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The journeys of elephants: An Indian circus trail [1]

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Philosopher Martha Nussbaum opens the remarkable chapter, "Justice for Nonhuman Animals", in her book *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* with an amazing anecdote about elephants from the Ancient Roman Empire:

> In 55 BCE the Roman leader Pompey staged a combat between humans and elephants. Surrounded in the arena, the animals perceived that they had no hope of escape. According to Pliny, they then "entreated the crowd, trying to win their compassion with indescribable gestures, bewailing their plight with a sort of lamentation." The audience, moved to pity and anger by their plight, rose to curse Pompey – feeling, writes Cicero, that the elephants had a relation of commonality (*societas*) with the human race.[2]

Interestingly, Nussbaum's compelling argument regarding justice for non-human animals has, to a large extent, stemmed from the historic judgement of an Indian court on circus animals. And more interestingly, elephants did not figure at all in this case.

Let me briefly narrate this significant legal battle. Then I shall discuss its core idea, "cruelty", and its historical contexts. The last section will discuss the animal subject, the human–animal relationship and intimacy in circus, and also briefly the ethico–legal debates on captive elephants.

On 2 March 1991, the Environment Ministry of the Government of India issued an order, based on the 1960 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, banning the training and performance of certain animals: bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and dogs.[3] (In the corrigendum dated 7 August 1991 the ban on dogs was withdrawn.) It should be noted here that elephants are not included in this ban**,** even though dogs could make it into the list.

In less than three weeks, on 20 March, the Delhi High Court granted a stay on this order on a petition filed by the Indian Circus Federation, and the animals continued in the ring. Seven years later, on 14 October 1998, a new notification was issued banning the five types of animals; lions, tigers, bears, leopards and monkeys. In banning these animals from Indian circuses the Kerala High Court asked, "If humans are entitled to fundamental rights, why not animals?" [4] It is by discussing the idea of "dignified existence" to nonhuman animals that Nussbaum noted: "there seems to be no good reason why existing mechanisms of basic justice, entitlement, and law cannot be extended across the species barrier, as the Indian court boldly does**.**"[5] Probably Nussbaum was not aware of the ironic fate of these animals after this telling judgement. Many of them died an untimely death; many travelled long distances, some without food and water**;** animals had to remain in cramped cages for several months; and they were deprived of sex, since they were not considered "wild" but "hybrid", that is, neither Asian nor African.[6]

However, this ban was fateful in the lives of thousands of circus artistes and workers around the country in such a way that it became a significant moment in the collective memory of the circus community. I have narrated in detail this legal battle between the circus community and the Indian state in my book, *Jumbos and Jumping Devils: A Social History of Indian Circus* (2020). Almost 40,000 animal trainers / caretakers / handlers / performers – the kinds of people who had been part of the Indian circus industry for more than 150 years – lost their occupation, and neither the government nor the circus owners gave any kind of compensation to these animal trainers, nor were they rehabilitated along with their animals.[7]

The politics of bans

However, in August 2013, the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) issued a ban on elephant performances in the circus in India:

> The Board decided to stop registration of elephants for performance under Performing Animals Rules in view of huge cruelties and abuse suffered by them. The Board also decided that a proposal for inclusion of Elephants in the list of banned animals under The Performing Animals (Registration) Rules 2001 be sent to the Ministry for consideration and there should be no performing animals in circuses.[8]

The Board also "directed to issue legal notices to all circuses for using sick, injured and unregistered animals in their circuses as Performing Animals" and "seize them after making arrangement for rehabilitation with some of the AWOs [Animal Welfare Organisations] and Zoos". The AWBI has stopped the registration of circus elephants under the Performing Animals Rules cited above. The report *Captive Elephants in Circuses: A Scientific Investigation of the Population Status, Management and Welfare Significance*, a document that focuses on the conditions of elephants maintained in the circuses, notes the need "to change and improve living conditions of these magnificent animals" and recommends that since the "basic welfare needs of elephants cannot be met within circuses", banning elephants from circuses is the "progressive and humane step". This report which contributed largely to the banning of elephants in circuses, although it acknowledges the long history of performing animals in circuses, hardly pays any attention to the human–animal relationship there. In line with the early bans, it negates circus as a space where "animals are trained or conditioned to exhibit specific behaviours with no option to do otherwise", and "the sole purpose of the elephants' existence in circuses is their ability to generate revenue".[9] The report, on many occasions, fails to understand the subjectivity of an animal, circus elephants as working animals and circus as a space like the zoos or the temples where humans benefit from animal labour. However, as per the Central Zoo Authority's legal restrictions, elephants now no longer perform in circuses. Many of the animals, including elephants, were kept on the private estates of circus owners, since there were regulations around keeping elephants in the tents, and the management anticipated a complete ban. The elephants were also sold to Hindu temples and to private parties. As in the case of other circus animal trainers who were compelled to leave their profession due to the ban, no rehabilitation of mahouts was planned. Maan Barua reminds us with regard to elephants that the key issues facing those who cohabit with elephants, some of whom are among the poorest people in the world, are often ignored.[10]

