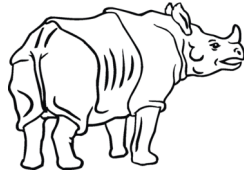


“Story of A Doomed Rhino”

“A Heartening autobiography of revival of a near extinction Indian Rhino”

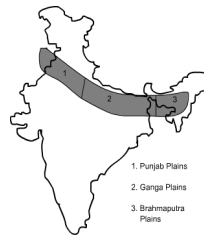
This is an autobiography of a near extinction Great One Horned Rhinoceros, narrating his upsetting chronicle of past life where he was brought down relentlessly in sport-hunting by Mughals, British hunters and Indian Maharajas reducing him to a few numbers in India. In a ruthless killing spree of shooting by rhino-horn-traders over the past few decades, in their attempt for trapping in pits for sawing off his horn, using high voltage power lines for electrocution, killing by poisoning, slaying by spearing, cutting through skin noose therefore murdering by strangulation, the number of Indian rhino has come down from 32000 alive during mid 20th century to 3555 in the wild in India now. An existence cliffhanging on the precipice ! Some how in one of the successful revival attempt of captive breeding in Kakraha at Dudhwa, it has raised few fibers of hope. There is still time and the time to act is just now, before it becomes too late...A K Singh

I am a single horned Indian Rhino. Now thirty six years of age, my name is Banke. As you know, Rhinos prefer to turn the swampy tall grasses. Before the sun rises and moon sets its foot on the horizon, me and my family members here at Kakraha swampy wetland in Dudhwa, enjoy shearing, trimming and mowing dew bathed pennisetum and digitaria grasses. As, a thing of beauty is a joy forever, so are the lush green vegetation of Great Terai Arc for me, sprinkled with teak, sal, sisoo, semal, khair and gutel. Savana swampy grassy woodlands of Dudhwa are full of sweet dreams, health and quite breathing. Some of my friends swamp deer, elephants, blue bulls, wild buffalo, pygmy hogs never tire of sweeping lovely tall grasses of saccharum, typha, and imperata. Marked with despondence of routine affairs, they give the shape of beauty to rising sun, the moon and to the trees old and young. Rich with smattering of pretty floral blooms, Sharda and Ghaghra rivers rising from Suheli, Mohana, Griva and Saryu streams pass into most lively green world of marshlands like Kakraha, Mahadeva and Puraina. Taking us away from pall of gloom, moving us away from our darker spirits, from unhealthy and over darkened ways, pouring unto us the “tincture of life” from the heaven’s brink.



Against the hot and blistering season in June, the forests brake with a wild mischief, a grandeur of doom, a terror of wilderness, a ghost of mighty power roaming around, haunting every soul, making search of an innocent spirit in swamp deer or probably in barasingha, as we imagine for the mighty phantom, meandering in an endless fountain of profligate hunger-quench of that blood hounding tiger. Once, upon a raw and gusty day, the troubled Sharda river, chaffing with her shore, swept away the last image of wild rhinos for ever in 1970s. Troubled in spooky, sinister doom, hundreds of gangsters, in their wild goose chase, of never ending treasure for a single horn the so called “fortune building unicorn” hatch a network of intrigue, plot and treachery

in the wild hinterland of sub Himalaya. I can hear a tongue, shriller than all music of the jungle. I turned to hear. Voice of a soothsayer beast, recalling, “Beware of woods of darkness, devoid of unicorns” !



Are you not aware, when all the sway of earth shook in trampling down this harmless beast ? I have seen a thunderstorm, when the scolding winds, rammed the knotty teak, an

aspiring wilderness desiring to swell, rage and boil, to be exalted with threatening clouds. Either there is civil strife in heaven, or else the world is too brazen, naughty and defiant with the devils shrouded in fury. Poverty is certainly a fire, wreaking havoc in flame, in spark of never ending conflagration.



