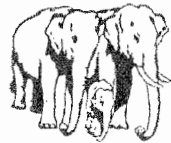


# Mahout Training Course

Elephant Welfare Association

135 Nehru Nagar, Trichur 680 006 Phone 0487 20547



*Participants of the Mahout Training Course : Shamsuddin, Sunilkumar, Jayanthan, Vijaykumar, Omanakutan, Gopakumar and Vincent, (missing from photo Nibha N.)*

## MAHOUT TRAINING PROGRAMME

Sally Walker and Jacob Cheeran

Traditionally the profession of mahout was passed on from father to son and the relationship of mahout with the elephant was almost life long which helped him to develop a good relationship with the elephant. Elephants usually obey mainly the chief mahout and at a times only one mahout.

During the past three to four decades the ownership of elephants and profession of mahout underwent a sea change. Elephant ownership, traditionally confined to big landlords, has now come to many, who own an elephant as an economic proposition like owning a truck or a taxi. Some of them even acquire ownership by availing bank loan on a hire purchase basis. The population of captive elephants in Kerala has also increased and they are at present between 500-600. Also there is an unprecedented increase in the use of elephants in festivals in Kerala. Festivals of all communities (Hindu, Muslim and Christian) using 50 or more elephants are not rare.

All these factors resulted in a dearth of mahouts and many who work as apprentice with one mahout took over as the first mahout with a new owner. Also, mahouts changed the

employer for better emoluments.

Unfortunately the elephant has had to pay the price for all these changes, and that too in a hard way, frequently resulting in ill treatment of captive elephants. The cruelty that was meted out to elephants has resulted even in death. Also many mahouts lost their life also, when elephants reacted violently to the cruel treatment.

Elephant lovers of Kerala studied the problem and realised this problem can be solved to a large extent by training the mahouts in a systematic and scientific manner and increasing the dignity of the profession of mahout so that the status and values which once were attached to the job can again be realised. The first step in establishing, upgrading and regularising a profession is training and certification, which the course ultimately aims to do.

The idea of a Mahout Training was in the minds of the members of the Elephant Welfare Association for some time. In the fall of 1994 Dr. Trevor Poole of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare and the International Academy of Animal

### Other collaborators and sponsors

Forest Department of Kerala

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

Zoo Outreach Organisation/ CBGS, India



Welfare Sciences visited Trichur to conduct a workshop on Environmental Enrichment for Captive Wild Animals, organised by Zoo Outreach Organisation. He visited the Guruvayur temple and discussed problems of elephant management and the need for training with Dr. Jacob V. Cheeran, a famous wild animal veterinarian in Kerala, known for his daring capture operations of wild animals in trouble. UFAW has been engaged in several captive elephant research projects and Poole encouraged Cheeran to apply for assistance for the Training which was granted.

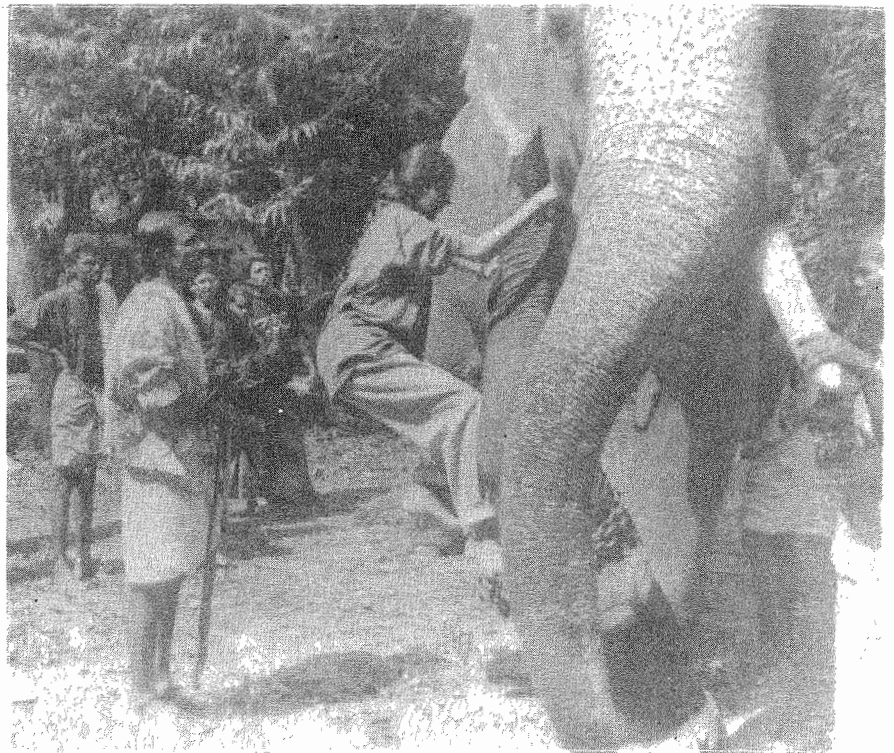
In the meantime the Forest Department of Kerala indicated interest in conducting a course and came forward to offer a venue at their range office in Peechi, teaching equipment, and an elephant. The Zoo Outreach Organisation, which is the Indian representative for UFAW and IAAWS and monitor for the course, agreed to coordinate course materials, translation facilities and out of state Resource persons.