It has to be noted here that a total ban on elephants in human institutions would not have been easier, since elephants were associated with powerful institutions that have a "traditional" and religious aura, such as the temple management trust, the Devaswam Board. The 1991 ban directly affected a marginalised group of people but, at the same time, hardly affected other dominant exhibition spaces, such as the elephants in religious places or the "traditional" animal-fighting for sport. The most ironical fact is that these exhibitions are not even considered as animals in "performance". What makes certain performances and spaces illegitimate is a triggering question. We may remember in this context how, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, following a mass agitation, the central and state governments sought to lift the Supreme Court ban on the agrarian sport of bull-fighting, *Jallikkettu*, by amending provisions in the law related to the prevention of cruelty to animals. The major argument was that *Jallikkettu* upholds Tamil traditional and cultural values and has historical significance. Similarly, AWBI has filed a report in the Supreme Court alleging that Thrissur Pooram, a globally well-known Hindu temple festival in which about 80 elephants are paraded annually, violates various rules and court orders. The AWBI inspection team had found elephants with heavy chains around all four

Figure 1: Great Bombay circus, circa 1970

legs and the belly during the events of the entire two-day festival. Many of these pachyderms had impaired vision, cracked nails, and wounds which had been deliberately covered with black paste. The team also found the use of banned control devices such as the *ankush* (elephant goad) at the Pooram. Fitness certificates were issued to elephants in the aforementioned conditions, while the AWBI team was denied permission by state authorities to enter the fitness inspection camp. The Kerala High Court did not even consider AWBI's plea that the firework ceremony is often harmful to the elephants, who are made to stand for long hours, often drugged, amidst the terribly loud noises. The state government of Kerala had also issued a government notification on 26 February 2016 and distributed the ownership certificates of elephants against the provisos of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The Supreme Court's intervention has barred the state government from further action (*The Hindu*, 5 May 2016). Thus, it turns out that certain spaces and practices are "sanctioned" and certain kinds of work / performance become "accepted", while others, such as the circus or the poor snake charmer in the street, are branded as cruel and are banned. It is this historical duplicity in the name of love and law that has to be challenged and redefined for a fair and sincere ethico-legal policy for our fellow beings.[11] In their decades-long legal struggle against the Indian state, the petitioners belonging to various circuses pathetically note that "horse shows are organised by military and police authorities wherein no bonafide military or police purpose is involved. Dog shows and bird shows are of similar nature. All over the world there are performing whales, dolphins, monkeys, chimpanzees, birds, etc."[12] A petition filed by a group of circus owners, managers and workers significantly argues that the legal system "totally ignored the plight of race horses, elephants used in temple festivals, bullocks used for pulling carriages, donkeys used for carrying excessive weights in hostile climates and the plight of animals in slaughter houses". They also bring in a reference to the transportation of buffaloes, sheep, goats, or pigs in trucks where they are severely cramped together for long hours. All of this highlights the duplicity of the idea of "cruelty", but also throws

light on the long history of animal domestication, human-animal relationships, and ever existing human conflicts with wildlife.[13]

Another significant point to remember in this context seems to be that many of these global non-governmental organisations that propagate humanity for animals or the rights of children often have their roots in the West. We need to think through this global web of the non-governmental capital, postcolonial states and policy production in the Global South. The perspective of domestication and universality implied in their outlook, in many instances, have become noxious and fatal to many animals and marginalised humans.