I was relocated in 1984 to Kakraha in Dudhwa National Park from Kaziranga in Assam when I was only 7 years as part of the rhino breeding program. Vexed I am, of late, with passions of some difference. Among the most endangered five species of unicorns, ranging from flood plains of Indus, Ganges, and Brihmaputra rivers from Hindu Kush to Indo-Burma, let not my good friends be greaved, if I tell that last son of our species was shot in Pilibhit in 1878. Not construe any further my absence from Manas, Chitwan, and Kaziranga in the event of any epidemic pushing me to the brink of extinction. I owe an obligation to some scientists in India who tendered conception proper to furtherance of my race, which gave me some soil, perhaps to my “ambitious-plan-of-breeding in wild”, when five sub adult rhinos and two elderly females, a young adult and one older male brought from Pobitora wildlife sanctuary, Assam were hurled to breed and multiply in a 27 sq Km Rhino Breeding Center at Kakraha Swampy Wetland in Dudhwa national park, to see the order of the course in

the foothills of Himalaya in Lakhimpur Kheeri of Uttar Pradesh in 1972.

Why a man does bstride a narrow world ? Men at some times, are masters of their fates, the fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are gofers that we are cronies, sycophants and minions. We most often act selfish for our private gain, but we fail in arriving on a consensus for nation building. Natural wealth of a nation, cultural heritage of a country, artistic value of a state, profusion of natural wealth of a our own land is our least priority. We can build castles to our advantage, we can hoard ill gotten riches for our own profit but we cant sacrifice for the benefit of nature, for the value addition to wild life, to the advantage of environment. Nothing more to admit that we are flippant, paltry and frivolous.

Our number swooped to more than 30 during the last thirty five years in Kakraha enclosure of South Sonaripur of Dudhwa. Thanks to William Andrew Laurie 1978 of Zoological Society of London for developing our identity protocols. Raju, Saheli, Asha, Pavitri, Rapati were brought from Kaziranga for breeding program. All died long back after 1984 relocation. Swayambara, Narayani, Hemrani and Lohit brought from Chitwan national park are still alive and all of them are of my age. I didn't like Raju and Lohit, they quite often had tussle with me and I shunted them out. I still greave as to why Raju an old rhino lost his life after my play of fight with him ? All the four lady rhinos from Assam settled well with certain noblest minded husbands to undergo an enterprise of building families of honorable righteous consequence. More diverse, varied and mixed stock from Nepal was obtained in exchange of four young adult female rhinos from around the Chitwan National Park so as to accentuate more reproductive potential in Dudhwa, and four rhinos young and smart were immobilized and sledged into crates for revival. They quickly settled in Dudhwa stockades and were released into the wild after a week. In the long last, 1984 translocation of diverse population of rhino had resulted in first viable "captive breeding community" of the great one horn rhinoceros in central north India since last century. In addition, valuable techniques in capture and handling of the great one horn Indian rhinoceros were developed which will be useful in the future management of the species in the subcontinent.

Since then exhalations of jubilation had been whizzing in the air, as the success of captive breeding did ascend to a considerable height, so were the clouds of hope and optimism. Since then, though tainted as vulnerable in Red Data List, yet greater one horned rhinos have been rising like a sun behind dreary clouds of despair and gloom. Rhinos now are confined to ten sites, in an extent of 20,000 sq Km amid continuing fragmentation of their last frontiers of abode, amidst decline of their eroding

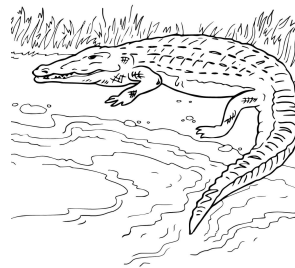
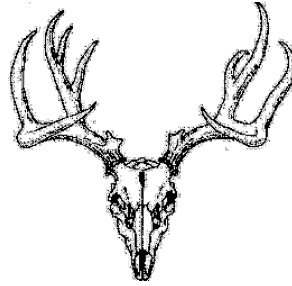
soil of aboriginal domicile in Sub Himalayan foothills.

Up these days, awake all these three decades, I know this new generation of rhino that had come along with me, by watchful cares, by parenting all these years, through the sufferance of our souls, past across the times-abuse, amid high sighted tyranny of surrounding monstrous demons, the melting spirits of some of our managers is kindling the light of gentility and courage. Foot hills of Himalaya is an ideal home to some of us old feeble carrions, suffering souls restricted to a small enclosure of 28 sq Km. Such animals as man trust, but do not stain even the virtue of our enterprise, nor the indomitable mettle of our spirits, when every drop of my blood spilled over on the innocent ground recounts the story of guilt and culpability of the savagery and barbarism of some freaky blood hound demons lurking from behind to smash away the upper ranks of my nostrils killings us day and day out one by one.

