

Man, Environment and the Elephant: A Case Study of Surguja

Gregory Xalxo

ABSTRACT

Surguja was one of the main princely states of central India during the British Raj. The state was spread over the vast Chotanagpur plateau region. Its former territories today lie in the present day state of Chhattisgarh.

In the past, Surguja has had a history of supplying wild elephants to the Mughal armies. About 58% of this area is forested. Today, this region consists of two wildlife sanctuaries namely the Semarsot and Tamor Pingla, which have a considerably large elephant population. Dozens of herds, from four to forty in strength, have dominated the forest region. The area covered by these sanctuaries has human settlements, as well as coal and bauxite mines. These activities of encroachment by the humans, over the forest cover, 'the original home of the Jumbos' has seen a rise in the human-elephant conflict.

Elephant-human conflict is a consequence of habitat loss and fragmentation. When elephants and humans interact, there is conflict due to crop raiding, injuries and deaths to humans caused by elephants, as well as elephants being killed in turn by humans for reasons other than ivory and habitat degradation.

This paper intends to study the human-elephant conflict in the Surguja region and the role played by the Forest Department in controlling these conflicts, under their Elephant Task Force, mainly to conserve and reduce conflict. Erratic elephant behaviour and human intrusion has increasingly caused an imbalance in the forest environment.

Keywords: *Human-Elephant Conflict, Surguja, Forest, Sanctuaries, Elephant Task Force*