The Circular issued by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (WL) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala on 28 August 2019 notes that "more than 50 elephants have died during the last one and half years mostly before attaining their normal life span".[14] A recent *Indian Express* report notes that the death rate is 416 wild elephants in the state from 2015 to 2020.[15] The media abound with reactions and responses over an unfortunate incident that happened on 27 May 2020 in Kerala: the assassination of a pregnant wild elephant from the Silent Valley forest, only 15 years old, by some malicious humans who fed her with pineapples filled with fire crackers. The animal spent almost four days in pain with a broken jaw and died in the waters of the Velliyar river where she must have found her last relief. The way it had been carried out might be a reminder of the cruellest chapters in human history, the electrocution of Topsy, the "bad" circus elephant in 1903 under the leadership of the "scientist" Edison. While the 19th and 20th centuries had different perspectives towards cruelty and kindness, the killing of the Kerala elephant and her unborn pachyderm makes it all the more outrageous and deplorable as it happened during contemporary times when the sentiment of "humanity" itself has changed, with more humane animal rights notions and animal protection laws. Have we come all that far is a probing question. Above all, it happened in Kerala where elephant is the declared state animal.

In this context it is noteworthy that elephants figure dominantly in the animal policy of the nation. In fact, the Indian elephant is the official symbol of Kerala state. The project elephant was launched in 1992**,** and the Elephant Task Force was constituted in 2010 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. As Mahesh Rangarajan, who headed the task force, notes elsewhere, "The fact that a species is unique as well as rare has eventually played a role in nationalist projects to protect, review and propagate it".[16] Eric Scigliano notes that the species included in Association of Zoos and Aquariums "Species Survival Plan Mission" are often flagship species, well known animals which arouse strong feelings in the public. Generating measures for the conservation of elephants, the report of Elephant Task Force notes: "Conservation policies that may diminish the status of the captive elephant should effectively integrate them into India's wildlife protection laws. This is especially important given that the vast majority of captive elephants today were born in the wild and subsequently taken into captivity".[17] The report recommends replacing "ownership" with "guardianship", and suggests that "service conditions of mahouts" should also be addressed, and training and certificates should be granted to them. It also recommends that the usage of elephants in circuses and for collection of alms should be discouraged / banned, and should follow the precedent of phasing out as per the 1991 ban.[18]

Stories of intimacy and grudge

In this section, I would be looking at how memories of particular elephants are significant to the humans who lived with them. What makes these elephants memorable to the circus people? Why do they transfer/share these memories to the next/peer generation? Why do we have these layers of memory about certain animal relatives? The intelligence, reflexivity, treasure of emotional connections, resilience, resistance and survival of particular animals often become themes of these memories. In a different context, I have described in detail in my book, *Jumbos and Jumping Devils* (2020) the close association of animals with their circus trainers: each individual animal possesses their own

subjectivity for an animal trainer in the circus, and it is in accordance with their particularity that often training is done. The job of an efficient animal trainer is often to identify each of these characteristics and develop a circus trick out of it. I have collected some memories as part of my field work. Let me briefly narrate two of them:

The rogue citizen [19]

It was late 1950s. Kamala three ring circus was playing in Kashmir. One day during a packed show an elephant broke its chains and walked out. Not that it simply went out of the circus, it went out of the country crossing the border and reached Pakistan. In its anger and confusion the poor animal demolished buildings and attacked whoever crossed its path. The Pakistan government made a formal complaint to the Indian government that the animal citizen had caused damage that came over one lakh rupees, and had attacked about a hundred people. It became an egoistic issue for both the nations. Damodaran, the owner of Kamala circus, tried his best to get the rogue elephant back, but to no avail. The Pakistan government denied the circus managers and mahouts entry to find or bring back the elephant. And the elephant never came back; it remained only in the official files of the two nations.

An elephant shot [20]

Bharath circus had fifteen elephants. Four of them were pregnant while it was playing at Ernakulam in South Kerala during 1970's. Having pregnant elephants was considered a thing of glory for any circus. The owner will distribute sweets and new clothes for the company girls when the great news reaches him; it brought him a lot of money. As a routine practice, the mahouts would take elephants to the nearby rivers for bathing. During such a bath, the big elephant Lakshman somehow got his head hurt. At the matinee show the elephant seemed upset but went unnoticed. But by the evening show, the elephant became more violent. It was a major camp, hence new tents were pitched and the whole camp was decorated colourfully. The tickets were sold, but it seemed none could control the animal. Another issue was that the major mahout was not in the circus at that time. The others thought the elephant was in *mast*. It began to run around the compound destroying things. Vegetables and bunches of plantain fruit were being thrown about. The tent and the compound were all destroyed, and instruments used for performance were stamped on to the ground. The people sitting in the gallery were asked to leave. The company girls hurriedly crossed the river in a boat to be on the safer side. Yet the circus owner and the management were patient. Now the angry elephant went beside the female elephant that was pregnant and tried to attack it; this outraged them. They suspected it would attack the wild animals too. Thus someone was brought from the military camp. Fifteen bullets were fired to shoot the elephant to death. The circus performer Janaky concludes her story that "elephants, whatsoever, brought money to the circus owners, dead or pregnant".[21]