Some of old of us who look quite healthy and strong, weigh more than two tones. Six feet tall every one needs 40 Kgs of grasses, shrubs and aquatic plants to keep him youths and wild. In such a

wholesome and hygienic environment which offers the desired diversity of higher woodlands, low lying grasslands, swamps, lakes and stream we can live upto 47 years in captivity otherwise maximum upto 35 years in the wild. For being one of the largest mammals after elephant, short legged, and appear to be slow and sluggish we were world renowned for recreation and amusement for sports hunting as a charming beauty and also as an "offer-of-pleasant-chasing" for British Memsahibs. I can recall those days when Prince of Wales, George V of England killed 8 rhinos in a single hunting splurge of ten days in 1911. As a bounty of abundance, Indian Maharajas never tired of chasing us in sports hunting, as we were known for sprinting at a faster speed of 40 km/h.

Greater one horn rhino has a single horn on the snout which can grow from 20 to 60 cm. It's a compact mass of keratin fibers, not a bone and serves as a dominant display not as a weapon, is the most sought after object and is also subject to wear and tear, not fixed to the skull but rests on a cartilaginous cushion. Due to high demand of this horn for large variety of fanciful medication to be used as an aphrodisiac and for curing cancer, which is a myth, a saga of fabled tales, the rhino horn trade continues to soar each year, jeopardizing the life of rhino in the wild. Rhino generally has very poor eyesight, not being able to see beyond fifteen feet, he relies generally on the sense of smell and hearing, as he can pick up smells from two to three hundred meters, and catch



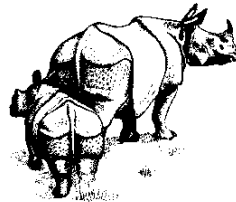
sound waves from all directions using cup like ears flapping all the times to hear from all sides. Me and my companions here spend larger time wallowing in waterholes, in summer, to regulate our body heat. Often seen in groups in water, females are often seen with their calves, or sub adults, but males generally spend time solitary and often being territorial like me. I have become now quite old. I prefer the edges of the enclosure, like fringes of the forests. You can distinguish males by larger head with prominent collar folds. Horns of females are narrower and sleeker than males. Males attain sexual maturity at age 7 while females only at 5 years. After 16 months of gestation mother gives birth to one calf every two to three years.

Over the years, good sense seems to have prevailed. Good conservation improves rhino, recovers their numbers, develops their health and well being. Almost more than 450 in Nepal and 2350 numbers in India we all stand up together in Orang, Pabitora in Assam, Jaldapara and Gorumura in West Bengal and Dudhwa in Uttar Pradesh in the cause of conservation.

In the spirit of cruel men there seems no blood, no essence in haunting our soul. Don't dismember us. Men must bleed for us. Don't carve me as a dish fit for monsters. Don't hew me as a corpse fit for hounds. When you cut loose my horny portion of the snout, it pains me too hard. Soft tissue, cut across from the sharp edge of the dagger, stings piercingly unbearable in my heart, burns me with terribly agonizing ache. Pierced edge of the sharp scalpel drives an excruciatingly gut curdling tingling for hours and days together. It breaks my heart. It shatters my dream to live longer. It splinters my hope of wandering far and wide. It smashes my optimism to migrate remote and longer distance. Be not burn with so much of piggish rapacious gluttony. Be not rage with so much of greed, avarice and voracity. Its just cutting the head off and then hacking the limbs. If humanity is to rise and awake from its slumber, it requires to appease the nature, it demands to mollify the mighty strength arising out from the environment, to begin to propitiate the power it beholds, to begin to respect the dividends it offers, to start admiring the gifts of nature, to turn to appreciate the aid the wild hinterlands contribute to the world at large.

