily, signed documents of these offices, we received the amount from 1877 from the clerk Janaki Tharu and we gave him the receipt. June-July 1877 (*v.s* 1934, Saturday the 12th day of the dark fortnight of the month of *Ashadh*)”.

Commentary

Both these documents are of the *lal mohar* type (referring to the red seal which formally identifies it), issued directly from the King and including both his honorific titles and a eulogy (although one should realise that this was the era of Rana rule in which the Shah kings retained their formal authority, but had been stripped of their actual ruling power, which was exercised through the hereditary prime-ministers of the Rana clan).

The apparently recurring financial mismanagement of the elephant stables and the harm to the elephants' welfare documented in these directives must be understood to have been a serious matter. Elephants played a role in hunting and in transport and were a valuable source of income to the Crown. Elephants were appropriate gifts of royal largesse for kings and courtiers of neighbouring kingdoms as well as compensation for the services of loyal subjects. They provided for a lucrative trade- being caught locally and exported to India, also being traded for horses.

There seems to be little doubt that elephant stables and the additional capture operations performed by *phanet* and overseen by a *raut*, played an important part in the economy of the Tarai. The supervising officers, the *subba* and the *daroga*, were responsible for recruiting capable men to manage the elephants and were answerable to the King. Records even attest to the use of forced labour in running the *hattisar* (Narharinath, 1966:433, 494, Regmi, 1984:198-199).

Some more needs to be said regarding the ranks of *subba* and *daroga*. Whilst in the contemporary *hattisare* ranking system in Nepal, a *subba* is senior to a *daroga* (mentioned in document 28), Krauskopff and Shrestha reasonably claim that in the past the *daroga* outranked the *subba* (2000:149). This seems credible to me when one considers that these terms (as with *khardar* and *tekhdar*) are not specific to captive elephant functionaries, but are designations of wider applicability, evident in the terms of Nepali as well as Bengali administrative systems. Indeed, in the context of his discussion of peasant insurgency in the Bengal-Assam hinterland of Mymensingh (including a revolt by ‘tribal’ elephant capturers), Schendel tells us that a *daroga* was an inspector, part of the administrative establishment for maintaining order and ensuring the collection of tax revenues (1985).

Document 28 (Bara district) (page 149)

Issued by: Rajendra Bir Bikram Shah, 1820 (*v.s 1876*)

Topic: appointment as an elephant trainer

Shri Durga

(eulogy)

“To Daya Raya: We bestow upon you the turban of honor (*pagari*) for training elephants (*rautai*) and the land previously given to Bandhu Raut. Capture the elephants by *jaghiya* or *khori kheda* hunting methods according to the order of the elephant stable manager (*daroga*) and be at his disposal. Be loyal to us and enjoy the customary taxes and income from the elephant training function (*sidhali rautai*) for this area according to the record. January-February, 1820 (*v.s 1876*, Monday the 10th day of the dark fortnight of *Magh*).”

Commentary

This document is significant for what it reveals about the term *raut*, which is still a part of the contemporary ranking system. Then, as now, the *raut* was inferior to the *subba* and *daroga*, and responsible for managing the elephant care teams. However, in an era in which capture from the wild is no longer practiced, his duties have shifted somewhat as

has the primary meaning of his inferiors' rank designations. In the past, the *raut* was responsible for overseeing capture and training operations, now reduced to the training of captive born elephants. And whilst the *phanet* was a capturer, and the *mahautya* a driver, who was additionally assisted by cleaners, nowadays the *raut* oversees a three-man team of *phanet*, *patchuwa*, and *mahout*.

Krauskopff and Shrestha consider *raut* to be a prestigious title, a conclusion not merely supported by the giving of the aforementioned 'turban of honour' (*pagari*), but also attested by the contents of the following document, presented to the son of *Daya Raya (Raut)* (see document 29). The *pagari* we are told, was a headdress, most usually a turban, typically adorned with silver ornaments, worn by high officials, and even if made of simple cloth, an indication of the receipt of royal favour. So, even if the hard work of capturing, driving and maintaining elephants performed by the junior ranks was apparently of low status, even requiring forced labour, evidence suggests that the positions of *raut*, *daroga* and *subba* were quite different- after all such personages received royal recognition and favour.