There are numerous stories like this in the circus world that talk about the relationship between individual animals and their humans – the chimpanzee who savaged her trainer; the fondness of a lion or leopard during a reunion after years of separation; an elephant who killed her mahout; these are just some of them. It is quite significant that this question of intimacy and relationship has not been talked about at all, neither by the state bodies who banned the circus animals, nor by the petitioners who raised the issue of the livelihoods of animal trainers and keepers. On the other hand, the animal trainer has always been a typical metaphor of supremacy and cruelty. In literature, especially in certain strands of feminist literature, the animal trainer personifies a brutal and violent masculinity that tames, controls and inflicts pain on the feminine / nature / wild.[22] Nationalist literatures often deploy this metaphor to represent the coloniser, while the animal signifies the colonised. It is in the grey expanse between the metaphor and the lived experience of an animal trainer that one finds the pain and peril in taming and training an animal and the fear, intimacy and love that the two beings share.[23]

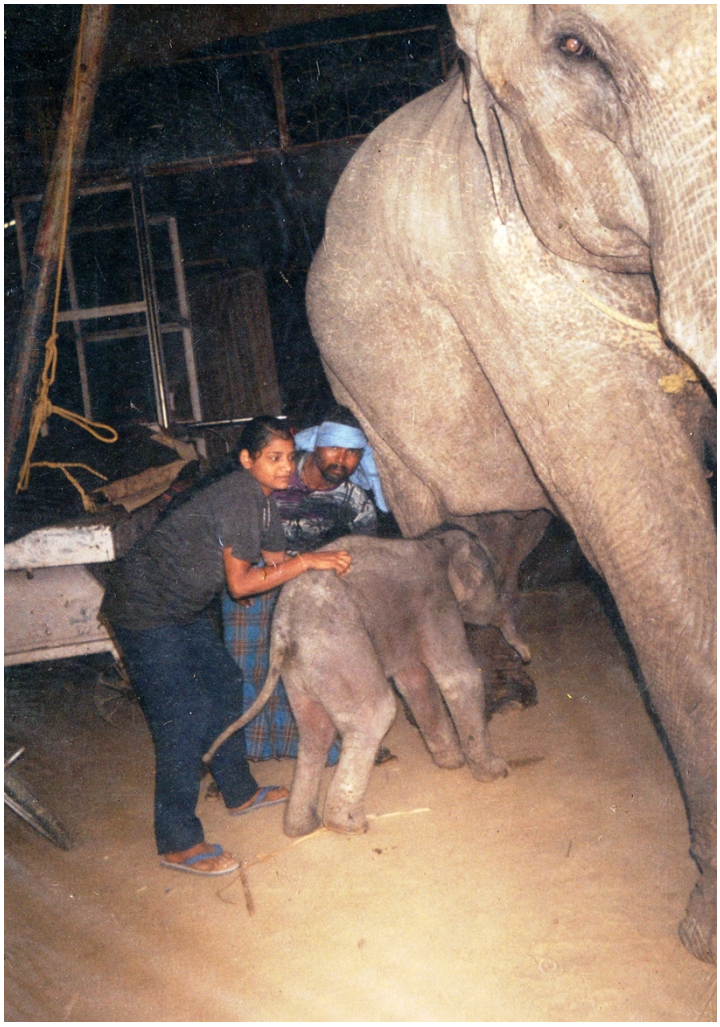

Figure 2: Circus artiste, Jamuna and the mahout with the baby and the mother, Royal Circus, circa 1990.

One of the moving narratives in *Ayeen Akbari* ["The Institutes of the Emperor Akber"] (1800) goes as follows:

> He [the male elephant] can be taught various feats. He learns the modes which can only be understood by those skilled in music, and moves his limbs in time thereto. He is also taught to shoot an arrow out of a bow, and to take up anything that is thrown down and to give it to his keeper. They are fed with any kind of grain wrapt up in grass, and what is very astonishing, upon a signal being given to him by his keeper, he will hide eatables in the corner of his mouth, and when they are alone together will take them out again and give them to the man.[24]