Kakraha our successful "zone-of-proliferation" is watered by streams of old course of Suheli river. Waterlogging of our enclosure makes it to be the playing ground for us. It becomes the cesspit of our fantasy, of dreams, and ceremonies. It is where we think of our apparent prodigies, unaccustomed reign of love amongst our member of community and persuasion of their

prophesied tender affection, where they fancy their imagination for procreation of more phenomenally ever increasing offsprings. Dry savannah grasslands get burnt every year block by block, helping to sprout naïve roots and shoots offering to invite more antlers, horny antelopes, ungulates, barasinga and chitals for browsing their taste of vegetation. It wont let you eat, talk and sleep if cutting of thatching imperata, narenga and canes and sacchurum grasses have far reaching effects on your routine. It is disturbing. It will much prevail on our routine state of affairs if you get acquainted with the cause of our grief. Leopards and Tigers quite often stray into the enclosure attacking calves injuring them. We can see herds of cattle, and buffalo transforming edge areas of woodlands into the flat sheet of pockets of short grasslands with printed blots of trees and scrubs opening borders for cultivation and fire burnt alluvial grasslands.

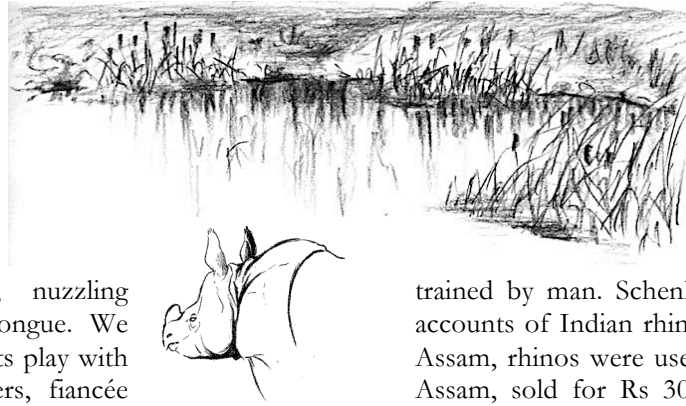


Most of the rhinos are wiped out in poaching, some of them in tiger predation, others are lost in old age, in fighting and some of them are abandoned by females. Almost 8% of rhino die in infancy and 3% in sub adult age. Reeds are most frequently preferred for eating. Litsea, Mallotus, Sissoo and Bombax ceiba are much browsed, trampled by rhinos thereby causing slight alteration of forest adversely impacting the natural regeneration of these species on the sand banks of the rivers. Mynas and egrets spend most of their time perching upon me picking up ticks, nematodes, leeches and other insects. I get too much irritated by Tabanus flies and often am susceptible to anthrax and septicemia. Quite often Saras cranes and Bengal floricans rejoice the virtue of my company. A mere snorting and honking of mine frighten away painted storks, kingfisher, minivets and bee eaters frequently perching upon sacchuram shoots in my vicinity. Drongos, cormorants, hornbills, teals and wood packers get scared by mere single moo-grunting and roaring when I propose to mate with some of my counterparts. Last time when I was squeak-panting in low mellifluous tone, orioles, owls and blue bulls got disturbed for my momentary gazing at one python emerged from the branch of a mango tree. I groaned,

rumbled and kept on humping for hours together asking them to bringing me their opinion of success. Story of triumph of the Gharials of their march on the sandbanks, victory of endurance of crocodiles of their age old catwalks on the grassbanks of Sarayu river. Besides the things which I feel that the community of monitor lizards, Sarus cranes and Bengal Floricans like exorcists have conjured up my mortified spirit, and I will strive with things impossible or get the better of them. What to do ? In routine plenty of tourists keep visiting our enclosure. In aggregations, we quite often greet them, waving or bobbling, with mounting flanks, nuzzling noses or licking with tongue. We together with our consorts play with twigs, instigate our lovers, fiancée and paramour for wooing, for marrying, dating in courtship, befriending new acquaintances for sensual desire, love and passion. Our wisdom is consumed in confidence, with the deep knowledge of man for our future revival, rebirth, recovery and reinstatement. I am quite an optimist.