On October 6, 1995 the course was formally inaugurated as part of the Wildlife Week celebrations in Trichur and on 7 November the Elephant Welfare Association (a non-governmental association based in Kerala) in collaboration with the Forest Department of Kerala and Zoo Outreach Organisation began the first Mahout Training Course which will run up to 7 February 1996. This course will be followed by two more 3-month courses to begin in April and October respectively. The primary objectives of the course are:

1. to impart improved skills in care and handling both traditional and modern,
2. to impart a better sense of the needs of the animal from a welfare point of view,
3. to upgrade the image of mahouts and the profession of mahout both in their own eyes, that of their owners, and the public

The first two months of training consist of a combination of theory and practical work with an elephant, and the last month will be devoted to visiting various elephant camps in and around Kerala. All the mahouts in the present course are Keralites and the course has been conducted in their language.

In order to provide variety and to assess



**One of the most important things a mahout has to learn is how to mount the elephant. In the photograph, participant, Course Coordinator and translator, Nibha Nambodiri takes her turn at practice.**

the feasibility of extending the course to other states other elephant experts from different parts of the south and all-India are being invited to serve as resource persons.

Ms. Nibha Nambodiri, who speaks fluent Malayalam, English and Hindi is serving as a translator who will help out-of-state resource persons communicate. Nibha is also a participant in the course, learning herself to be a Mahout with all the skills. Originally she was just to monitor the presentations and translate, but since a major part of the course is practical it was clear that simply translating lectures was not going to be enough. Nibha signed up and is undergoing every aspect of the practical training, taking notes on whatever the mahout says whether it is chaining the elephant or gathering fodder. As course coordinator, she also spends a lot of time with the participants listening to "elephant lore" and discussing problems of mahouts and leads special discussions and activities on lecture days when there is an empty slot. The document or Manual which results from the series of training courses will reflect much of this informal training as well.

Now, the participants use a book on

elephants written by Dr. K.C. Panicker as course material as well as other, less didactic material on elephants in their language.

Course Directors and primary Resource Persons, Dr. Jacob Cheeran and Dr. K.C. Panicker frequently have to go on emergency calls to tend to sick or misbehaving elephants. Whenever possible they take the participants to further enhance the experience for them. On days when there is no practical (no elephant) there are two sessions of theory.

On practical days, trainees begin the day cooking food for the elephant and taking her through various routines. Her Mahouts, who are very experienced, instruct trainees in a variety of elephant handling techniques, including long walks in the forest and the all-important bath. The elephant is a 20 year old female from the Forest Camp at Kodanadu and has been provided for the course.

The experienced Mahout Resource Persons are First Mahout Shri Ponnapan who is employed by the Forest Department and has done twelve years of service, and Second Mahout Shri Radhakrishnan who also works for the

Forest Department with six years of experience. Sunita has had two offspring which have been taken care of by Radhakrishnan who is known for his experience with baby elephants. These Mahouts were selected by the Forest Department for their combination of experience, expertise and correct behaviour with an elephant.