This invariably brings in the bonded lives of the humans and animals, the longer history of domestication, and training of feats and tricks. The first volume of *Ayeen Akbari* that describes the maintenance of the Mughal emperor Akbar's imperial household, also records the life span, diet, disposition, size and types of the elephants. It notes, "The natives of Hindostan hold this animal in such estimation that they consider one of them as equivalent to five hundred horses".[25]

Radhika Govindarajan notes that "reflexive exchanges between particular humans and animals, facilitated through an embodied, touchy-feely, language of mutual recognition and response were crucial to their co-constitution as subjects", while Piers Locke describes these entwined destinies of the human-animal lives that go both ways as, "I was much 'her

human', as she was 'my elephant'".[26] Those who have spent their lives in the company of animals understand this relationship full of perplexity and surprises that we social scientists often fail to see. *The Elephant Company* describes Elephant Bill's life with his working elephants during World War II as beyond "friendship or even family": "The great animals… had become his religion. Through them he had been saved, reborn, and even christened – renamed as Elephant Bill. With them, he had gained a world of wisdom and compassion. In a way, he proudly told one writer, he had even become one".[27] Another point to be noted seems to be the bounded lives of the helper mahouts with these elephants and their individual techniques to train each of them, apart from their white bosses whose lives have been forefronted through biographies or life stories. The Burmese Po Toke who "tried out his [Bandoola's] gentling process, rather than 'breaking' the animal", or Curpo (probably a Latino/Hispanic) whom Emma the circus elephant treated "as an equal, rather than a superior, and didn't mind showing it".[28] The great Maratha animal trainer, Damoo Dhotre has written an autobiography, *The Wild Animal Man*, the only one of its kind when it comes to Indian circus. He trained umpteen numbers of animals from varied species including elephants, in circuses around the world**,** such as the Ringling Brothers' Barnum and Bailey circus. In the beginning chapters of his autobiography, he talks about his training lessons from his teacher animal trainer, Mr Chavan: "'Now,' he told me, 'the first step is to win their confidence – and the way you do that is to play with them and feed them'."[29] Later on, speaking of his childhood, Damoo realises, "I was thinking of nothing except how to make friends with these animals. I wasn't even thinking of training".[30]

There is a voluminous body of hunting literature from around the world written by colonial officers or explorers who travelled to the tropical lands in search of economic benefits and sport hunting. Elephant hunting, as many of us know, was one of the favourite sports of the royal as well as the colonial rulers. Some of the incidents narrated describe moments of intelligence, reflexivity and resilience of the elephants encountered by these hunters. One such instance would be from the hunting account, *Elephants Never Forget*, where the author would detail his experiences with the log-roller elephants in Ceylon:

> A few words from the mahout and that the elephant began lifting the two-ton flywheel from the ground by the pressure of its nose against the smooth face. The flywheel slid along till the opposite side butted against the wall and he then completed the job by rising from his knees and placing the wheel against the wall in an upright position. Now that elephant has never done anything like that before, yet he knew exactly what was wanted, and did it with apparent ease.[31]

He further adds, "The intelligence shown here is not exceptional. The elephant exhibits this sagacity in all the diverse undertakings he is called upon to perform".[32] The chapter "Surrounded by Elephants" in *Big Game Hunting*, recounts the shooting of two elephants in Central Africa. The account brings up the persistence and deliberateness of the cow elephants to save the wounded bull; their willingness to attack the enemy in spite of knowing how deadly he is; and their cunningness to take the wounded friend away from the hunter no matter whether he would make it or not: "I now went to look for the bull [elephant], but he had gone. Under cover of the demonstration made by the cow I had shot, the other cow had got him away. I followed the blood spoor until it was no longer visible…. We had to abandon the chase and I never found the big bull I had wounded…"[33] The colonial administrator James Fobbes seems to have been moved by the "sagacity, docility, and affection of this noble quadruped". He notes that it is the training that increases the value of an elephant: "their price increases with their merit during a course of education".[34] M. P. Sivadasamenon, a hunting enthusiast who describes the methods and plans of elephant hunting in detail, observes the caste dimensions of the hunting discourse in Malabar.[35]