Majestic riverine forests of Great Terai Arc, fascinating swampy sandbanks of tall grasslands, splendid alluvial soil planes of lush green valley of Himalyaan foothills are the places where one horned Indian rhino evolved over the last few millennia. A gigantic mammoth of tectonic plate emerged from oceanic current of river valleys from under the highest hills of India is the last frontier animal god of our perpetual existence. A friend with copious sense of smell, a colleague with plentiful sense of hearing and listening. He keeps the earth livable by his distinct scent and perfume immersed in his urine and dung spreading far and wide in the paradise of tall grassland meadows. Visually poor, territorially disgruntled, disoriented in mating, and further spreading his progeny, an innocent god of primeval wilderness is somewhere lost in poaching, vanished in agriculture cultivation, bewildered in erosion by flooding and invasive aggression of exotic vegetation.

Unicorn wild animal is carved in the mysterious seal of Harappa and Mohanjodaro Indus Valley civilization, in recognition of Rhinoceros unicornis as a single horn God of fertility, for natural resource richness and ecosystem abundance. In Chandogyia Upanishad of 900 BC the rhinoceros as an animal lived with elephant and buffalo wandering in marshes and grazing on river banks. Ctesias a Greek physician writing a book about India conveying it to Queen Parysatis of Persia mentioned the Indian Horse from whose horn a "poison-detecting-cup" can be made, for protection against toxin, for medicinal



and other supernatural properties. Validity of such wrong notion was questioned long back but misconception still pervades in larger part of the society. Strabo quoted an animal from India given to emperor of Rome Augustus by an Indian ruler and was exhibited in Rome in 11 BC. Plenty of beliefs and superstitions got associated to Indian rhino being as unicorn and its horn, as pulverized tusk of narwhal used extensively in European system of medicines and was recognized officially as a drug in England until 1741. Albert Durer made his famous woodcut of the Indian unicorn that was copied many times during the next 200 years. Indian rhinos were reported tamed and even

trained by man. Schenkel and Lang 1969 quoted early accounts of Indian rhinos being used to pull ploughs in Assam, rhinos were used in war by the ancient kings in Assam, sold for Rs 300 and grazed along with cattle. Pollok and Thom 1900 reported that a washer man in Gauhati had a tamed rhino that carried laundry on his delivery rounds.

Oh, gentleman ! I never stood on omen, never raised in ceremonies. Yet now they shock and scare me. They kill and murder me. Besides the things that we have heard and seen. I recount most nasty and despicable sights seen by the guards. A phantom of ghoulish witches whelping in the streets where all the unicorns slayed so far, buried here and there in crypts and vaults. Their graves have yawned and yielded up their dead. Why don't you see their frozen souls emerging in dreaded droughts and floods, their ominous spirits shaping in tempestuous cloudbursts and thunderstorm ? Don't you see the deadly catastrophic phantom-of-opera dancing, twirling and prancing upon the darker mists of misfortunes befallen on your head in solar radiation, plate tectonics and glacial melt? Can't you see the ghosts of troubles and adversities growing in extreme weather, in rising sea level, in hurricane, cyclones, in global warming and in climate change ?.... Yours Always...**Banke** (a Rhino)

A K Singh is the member of Indian Forest Service working in the Ministry of Forest, Ecology and Environment of the Government of Karnataka. Views portrayed here are personal which are expressed in the wake of references cited hereinafter. Contact: 9481180956. aksinghifs@gmail.com



Reference:

1. Dinerstein E 1992. Effects of Rhinoceros unicornis on Riverine Forest Structure in Lowland of Nepal.
2. Fruits Rhinoceros eat: Dispersal of *Trewia nudiflora* in lowland of Nepal
3. Foosse T and Van Strien N 1997, Asian Rhinos, Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan.
4. IUCN 2008, Red List of Threatened Species.
5. W A Laurie 1978. The Ecology And Behaviour of the Great One Horned Rhinoceros Cambridge University Press UK London
6. Martin E B 2004. Rhino Poaching in Nepal during and insurgency.
7. Rothley KD Knowler D J and Paudyal M 2004 Population Model for the greater one horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in Royal Chitwan National Park Nepal.
8. B K Talukdar 1999 Status of Rhinoceros unicornis in Pabitora Wild Life Sanctuary Assam
9. Arun K Tripathi Habitat and Population Ecology of Rhinoceros unicornis in Dudhwa National Park Uttar Pradesh 2012
10. Rhinos of Dudhwa National Park ID Guide citation by R Sharma and Gupta M a Field Guide.