Document 29 (Bara district) (page 150)

Issued by: Rajendra Bikram Shah, 1827 (v.s 1884)

Topic: Land grant for capturing an elephant

Shri Durgajyu

(eulogy)

"To Kokil Raut, son of Daya Raut: During a royal visit at Hariharpur, your father Daya Raut presented to us a one-tusked elephant that he had caught. We granted him as *jagir* the village of Babhani in Cherwant *praganna*, Bara District, except for twelve *higha* of land that has been granted as *maraut* pension to Nathu Khan, brother of Asha. In addition, all the land towards the village of Naraulkos which was registered in 1813-14 is included in Babhani village and granted to you from 1828. Collect the customary judicial fines, commercial and service taxes except for the royal share. We bestow upon you all the other produce of this *jagir* grant. Be loyal to us, make the land populous, and enjoy it

for your lifetime. November-December, 1827 (*v.s 1884*, Monday, the 1st day of the bright fortnight of *Marga*).”

N.B

The various taxes and fines included: local taxes (*malmahalat*), customs duties (*sayera, jayat*), taxes on water and timber products (*jalkar bankar*), taxes on communal pastures and water resources (*sagaudha*), marriage taxes (*biahadani*), cattle market taxes (*singarahat*), timber taxes (*kathiyari*), judicial fines and penalties (*danda, gunagari*), escheat property (i.e the estate of someone who dies without heirs reverting to the state) (*maryo aputali*), other unspecified taxes (*rahata bahata*), administrative service fees and appointments (*amilan dastur, chaudari, kanugoye*). The Royal Share or *raj ank*, which went directly to the royal family rather than the state treasury, here refers to the five crimes (*panchkhat*) and unclaimed wealth or property (*kalyandhan*). Furthermore, the *maraut* given to Nathu Khan, refers to a war pension.

Commentary

Having been given the post of elephant trainer in April-May 1820, Daya Raut later caught a one-tusked elephant at Hariharpur during a visit by the King, to whom he presented it. One-tusked elephants are rare and highly prized, most likely due to the connection with Ganesh, typically represented as having only one tusk, said to be the result of him ripping it out and throwing it at the moon (*Chandra*) in anger, since it had laughed at him when he had fallen over and his internal organs had fallen out of his bloated belly. Krauskopff and Shrestha also tell us that in his renowned wise sermons, *Dibya Upadesh*, the founder of the Shah dynasty and ‘unifier’ of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah mentioned his desire to procure a one-tusked elephant from Digbhandan Sen, ruler of the kingdom of Makwanpur.

The wild elephant Daya Raut had caught, and for which he was awarded the ‘turban of honour’ (*pagari*) was given the name Jala Prasad, and was captured by means of a famous trained elephant called Sri Prasad. This elephant even warrants mention in Pandit Sundarananda’s history. Said to command great respect, he was praised as one who could

trap freely walking elephants as easily as Rahu ('the eclipse') traps the moon and the sun, and as easily as a wrestler traps a weak person (Vajracharya, 1962:222-226).

In this document, not only is Daya Raut's land gift and its revenue collecting responsibilities reiterated, but his son Kokil Raut also receives a further gift of land, which also seems to be by virtue of his father's capture of such a religiously significant elephant. This deed of land rights may be seen as an indication of the extent to which elephant capture could benefit a family for generations to come.