Indian circus has a long and rich history of elephant training and performances. There are very many newspaper reports from the early 20th century that mention the performance of elephants in various circuses. To cite an example, a report on a Parsi circus group speaks

about bears and elephants that rode cycles (*Malayala Manorama*, 1 December 1909). The tricks of elephants and parrots are specially mentioned in another enthusiastic report (*Malayala Manorama*, 24 November 1909). Bhagwantrao D. More, who inherited his ancestral home in Sangamner, Maharashtra, told me that the house of his grandfather, Yeshwant Rao Gangaram More who established the Grand More circus in 1881**,** had *hathikhanas* where elephants used to be trained and kept. Built on a large area of his land, the big house was divided into two halves; one for keeping the animals, called *shikarkhana*, and the other for giving them rehearsals, the *khelwada*.[36] Early in the morning at about 4 am elephants are woken up and mahouts train them in the ring for about two hours. At times there will be practice at night also for about an hour. The duration of practice session will vary according to the items an elephant performs. Many of them are brought and trained as babies since it is easier to teach them than the grown-up animals. In the first phase of the training they are taught to sit, walk, stand up, "go" and "come". Experienced mahouts and indigenous medical practitioners qualified in elephant treatment from Kerala, Bihar and Assam were employed in circuses for looking after the elephants. An allopathic doctor's help would be sought only as a last resort or when a surgery is needed. Elephants are selected according to certain features that supposedly mark character and quality.[37] A program book of Kamala circus, 1955 describes the baby elephant Champa who enjoys playing with the female artistes in the circus.[38] On the other hand, another program book of the same year mentions that it had 20 elephants to its credit while the book also admits that an equal number of them had perished during that time.[39] In his autobiography, Damoo Dhotre notes that circuses have stopped using bull elephants anymore because "they are far too unpredictable". During the period of *mast*, he wisely adds, "all work and patience that has gone into training him seems to mean nothing. No amount of kindness or discipline 'takes'. The animal seems to have lost all sense of fear."[40]

State policies and elephants

Let me briefly discuss the policies and attitudes that brought elephants into the circus in the sub-continent. The colonial government promoted hunting as a "manly" sport; it had cash awards for those who killed wild animals; it issued guns to interested parties; and it levied taxes on grazing for domestic animals.[41] This was part of their forest policy; clearing forests and slaughtering wild species. The fact that this very structure had established the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, shows the Janus-face of the legal system. Mahesh Rangarajan notes the Raj's project to eliminate ferocious beasts: "They were a scourge to be wiped out. Such practices were new to India: no previous ruler had ever attempted to exterminate any species".[42] Sujit Sivasundaram points out that the British colonial state used elephants in the military, and traded, exhibited and exchanged them as gifts in the colonies as well as their homeland. They adopted the natives' knowledge to mark, trap, train and medically treat elephants in India. But the acts of the natives were considered less benevolent.[43] The best example could be William Logan's *Malabar*, where he wonders at the extent of natives' cruelty towards the timber dragging elephants: "when we consider the brutal and wicked manner in which this, one of the noblest creations of God, is treated, is it any wonder that the wretched animal, however powerful its constitution, succumbs?"[44]

In *The Turning Points of Environmental History*, McNeil notes; "horses and war elephants became so valuable for military purposes that rulers tried to govern environments so as to ensure a ready supply of these strategic goods. With respect to horses, this meant expanding or preserving grasslands. In the case of elephants, it meant forest preservation". He further adds this interesting observation: "An ancient Indian author, Kautilya, an adviser to the throne in the Mauryan Empire, explained the importance of maintaining forests as elephant breeding grounds in the interest of the state. Only Asian elephants were domesticated and trained to war; African elephants remained wild animals and from the farmers' point of view, a pest".[45]

The allegorical poem, "Elephant in the Dark" in Rumi's *Rubaiyat* begins with an element of wonder: "Some Hindus have an elephant to show. / No one here has seen an elephant. / They bring it at night to a dark room. / One by one we go in the dark and come out / Saying how we experience the animal."[46] The human relationship with the megafauna in the early modern period was built on "awe, mystery, spectacle, fear, danger, and imagination".[47] The circus, without fail, seems to be a metaphor and epitome of all these. This charismatic world would later on be defined as a world of brutality with changing sensibilities of humanity. The European love for the 'exotic' has its root in the territorial, political, racial, and environmental imperialism colonialism exercised in its colonies. The animal trade from the colonies was one of the most prosperous enterprises for the colonial empire.[48] They were exported for scientific experiments, to be showcased at the zoological gardens and Parks, and to be stuffed in the museums of London and Paris. Paul Chambers throws light on how the very idea of the African elephant Jumbo as the 'greatest elephant in the world' invokes the obsession that was prevalent throughout Europe to see 'the longest, biggest, and the most abnormal and extraordinary' from their colonies.[49] A hunting account from Limpopo, South Africa, states that the hunters chose from a herd of elephants the perfect elephant for ivory and then shot the target, "The tusks of this huge elephant being unusually perfect, I resolved to preserve the entire skull".[50] The autobiography of the circus animal agent, Charles Mayer describes how he was sent to Bombay to find an Asiatic elephant with fourteen and a half feet height by P.T. Barnum, the circus baron. [51] W. W. Hunter remarks, "In 1882, 3,475 elephants were captured in Assam yielding revenue to government of 8573 pounds."[52] Alan Mikhail notes that Egypt became a major source of animals for European zoos, thus acquiring, purchasing, selling, trading, supplying and distributing animals all over the world in the nineteenth century. Even an older institution like hunting became transformed into a project of the empire and capital while the new interspecies economies reduced the animal bodies into market commodities.[53]

