



## PARBATI BARUAH

### Taming the Untameable

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Queen of the Elephants, Parbati Baruah has a unique feat of success to her credit—she can tame the untameable wild tuskers with love and care and her unprecedented, unparalleled career in this untrodden track started as early as at the age of fourteen. Parbati Baruah was born to Prakitesh Baruah (Lalji) and Bina Baruah in 1953 at Gauripur in the Dhubri district of Assam. She was initiated in the field of elephant management by her late father, Lalji. She has been associated since her childhood with capturing and training of wild elephants and treatment of sick and injured elephants.

Parbati Baruah caught her first elephant in Kochugaon forests (Assam) at the age of 14. She has independently captured 14 wild elephants by Mela Shikar from 1975 to 1978 in the forest of Assam (Darrang and Kochugaon) and North Bengal (Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling). Parbati Baruah has been assisting the West Bengal Forest Department since 1980 in dealing with the problem of elephant depredation in tea gardens and villages in the northern

as well as southern parts of the state. Parbati Baruah also helped the Forest Officers in the treatment and taking care of domesticated and newly captured elephants, assisted Subhasini Tea Garden, a tea estate in North Bengal, during 1991-93 in tackling the serious problem of depredation by leopards using trained elephants. A similar help was provided to Fatemabad (Basbari) Tea Estate (near Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam) in dealing with tiger depredation.

She attended the international Workshop on Elephants held in Jaldapara Sanctuary (West Bengal) in 1982. She also participated in the International Seminar on Asiatic Elephants organized by the Bombay Natural History Society in Mudumalai Sanctuary (Tamilnadu) in June 1993 and contributed two papers on the status of elephants in North Bengal. Parbati represented India in the International Workshop on the Domesticated Asian Elephants at Bangkok, Thailand, organized by the F.A.O in February, 2001.

Parbati Baruah assisted the West Bengal Forest Department in March, 2000 in organizing training for the Mahouts and field staff participating in the elephant census. She was a resource person for the First Mahout Training Course at Pichi (Kerala) in 1996. She acted as technical Director for the Mahout Training Course organized by the Uttaranchal Forest Department in November, 2001. She was assisting the Govt. of Assam by giving training to the Departmental and private Mahouts of the State and also by imparting training to the departmental mahouts of Govt. of West Bengal as course Director. Under her supervision and guidance more than four hundred elephants were trained. Parbati has trained Koonki elephants and men for depredation work.

Parbati Baruah received the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) award, 'Global 500-Roll of Honour' in 1989 for welfare and management of both wild and captive elephants. She was felicitated by the Chief Minister of Assam during the 43<sup>rd</sup> Wildlife Week in October 1997 for her outstanding work on wildlife conservation. She also received felicitations from the Assam Silpi Divas Samiti in Guwahati and Sadou Assam Lekhika Samaroh Samiti at Goalpara on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2001. The Govt. of Assam felicitated her as the 'Honorary Chief Elephant Warden of Assam' for her lifetime work for elephant on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, 2003.

Parbati Baruah participated in the Bengali feature film on nature conservation 'Aranya Amar' in 1982-83, the B.B.C documentary film 'Jumbo, Jumboorie' in 1987 and the Discovery Channel's 'Queen of the Elephant' in 1992-93. She also featured in the Doordarshan program 'A Face in the Crowd' in August, 1992. She also appeared in Doordarshan's North East Folio and some other programs of Guwahati Center of English, Bengali and Assamese. Parbati Baruah is a performer of the Goalpara folk dance. She has participated in cultural programs in various places of India.

Parbati Barua is the only woman elephant catcher and practitioner of Mela Shikar in Asia or probably in the world. She is also a member of the Asian Elephants Specialists Group of the I.C.U.N. She is one of the members of the 'Man-Elephant Conflict' Task Force of the Govt. of Assam. She successfully trained captive man killer elephants. One departmental male elephant is still with her for better training. She is the Vice-President and life member of Kaziranga Wild Life Society (NGO) and Chairperson of Elephant Owners and Managers Association. She is attached with many organizations for better management of elephants, both wild and captive. □□