Document 30 (Bara district) (page 151)

Issued by: Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, 1884 (*v.s 1941*)

Topic: *Birta* land grant for captured elephant and boundary survey

Shri Durgajyu

(eulogy)

"To Anup Raut: In the year 1881 with Maharaja Ranauddip Singh (as referred to in the margin) attending the royal elephant hunt at Khurahariya camp, Chitwan District, you caught an elephant named Ranagambhir Gajahatti. You were given as reward the cultivated land of the village Thaskaul, Cherwant *praganna*, Bara District, as *birta* from the year 1882, and were authorised to take the full crops. The document setting the boundaries of this land is in the revenue office of Bara but you did not receive a *lal mohar* in your name and you requested it through Ranoddip Singh Rana and Dhir Shamsher Jang Bahadur. Now we, at the age of 9, give you a *lal mohar* setting the boundaries...

(boundary details listed)

...Enjoy your *birta*. June-July, 1884 (*v.s 1941*, Wednesday the 3rd day of the dark fortnight of *Ashadh*)".

Maharaja's full name and position as prime minister and commander-in-chief given.

This document renewed with black seal in 1932 and with a red seal in 1960.

Commentary

Since this document again refers to Cherwant *praganna*, we can assume that Anup Raut is a descendant of the Daya Raut and Kokil Raut previously mentioned in documents from 50 years previously. He too is involved in the capturing of elephants and is accruing further wealth (in the form of heritable land rights) and favour as a result of these activities. With such rewards available, it is unsurprising that such professions would persist through the generations. However, since the *raut* could acquire land on which tenants and bonded labourers (*kamaiya*) might work, one must consider how, over time, the incentive to practice the profession of one's forefathers might lessen, thereby making the transition from a profession to a caste designation (*jat*) seem reasonable. The *rauts* serving in contemporary *sarkari hattisar* do not bear the name Raut as their *thar*, and if they were endowed with land would be unlikely to take a salary to live and work in a stable away from one's family.

Furthermore, those that do bear the Raut *thar* today are of *Chhetri* status, raising the question as to whether the original *raut* overseers might have been Tharu whose status overtime converted to *Chhetri*, or whether the overseers were never actually Tharu themselves (although few non-Tharu people were able to endure living in the malarial-infested Tarai all year round until after the USAID eradication program of the 1950s). On this point we should remember that in Nepal, unlike most parts of India, there has historically been a relatively permeable division between 'tribals' and caste Hindus, such that the origins of the Khas interweaves tribal and *Chhetri*, just as the Magars were conferred *Chhetri* status (see Sharma, 1978)¹.

Incidentally, with regard to the document addressed to Anup Raut, the delay between the bestowal of the land (1881) and the actual receipt of the deed, was caused by the political incident known as the 'Conspiracy of Thirty Eight' (*v.s* 1938, or 1881). "Following the death of Jang Bahadur Rana, three factions conspired against one another for power, and

¹ Similarly, it is believed that in the area between Bengal and Assam, the Kuch principality was originally composed of Mech or Bodo tribal groups who over time transformed themselves into a dominant caste by a Sanskritising process in which temples to the goddess Kamakhya were re-established and patronised and in which Sanskrit scholars established familial connections on their behalf with the mythical exploits of Parashurama's exploits against the Kshatriyas, and which led to their subsequent adoption of the appellation Rajbanshi (Bhadra, 1983:56).

the resulting atmosphere of uncertainty that prevailed disturbed the government's normal administrative activities (Krauskopff & Meyer 2000:153).

Document 41 (Nawalparasi district)

Issued by: The court of Rajendra Bikram Shah, 1828 (*v.s 1885*)

Topic: Flight of villagers and elephant tax exemption

Shri Durgajyu

“To the *Jimidar, chaudari, kanugoye*, and subjects of Nawalpur: Bhaktabar Singh Thapa of Palpa brought us your request:

When there is an elephant hunt (*hatti kheda*), we are exempted from paying 600 *rupees*. If there is no hunt, then we must pay 600 *rupees*. We are satisfied if there is an annual elephant hunt but since there has been no hunt, it was difficult for us to pay. Some villagers fled to Ramnagar, others to Latthepar and the governmental revenue is reduced. Such a system has never been recorded in any country. If we are exempted from this tax, or if this system is cancelled, we will bring back the villagers, cultivate the land and make it populous and the government will collect the revenue after 3 or 4 years.