The practice of exchanging elephants as gifts was also common among the rulers. Jose Saramago's poignant novel, *The Elephant's Journey* narrates the elephant Solomon's travel on foot from Lisbon to Vienna as a wedding gift from the King of Lisbon to Hapsburg Archduke in 1551.[54] The elephant was named after the Ottoman enemy, Sultan Suleyman and might have hailed from Kerala or Sri Lanka.[55] In the elaborate historical account *The Animal in the Ottoman Egypt*, Alan Mikhail describes,

> "… the history of elephants in these two Ottoman cities [Istanbul and Cairo] reflects wider early modern uses of the animal in the Islamic world, South Asia, Europe, and beyond. One of the principal factors spurring demand for Indian elephants in both the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran was their dual use as diplomatic gifts and symbols of imperial power…. The gifting of elephants was a common practice in South Asia and one likely exported from the subcontinent to the Ottoman and Safavid worlds. Indeed, there is a long tradition in South Asia of gifting and using elephants as signs of power and prestige…".[56]

This type of exchange has continued well into the twentieth century. For instance, Nehru gifted a baby elephant named after his daughter, Indira, to Japanese children in 1948.[57] In a similar way, David Jamieson and Sandy Davidson point out, elephants reached the circuses,

> Many [elephants] came [to European and American circuses] as youngsters from India, Burma, Sri Lanka and Siam, where elephants have been used for centuries as working animals in the timber forests. Because of this tradition of domestication, the Indian elephant was thought for many years to be far easier to train than the African….[58]

The Indian circus companies usually bought elephants from the *mela*s of Assam, Calcutta and the Sonpur mela in Bihar.

Philip T. Robinson observes that elephant performances such as elephant riding and tricks done by elephants were regular show items in zoos in the United States in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[59] The photos published in the *Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly* show that joy riding for children, circus-like feats where the elephant carries the performer in the trunk and group dancing and performance on the stools by elephants were performed as late as 1950s in the Colombo zoo.[60] I could also watch similar performances by elephants and a sea lion in 2016.[61] A report by *The Hindu* (30 December 1963) shows photos of the "masterly dumb show at Kerala Forest Sports Festival" by the two baby elephants, Sankaran and Rangan, the captive elephant calves in the Nilambur Forest Division. Being an "officer in charge of the elephant-catching establishment in Mysore", G. P. Sanderson shares his reflection: "The driver's knees are placed behind an elephant's ears as he sits on it, and it is by means of a push, pressure, and other motions, that his wishes are communicated, as with the pressure of the leg with trained horses in a circus".[62] All of this acknowledges the longer history of animal domestication, human-animal accompaniment and wildlife conflicts during colonialism and the princely states.

To wind up my points on the idea of conservation and the duplicity of the state, it is worthwhile to note here that perhaps in a small way, humans began to transform the environment a very long time ago.[63, 64] As humans who were "human enough to transform the natural world they lived" into a better world for themselves, "Australia lost 86 percent of its megafauna…, South America lost 80 percent; North America lost 73 percent; and Europe lost 14 percent". Among mammals, the extinction rates were even starker: "94 percent in Australia, 73 percent in North America, 29 percent in Europe, and 5 percent in Africa".[65] Climate change and human predation are cited as causes for these extinctions. What is important in the context is, as *Humans Versus Nature: A Global Environmental History* (2020) argues, the fact that the animals were unwary and unable to survive after their encounter with *Homo sapiens*.[66]