The course is aimed at both young working mahouts as well as aspirants which is a good mix, as the working mahouts enhance the depth of the course for aspirants. A list of the participants and their qualifications is appended.

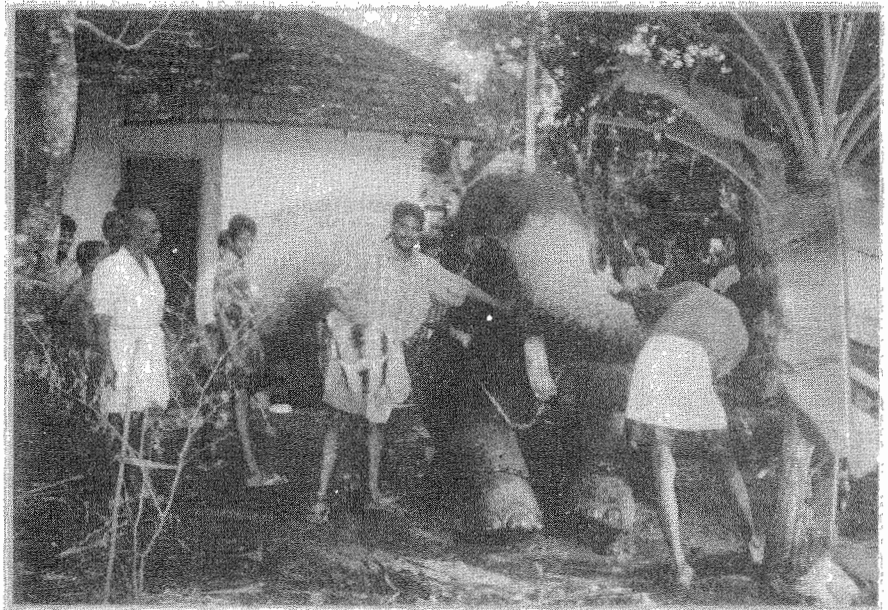
When the course was announced there were 70 applicants with 8 graduates, 40 who had passed S.S.L.C. and 14 with previous experience. While attending the course, participants are given a living wage although it is far less than what they can earn if doing their regular work. Therefore taking the course involves motivation and some sacrifice. Finally 7 participants were selected. There has been one drop-out and an addition, making the total again seven.

A variety of subjects will be taught in the course other than what is listed in the syllabus on the following page. One of the objectives being to upgrade the image and alter the attitudes of the Mahouts, much of the theoretical part of the course is devoted to conservation, ecology and animal welfare. Officers from the Kerala Forest Department, from Kerala Forest Research Institute will teach these aspects. Trainees also are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Dr. V. Krishnamurthy, A.K.A. "Dr. K." or the "elephant doctor" of whom they have heard much.

Originally Dr. Krishnamurthy had planned a similar training under the auspices of Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department and the Ministry of Environment. Due to bureaucratic delays, however, this did not materialise and Dr. K. advised Cheeran to try and get the Kerala course underway. Now, Dr. K. has been requested to spare as much time as possible for the Kerala course.

### Eligibility

a) Persons who had been working as mahouts in various establishments like Forest Department, Zoos, etc.



*Mahout trainees learn the correct techniques in giving an elephant a bath.*

- b) Tribals with a background of elephant management in various states.
- c) Ability to read and write

### Certification

Participants will receive a certificate from the Kerala Forest Department and the Elephant Welfare Association of having taken the training. It is not clear yet what the certificate will mean. For the aspirants, in particular, it is certain that no one could manage an elephant after a mere three months' training. Possibly the certificate could entitle an aspirant to become an assistant and after a year's work, to become a mahout. Many questions have to be answered about the subject of captive elephants and their owners and caretakers before the best solution emerges. This course provides a means of experimentation and trial which will be useful in deciding a protocol and perhaps a licensing procedure for keeping and maintaining elephants.

The Kerala Forest Department has drawn up a scheme to provide training to mahouts (3 months), as well as veterinarians who work with elephants (one month), Forest Officers and Wildlife Managers (7 days), and Policy makers (7 days).

Actually a capsule course also needs to be developed for private elephant owners so that they can understand the needs and problems of mahouts and provide a better working environment for their elephant.

