

Dhala-Kota, the Tame Tusker

Srilal Perera

ABSTRACT

His name means "the elephant with short tusks." He broke it several times by trying to do things beyond the capacity of his tusks that he was blessed with. He was from the *Saddhantha* Cast of the ancient traditional elephant classification. He was strong, powerful, temperamental and naughty. Six points of his anatomy touched the ground when standing.

Many times he had disobeyed his *mahout* and had run along main roads until he reached home, where he felt safe and secure. He felt very insecure if all his chains were removed. His first home was the Morawatta Waluwwa of the Mapitygama family in Ruwanwella.

His second home was the Gangaramaya temple of Podihamudurwo at Hunupitiya. He was renamed Ruwanrajha, meaning the king of Ruwanwella. During this period he travelled by lorry on pilgrimages, from Katharagama to Jaffna through the then LTTE controlled area. A ceasefire agreement had just been signed between the present Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and the LTTE leader late Prabhakaran and this lorry with RuwanRajha as live cargo was one of the first vehicles that cruised through the A9 road to Jaffna to take part in a *Perahera* organized by the Sri Naga Vihara of Jaffna. Having passed through about two kilometers of no-man's land we reached the gate at Omanthai. We were not sure if the orders of the leader had reached the anti-government sentries at the gate. However, when the gates opened we were surprised by the shouting of the sentries " *PillayarPillayar* ", the Tamil word for God Ghanesh or Ghana *deviyo* of the Sinhalese . They stopped our vehicle, abandoned their sentry post and disappeared, only to return with sugarcane, and fruits to offer to Ruwanrajha. We were relieved. Thereafter, we also shouted "Pillayar" when we were confronted and we got free passage through. They live within their beliefs.

Dhala-kota or RuwanRajha's third home happened to be my home at Ruwanwella. During the two and a half year period he was with me, I was surprised and thrilled to hear him purring like a pussy cat but louder than my motor cycle. Contrary to the theory of animal lovers, even while being chained to two trees by their hands and legs, they purr if they are comfortable in the environment. I believe that they have the capacity to tap brain waves of humans-beings, the *Pari-chitthag`anaya*. Love, hate, fear etc. of humans, they have the ability to sense. For the same reason there is no conflict between elephants and *Veddas*, our *aadivaasi* people. DalaKota had killed only one civilized human being during his life time

when a Police officer at Ruwanwella had ordered the mahout to do some work at the time of coming to musk, the period of disobedience of male elephants.

However, RuwanRajha's greatest achievement was to carry the casket of Dalada at the magnificent Kandy Perahera. In the year 2002 A.D. he was the cynosure at the annual Kandy Esala Perahera. In 2002, December 18th he took his last breath at Vihara MahaDevi Park (Victoria Park).

Even at present, some people come in search of Dhala - *pas* (soil that has been disturbed by his tusks to enshrine in foundations of their new houses as *pooja -vasthu* for the *Bhahirawa*).

Basnayake Nilame, Purana Kadadora Devale
The National Trust (Sri Lanka)