NOTES

1. This article stems from my research presented at the Elephant Conference organised by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore in April 2016, from which the idea of this volume to a large extent derives. The research was done as part of my doctoral work**,** and over the years, I have presented this paper in the University of Hyderabad, University of the Witwatersrand, Hebrew University, University of Kelaniya and also at the European Conference on South Asian Studies, New England Historical Association and European Society for Environmental History conferences. Earlier versions and arguments of this article have appeared in my book, *Jumbos and Jumping Devils: A Social History of Indian Circus* (2020), New Delhi: Oxford University Press and in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review* as a research paper, "Ban and Benevolence: Circus, Animals and Indian State" (2017), 54, No.2, 239-266. I am grateful for the support and suggestions from Prof. Mahesh Rangarajan and Prof . K. Sivaramakrishnan. I acknowledge my gratitude to all the animals and humans I met in the circuses, and the cats, dogs and birds with whom I lived in Johannesburg, Thalassery and Thiruvananthapuram.

2. Martha Nussbaum (2006), *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 325.

3. Notification F 26-7/91 WL-I, Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2 March 1991.

4. Judgment dated 6 June 2000, *N. R. Nair and Others* v. *Union of India*, Original Petition No. 155 of 1999 (Hereafter, "Judgement 2000").

5. Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice,* 326.

6. The categorisation of animals into Asian, African, German or Persian with the idea of their pedigree often goes in parallel with human racialisation. Scholars have worked on the close connection between animals and race: how dogs would identify black Zambian natives and terrify them even when their colonial white masters were not around, how the

fear of the Jamaican black people towards bull dogs are historically related to the racial subjugation, or how African American slavery was ensured with the help of hound dogs, are just instances. It is not surprising that dogs enjoy a major position even in the postcolonial societies such as the white supremacist Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa with their long-time association with black slavery, colonisation and servitude. Josh Doble, "Can Dogs be Racist? The Colonial Legacies of Racialized Dogs in Kenya and Zambia" (2020), *History Workshop Journal*, 89, Spring, 68–89; Tyler D. Parry and Charlton W. Yingling (2020), "Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas", *Past and Present*, 246, No. 1, February, 69–108; Shontel Stewart, "Man's Best Friend? How Dogs Have Been Used to Oppress African Americans", see https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1347&context=mjrl, Available at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjrl/vol25/iss2/4 27 February 2021.

7. Nisha P R (2020), *Jumbos and Jumping Devils: A Social History of Indian Circus*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 86.

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9. Surendra Varma, S. R. Sujata, Suparna Ganguly, and Shiela Rao (2008), *Captive Elephants in Circuses: A Scientific Investigation of the Population Status, Management and Welfare Significance,* Bangalore: Compassion Unlimited Plus Action; See Nisha P R, *op. cit.,* 89-90.

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12. Judgement 2000.

13. Argument notes, O.P. no. 2636 of 1999, *M. A. Sasidharan and Others* v. *Union of India and Another*.

14. KFDHQ/82/2019-BDC/BDC1, Circular No.5/2019.

15. See https://indianexpress.com/article/india/elephant-death-brings-to-fore-man-animal-conflict-in-kerala-6447800/ 26 February 2021; Another report by the same newspaper notes that the majority of the nationwide population of elephants exist in Kerala and Assam amongst, which less than one fourth are with the Forest Department and nearly three fourths are in private custody. See https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/indias-2454-captive-elephants-where-they-are-and-with-whom-5560322/ 25 February 2021; On the other hand, the BBC reports that about 350 of the captive elephants in Kerala and Rajastan are "illegal". See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43862182 26 February 2021.

16. Mahesh Rangarajan (2008), "Region's Honour, Nation's Pride: Gir's Lions on the Cusp of History", in *The Lions of India*, ed. Divyabhanusinh, Delhi: Black Kite, 258.

17. Eric Scigliano (2002), *Love, War and Circuses: The Age-Old Relationship between Elephants and Humans,* Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 293.

18. Nisha P R, *op. cit.*, 90.

19. This story is narrated by Kalicharan whom I met at the Super Galaxy circus when it was playing at the Jagannatha temple festival in 2006. He, who is from Utter Pradesh in the northern side of India, has worked in Kamala circus as an artiste, while in Super Galaxy he is working as a manager. Interview with Kalicharan, Temple Gate, Thalassery, 18 September 2006.

20. From the interviews with Janaky and Kausu, Meethala Peedika, 13 March 2007 and 25 March 2007. Kausu and Janaky worked in various circuses as performers in the 1980's and 1990's respectively. Both of them live in Thalassery, Kerala.

21. Interview with Janaky, Meethala Peedika, 13 March 2007.

22. Nisha P R, *op. cit.*, 132-133.

23. *ibid.*, 133.

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