It is envisioned that the fact of the training itself will provide information and create interest in private owners in improving conditions for their animals. It is largely appreciated by owners that their financial investment is safe only if the animals are well-treated but many do not know how to provide optimum conditions.

### Elephant Welfare Association Newsletter

To address the elephant owners and draw more of them into the Elephant Welfare Association, it has been decided to start a Newsletter for the Elephant Welfare Association which will report on training, give tips and guidelines for maintaining good working relations with mahouts, and relate general elephant news. The Newsletter will be in English and Malayalam. Initially, the Zoo Outreach Organisation will produce the newsletter and include it as part of ZOOS' PRINT as well as providing copies for wide distribution to elephant owners, both members and non-members of the Elephant Welfare Association.

### Elephant Issue of ZOOS' PRINT

Finally, after the first course is over in February, Zoo Outreach Organisation will bring out a Special Elephant Issue including a complete Report on the course as well as all the elephant articles which have been piling up at the office for the last few months.

# Things a good Mahout needs to know

## 1. Basic knowledge about elephants (incl. first aid)

- a) Recognizing good and undesirable traits in elephants.
- b) Selection of elephants for various purposes.
- c) Signs of good health and ill health.
- d) Identifying fodder species and seasonal preferences.
- e) First aid

## 2. Reproductive behaviour and birth

- a) Detecting signs of musth.
- b) Controlling an animal in musth.
- c) Precautions to be taken when in musth.
- d) Detecting signs of estrus in cow, mating and pregnancy.
- e) Care of pregnant and lactating mothers.
- f) Care of new born.

## 3. Watering and Grazing

- a) Collection of cut fodder
- b) Precautions to be taken while taking for grazing.
- c) Watering and water requirements.

## 4. Camp Management

- a) Duties of the mahout and his assistant (Kavady).
- b) Daily routine to be followed in an elephant camp.
- c) Training and handling of the elephants.
  - i) Leading the animal.
  - ii) Removing and putting on the hobbles.
  - iii) Bath and Grooming.
  - iv) Learning to make the animal obey commands
  - v) Routine training from the ground.
  - vi) Routine training from the elephants back.
  - vii) Mounting and dismounting - various techniques.
  - viii) Guiding by voice command & leg signals.
- d) Use of ropes.
  - i) Knowing different materials in use for making ropes in different regions.
  - ii) Learning to make ropes for various purposes.
- e) Gaddi and Numdah - use of - and how to secure it.
- f) Different types of howdah and methods of securing.
- g) Care of elephant accoutrements.

## 5. Work

- a) Different types of work for which elephants are used.
- b) Taking the animal for work - precautions.
- c) Putting the animal for work.
  - i) Logging.
  - ii) baggage carrying,
  - iii) Joy rides.
  - iv) other uses.
- d) Precautions to be taken during work.

## 6. Methods of capturing elephants - including care, management of new capture.

- a) Different methods of capturing.
- b) Equipment used for capture - their care.
- c) Kumkies - use of kumkies.
- d) Noosing - methods of noosing.
- e) Enkraaling.
- f) Care of new capture in the kraal and handling.
- g) Animal psychology and principles of animal training.
- h) Training of the new capture.

- i) Taking the new capture out of the kraal.
- j) Care of the new capture outside the kraal.
- k) Training of the new capture outside the kraal.

### C.V. of Mahout Trainees First Mahout Training Course Elephant Welfare Association, Peechi

**Omanakuttan T.T.** -- Age: 23 -- from Puthusherikkara  
Educational Qualification: 5th Std.; Wk experience: 8 years.

**Sanilkumar V.A.** -- Age: 17 yrs. -- from Ernakulam  
Edl. Qualification: S.S.L.C.; Wk experience- Nil

**Jayanthan R.** -- Age: 21 -- from Cherthala, Alapuzha  
Ed. Qual. 9th Std. ; Work experience: 6 yrs.

**Gopakumar G.** -- Age: 17 ; from Ameyidu, Ambalapuzha  
Ed Qual. 9th Std. ; Work experience: 3 yrs.

**Nibha N.** -- Age: 22 -- Coimbatore 7  
Ed. Qual. : Graduate ; Work experience : nil

**T.M. Shamsuddin** -- Age: 24.; Mandaram, Konni,  
Ed. Qual. S.S.L.C. nil pass; Work experience: 4 yrs.

**R. Vijayakumar** -- Age: 22; Dhanavachapuram  
Ed Qual. S.S.L.C. nil pass; Work experience: few months.



*Dr. Jacob Cheeran, Course Director (along with Dr. K. C. Panicker who is not pictured) with participants.*

## Mahout Training Course -- the first two weeks

### 6th November 1995

Orientation of Trainees, Informal Introduction to Course and Resource Persons. Trainees settled into the campus.