From 1828 we grant you an exemption from the 600 *rupees* tax if there is no hunt. Bring our subjects back to cultivate the lands and make it populous in order to increase the governmental revenue. May-June, 1828 (*v.s 1885*, Tuesday the 3rd of the dark fortnight of *Jestha*)”.

N.B

Jimidar: “Private person responsible to the Crown for collecting all taxes in his village, whether or not he succeeded in collecting the required amount from his tenant farmers. He was entitled to keep the taxes collected above the sum owed to the government. *Jimidars* were also entitled to free farm labour by the farmers of the village and often became wealthy landowners” (Krauskopff and Meyer [eds], 2000:184).

chaudhari: “Tax collector in the Tarai who supervised the tax collection in the *praganna*, and today a common Tharu surname” (Krauskopff and Meyer [eds], 2000:183).

kanugoye: “Village level tax collector and record keeper in the Tarai in charge of land registers and the cadastral survey” (a map showing the extent, value and ownership of land) (Krauskopff and Meyer [eds], 2000:184).

praganna: “Administrative district comprising several villages under the supervision of the *chaudhari*; there were 14 *praganna* in the-then Saptari District” (Krauskopff and Meyer [eds], 2000:185).

Commentary

This was the latest in a succession of complaints by headmen and tenants about excessive tax. Considering the abundance of land and the scarcity of labour, the government had to be mindful of peasants fleeing- Ramnagar was in then-British controlled territory, so the Nepali state would not be able to benefit from their cultivating labours elsewhere. When royal hunts did occur, the locals had to provide compulsory, unpaid labour (*jhara*) in capturing wild animals. The logic behind taxing them in non-hunt years was that they were free to use the elephants for their own needs (as a means of transport and to assist with agricultural activities), but clearly this privilege was insufficient and this taxation strategy resulted only in unbearable hardship. The loss of revenue to the Nepali government was enough for them to cancel this tax obligation.

This document illustrates the hardships Tharu farmers were subject to, but at least there was always the option of fleeing elsewhere, rebuilding communities and clearing forest for cultivation. In the 20th century, with available land becoming scarce, in-migration increasing and government restrictions on freedom of movement, the economic condition of the Tharu worsened.

Appendix 4: Captive Elephant Births in Nepali Hattisars, 1979-2004**(Table 5)**

Updated as of 2005 and adapted from: Kharel, F 'The Challenge of Managing Domesticated Elephants in Nepal' in Baker and Kashio (eds) 2002:108 (data from DNPWC and Locke field research)

Name of Mother	Calf's Name	Year of birth	Status	Sire	Remarks
1. Tribhuvan Kali	unnamed	1979	killed	Ganesh Gaj ¹	Kicked by mother after parturition
2. Durga Kali	Shamsher Gaj	1980	live	wild bull	Tiger Tops
3. Manju Kali	Nirajan Prasad	1981	live	Ganesh Gaj	Born at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (KTWR)
4. Tribhuvan Kali	Gyanendra Prasad	1981	live	Ganesh Gaj	Born at KTWR
5. Rup Kali	Puja Kali	1984	live	Ganesh Gaj	Born at KTWR
6. Aishwarya Kali	Dipendra Prasad	1984	died aged 6	Ganesh Gaj	Born at KTWR
7. Rup Kali	Puja Kali	1984	live	Ganesh Gaj	Born at KTWR
8. Dipendra Kali	unnamed	1986	died after 9 days	Ganesh Gaj	Born at KTWR
9. Rampyari Kali	Chitwan Kali	1987	live	wild bull	Born at Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP), currently

