

An Imperilling Existence

“The question is , are we happy to suppose that our grandchildren may never be able to see an elephant except in a picture book” , are the most realistic wordings , one can narrate about the melting fate of our planet , beautifully said by the famous English broadcaster and natural historian , David Attenborough.

The Kerala Tourism’s website defines the Elephant Rehabilitation Centre , located in Kottur, Trivandrum , Kerala , as a “fairytale” , whereas local guides and curious visitors to this ‘prestigious’ place , describes it as an “elephant’s paradise” and some claim that the government has been doing a tremendous job as “elephants are being cared here properly” . Tourists to this ‘beauty of a place’ , witness an ‘elephants’s haven’ in the centre , while I was one of the unfortunate ones to view the centre as what it was and currently is- the friendly beasts’ prison.

Elephant numbers have unsurprisingly and drastically decreased by 62% over the course of the last decade to satisfy the undying and wide spectrum of greed , that possess humanity , for , ivory , meat and other body parts. Since 1986 , Asiatic Elephants , or *Elephas Maximus* , the gentle giants found in great symphonies of trumpets , in India have been ‘proudly’ listed as ‘Endangered’ in the IUCN or the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s ‘Red list’ , a conclusion which arose from rapid killings of elephants , caused by train or vehicle hits , electrocution , falling into pits or traps and finally poisoning which are all factors that can be greatly blamed on my colleagues of the human species.

Bill Murray , a famous actor , director , and writer once said , “They say an elephant never forgets. What they don’t tell you is , you never forget an elephant.” , a quote which affects me in a warm way and can aid me to talk about my experience in this ‘Animal Protection Organisation’ which has been credited a rating of 4.2 out of 5 by Google , which was in contrast , an experience not at all ‘warm’.

Being a passionate photographer , I was initially much excited to humbly march into this famous centre , with a camera in my hands and a strong determination overflowing from my heart , to capture the perhaps many intimate moments shared by the elephants , which I thankfully did but my mind was fated to waiver and witness the scarring chains on the elephants every once in a while. I thought to myself , “ Five and a half tonned giants and yet somehow fleshless , grey-haired men with screaming sticks and burning chains seem scarier”.

In 2017’s census of elephants , India was blessed to hold at least 27,312 elephants, which made up 55% of the total world elephant population. While Karnataka , a state flooded with poverty , gains the reputation of having the most number of elephants in India , Kerala , God’s Own Country , claims the title for having tortured these speechless creatures , leading them to the non pleasantries of death. According to the Heritage Animal Task Force , who is a group which was glorified with the task of closely watching and documenting the elephants , sadly discovered the grave fact that , in the first ten months of 2014 , 24 captive elephants and 92 wild elephants had died and not peacefully. The innocent captive elephants died as a result of constant torture and the wild elephants had their lives concluded by the forest mafia or the brutal group of hunters and poachers , who are engaged in timber smuggling, ganja cultivation and illicit liquor brewing. Elephants are

categorized as endangered species in Schedule 1 of Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 which simply means that elephants are one of the, several types of animals which need upmost care and protection.

Taking away of these pachyderms , from their forests , from their homes , to be a laughing stock or an exposed showpiece , in temples and other religious congregations with insufficient water and food , preventing their sleep as they are transported for hours on end in trucks which scream out the word 'dungeon'. There, these victimised jumbos are threatened to wear unfriendly garments while having to carry around unskilled mahouts , who hold crying sticks and striking iron rods , on their crumbling spines . As it is not a jolly one , the end of their journey either concludes with these quiet souls being released by the sweet embrace of death , a path I'm sure is better than this one , or they are sent to rehabilitation centres like this one , where they are further cruelly chained while being yelled at by talking skeletons with strength almost as weak as a bacterium cell's. Baby elephants who's parents have been killed by poaching or other 'accidents' also reside in these very few spots of hell on Earth.

I am sorry to say that I truly believe that the rehabilitation centre I visited with such eagerness to witness joyful elephants , was just another 'nightmare dressed like a daydream'. By providing the visitors with a wide array of opportunities to have a gala time , through a play area or park for kids , boating (river dried up when I visited which enables a lack of bathing space for the growing elephants), and the opportunity for the oblivious citizens to take photographs with the elephants as they pose(poked by the mahouts to pose) , the people get distracted away from the truth of the pathetic life struggled by the elephants.

Us, 'strong and wise' human beings are portrayed as heroes who establish homes and centres for the animals and in this case elephants in need when , these very places in fact , are a lousy cover up for the truth , that we are the very species responsible for causing these troubles and struggles to these creatures who's eyes speak in great depths much like the beautiful oceans which sing to us, by intruding and taking them away from their natural homes. This is not a warning or a sympathy note. This is a story from which you find out its moral yourself.