### 7th November 1995.

Psychology and Behaviour of elephants, Dr. Jacob. V. Cheeran  
Empathy towards animals, Nibha Namboodiri.

### 8th November 1995

State Bandh and there were no classes

### 9th November 1995

Peculiar Behaviour of elephants, Shri Maheshwaran Namboothiripad.  
Group discussion of factors responsible for cruelty towards elephants -- led by Nibha Namboodiri.

### 10th November 1995

Mahout Elephant Interaction Shri Maheshwaran Namboothiripad.  
Handling and management of elephants, Shri Radhakrishna Kaimal.

### 11th-12th November 1995 -- Weekend Holiday.

### 13th November 1995

Musth in elephants: an Overview, Dr. Shafi.  
Video show on wildlife by District Range Officer.

### 14th November 1995

Some diseases in elephants and their causes, Shri Maheshwaran Namboothiripad.  
Interactive discussion on how trainees thought they as a group could help prevent Ivory poaching, led by Nibha N.

### 15th November 1995.

Musth-reasons for occurrence and symptoms, Dr. Shafi.  
Revision of previous lessons, Dr. Cheeran.

### 16th November 1995

Principles of Animal Training, Capture of elephants, Dr. Cheeran  
Poaching in the wild ; how to differentiate elephants individually, Dr. Kaimal

### 17th November 1995

Physical Indicators of an auspicious or good elephant, Mythological conceptions of elephant evolution, Dr. K.C. Panicker  
Physiology of elephants-Respiration, Digestion and excretion; M.G. Ramakrishna Pillai.

### 18th November 1995

Elephants in the wild, some experiences, Dr. Kaimal  
Individual exercise for mahouts to list out their daily activity pattern and that of their elephants.

### 20th November 1995

Modern Evolution Theory of elephants, (Slides) Dr. Panicker  
Differences between Asian and African Elephants, Dr. Cheeran

### 21st November 1995.

Slide show on internal organs of elephants and their functions. Dr. Panicker.  
Practical Classes on Mounting, Dismounting elephants, Learning about elephant's nerve points, Ponnappan and Radhakrishnan.

### 22nd November 1995

Sub-species of elephants, and their distribution, Dr. Cheeran.  
Trainees drew distribution maps and listened to recorded version of previous lectures

### 23rd November 1995

Capture and Training of wild elephants. Voice commands; regional variations, directing elephant movements using feet. Dr. Girinadhan Nair.  
Restraining devices-their names and specifications. Various sensitive nerve points in an elephant

### 24th November 1995

Practical classes of dismounting and mounting an elephant. Ponnappan and Radhakrishnan.

### 25 November 1995 -- 7 January 1996

Practical sessions (primarily) with experienced mahouts and elephants (Ponnappan and Radhakrishnan) interspersed with Field visits (festivals, etc.) and theory classes.

### 7 January (appx.) - 7 February 1996

Touring different elephants camps and sites in Kerala and adjacent states with occasion theory classes

The Mahout Training Course would not have been possible without the assistance of the Kerala Forest Department and Mr. T.M. Manoharan whose keen interest and cooperative spirit made it a reality.

The course got an auspicious and prestigious start with an ornamental inaugural function with Sri P.P. George, M.L.A. and former Minister inaugurating the function.

Shri T.M. Manoharan, I.F.S. and Chief Conservator of Forest Wildlife who has given so much moral and material support to the course is pictured giving the Presidential address as members of the Elephant Welfare Association, Course organisers, Forest Department officials and staff and public look on. The function was held in collaboration with Wildlife Week festivities.