¹ Ganesh Gaj was a wild bull who regularly visited the hattisar at the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve where he would mate with captive females, leaving behind eight live calves from various females. He died in 1991 from septic wounds.

					residing at Khorsor
Name of Mother	Calf's Name	Year of birth	Status	Sire	Remarks
10. Bhrikuti Kali	Ram Gaj	1987	live	wild bull	Born at RCNP, resident at Sauraha
11. Rup Kali	Ganesh Kali	1990	died after 2 hours	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP
12. Komal Kali	stillborn	1993	dead	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP, mother still resident at Khorsor
13. Rampyari Kali	Bahadur Gaj	1994	live	Birendra Prasad	Born at RCNP
14. Rup Kali	unnamed	1996	died after 9 days	wild bull	Born at Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR)
15. Pawan Kali	stillborn	1997	dead	wild bull	Born at Royal Bardia National Park (RBNP)
16. Prerana Kali	Gandaki Kali	1998	live	wild bull	Born and resident at Khorsor, RCNP regularly used for Elephant Polo
17. Sitasma Kali	Karnali Kali	1998	live	wild bull	Born and resident at Khorsor, RCNP, regularly used for Elephant Polo
18. Sashi Kali	Rapti Kali	1998	live	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP

19. Bhawani Kali	stillborn	1999	dead	wild bull	Born at RCNP
Name of Mother	Calf's Name	Year of birth	Status	Sire	Remarks
20. Sashi Kali	Narayani Kali	2000	live	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP, trained in February 2004
21. Laxmi Kali	stillborn	2000	dead	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP
22. Shanti Kali	unnamed	2000	live	wild bull	Born at King Mahendra Trust (KMTNC) facility, RBNP
23. Man Kali	Gyanendra Gaj/Prasad	2000	died after 1 year	wild bull	Born at KMTNC facility, RCNP
24. Prerana Kali	Paras Gaj	2001	live	Birendra Prasad	Born at Khorsor, RCNP, trained in May 2004
25. Puja Kali	Himani Kali	2002	live	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP, trained in November 2005
26. Sitasma Kali	Kha Prasad	2002	died after 3 years	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP, died during training November 2005
27. Laxmi Kali	nicknamed 'Mangal Prasad', awaiting official name	May, 2004	live	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP

28.		November 2004	live	wild bull	Born at Khorsor, RCNP
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**Appendix 5: Plants Commonly Recognised by Elephant Handlers
and Their Uses (Table 6)**

Nepali Name	Tharu Name	Binomial Name	Uses
Siru	Dhabi	<i>Imperata cylindrica</i>	Grass eaten by elephants
Dadi		<i>Cymbopogon jwarancusa</i>	Grass eaten by and cut for elephants
Baruwa		<i>Daphne papyracea</i>	Grass eaten by and cut for elephants, also used to make rope
Patera	Patir	<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Grass, the bottom section of which is eaten by elephants, the top section of which is used to fill a gada
Ikari (Ikro)		<i>Arundinella nepalensis</i>	Grass only eaten by elephants in small quantities to serve as a purgative
Simal			Thorny tree sometimes cut for elephant fodder in winter. Also serves as vulture nesting habitat
Kusum			Tree eaten by elephants
Khose/Khosre	Khoksa	<i>Cochilianthus gracilis</i>	Vine eaten by elephants
Bayar/Bariyar	Barir	<i>Zizyphus</i>	Fruit of a tree,

		mauritiana/ Sida rhombifolia	edible to humans/ a herb of medicinal utility for humans
Dumri		Ficus racemosa	Tree with milky juice, eaten by elephants
Khanyo	Khurahur	Ficus semicordata	Fruit of a tree with rough leaves, eaten by elephants and edible for humans
Mahur	Mahuli	Vitis lanata	Wild grape, eaten by elephants
Ammala		Phyllanthus emblica	
Bar Pipal	Gajahur Pipal	Ficus bengalensis	A parasitic vine which twists itself around a tree, usually a sal, eventually killing it

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