

Elephant Protocol in Kerala Tradition

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- ▶ Observe the elephant, especially the face as well as the eyes and the other body languages to ensure that mood and temperament of the animal is normal and calm.
- ▶ Never approach the animal under the influence of alcohol or any other psychedelic drugs.
- ▶ Do not approach the animal until and unless the animal shows welcome response signs, which is expressed by making the grunting sound as well as by repeatedly tapping the trunk on the ground.
- ▶ Approach the animal only if it is in a mood of obedience showing calm temperament. This is an indication that the mahout can go close and dust the animal and start further daily routine like cleaning the tethering site etc.
- ▶ When oral commands are given never use percussion commands simultaneously. In other words oral commands are the preferred choice of command. The advantage of using oral commands is that mahout can make the animal obey the commands from a safe distance, and avoid the risk of approaching the animal in the morning before making sure of the mood of the animal.
- ▶ Avoid frequent and unnecessary use of tools (stick, hook, pole etc.). When tools are used frequently, animal gets habituated and often ignores such commands, which are critical.
- ▶ Commands are to be clear, audible and the voice, properly modulated and with clear syllables. Use only standard protocols of commands and restraining methods. Training contrary to that is likely to cause stress to the animal.
- ▶ Elephant may be approached with tools (stick & hook) or without them. This is the option of the mahout. But once an animal gets used to one protocol, the animal will become restive if mahout changes this protocol.
- ▶ All tools of restraint, like different types of chain must be available at all times (body chain, hobbles & cross chain). Body chain is a must when taken out of the tethering site for a walk or transport.
- ▶ Mahout's attitude towards the elephant should be like a parent. Elephants do accept scolding and other punishment to some extent. But if mahout is cruel with elephant he can expect the same in return.
- ▶ Unnecessary and cruel punishment like deprivation of food and water will make elephant aggressive towards the mahout.
- ▶ Good command words, with proper modulation of voice are an asset to mahout. Calling out to the animal in a loud modulated voice at the critical times can save lives.
- ▶ Superstitions like auspicious and inauspicious time should never be applied in a mahout's job. Every moment is important and at times very critical even.
- ▶ Knowledge of sensitive points is a basic requirement for every mahout. He should have basic knowledge on elephant behaviour and signs of illness.
- ▶ Controlling the elephant while riding it is an expert job and requires special skills. The elephant can become violent even at the slightest provocation and more so if frightened from behind.

► Develop observational skills. Observe the animal, standing at a distance. Note its mood, behaviour responses in different situations. Mahout should be able to read an elephant's moods and react accordingly.

► At the first sign of musth the elephant should be tethered. Elephant in musth should not be made to work nor subjected to punishment by depriving it of food and water.

► In the event of an elephant running amok the mahout should not leave the animal but handle the situation with tact and common sense.

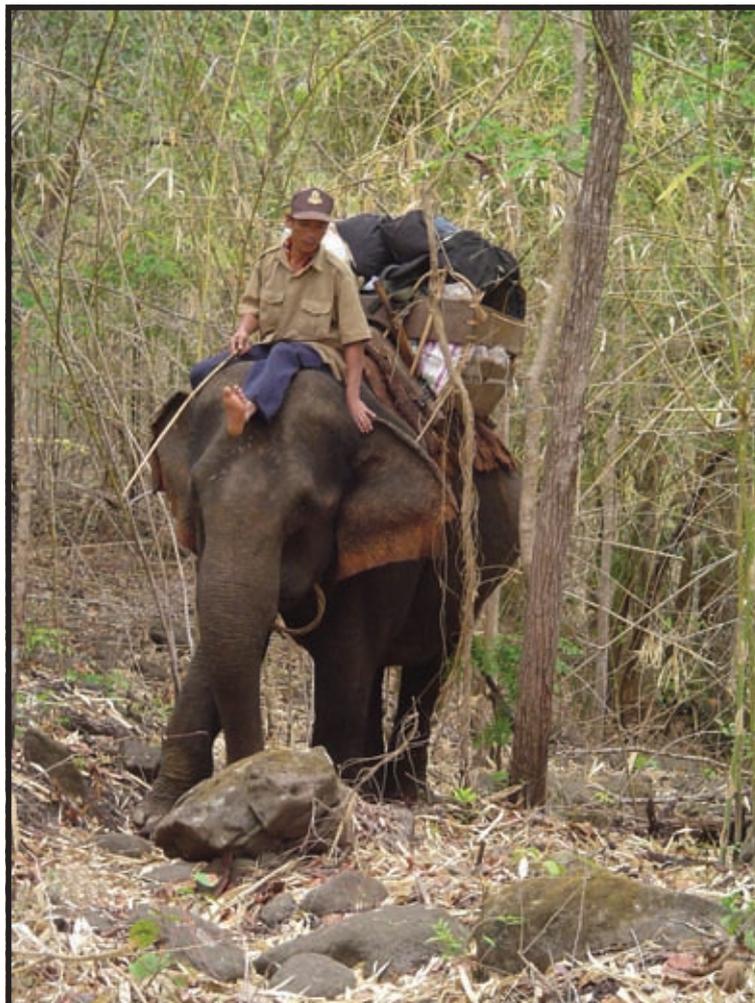
► You cannot change the elephant's temperament, but you can and have to change yourself for the good and lasting results.

► Elephant is highly adaptable and hence can be trained for different situations. But such training should be done humanely.

► Logging elephants and festival elephants are different and require different methods to control them. Riding ensures better control of logging elephants. For festival elephants it is better for the mahout to remain on the ground.

► Reinforcement of obedience protocols should be done every day. The elephant should be subjected to these protocols daily. Exercise the elephant regularly. The best form of exercise is to walk.

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Pack elephant on the trail (Cambodia)
Photo by Gareth Goldthorpe