BUDDHRAM AND HIS ELEPHANT RAMBAHADUR: A TALE FROM THE INDIAN JUNGLE

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My name is Budhram Rotiya. I have worked as mahout with different forest departments in India. The journey with forest departments started in 1991 when I was hired as surveyor for counting agricultural losses caused by elephants. My work was to provide all details related to such losses, like compartment number, loss-type, damage caused, etc. These details used to be shared with capital of the states and from there, compensation for local people was sanctioned.

I learnt elephant-taming while working with domesticated elephants in southern states. Once, I got a chance to interact with a tiger monitoring team from Bangalore and fortunately, got an opportunity to work with them. I was hired and I started taking care of their elephants, like feeding, bathing, etc. Gradually, I gained experience and I started taming wild elephants. In 1993, an elephant named Rambahadur was caught from the jungles of Chhattisgarh. He was caught because of his status “adamkhor” (man-killer). He had killed 46 people! Post his capture, I was given the responsibility of training him. This elephant was caught at the age of 33. He was very notorious and would listen to nobody. I was the one who tamed him and now, I consider him as my child. I have spent more time with him than my own children.

These days, I am working with Madhya Pradesh Forest department. Once few people came after me and it was only Rambahadur who saved me. Many times, tigers have also tried to attack me while being on duty, but this has made Rambahadur very angry with them. Such situations are tough and tensed! In such moments, I have to speak to him and keep him calm. I tell him “ye gussa kar rahe hai ki... ye, fir humne mana kiye... nahi, wo sab kaam nahi karna hai” (This anger is not right, I have told you not to do that, we don’t have to do such things).

Today, Rambahadur is 55 year old and Budhram is 54.