

INDIA'S ROYAL ELEPHANTS

"Moving Palaces of Glory"

By Edmund Russell

IN India the elephant is not simply a gigantic forest-lord or beast of burden—he is a temple, a moving palace of glory. His jewels outvie the splendor of Kings. There he becomes an immense ambulatory structure, so loaded with trappings of gold that only beady eye and swaying trunk are visible. Topped with the turrets of the golden howdah, with his peculiar majesty of gait, he seems created expressly for processions.

At Queen Victoria's last Jubilee I sat beside some princes, and when one of them was asked: "What do you think of the procession?" he replied: "This is not a procession; it is only a military review." For can one have a procession without *Hathi*—the elephant?

At the late Durbar, the great beast of Mysore, snapped in the act of saluting her excellency, first bent the knee to the ground, and then flung up his trumpet with a roar like an unrolled hinge, proudly conscious of the honor conferred upon him that the lovely Vice-Reine was to sit between the British lions upholding the Mysore double-headed eagles which Queen Victoria had presented to his master, the young King. There were elephants many and magnificent, and the unknowing public imagined that this was the most glorious sight that ever was seen in India, paralyzing the attending Indian princes.

But the truth is the reverse. I have had many letters from Hindu friends saying that it was modernized out of all its ancient character. There was red bunting where there used to be cloth of gold, brass buttons instead of jewels.

The procession of fifty-eight elephants was in the ancient style, but did not approach the parades of Lord Lytton's imperial proclamation, as these, in their turn, were outshone by purely native Sowaris. To compare the procession with the pageants held in the reign of the Moguls was ridiculous. On the most trivial occasions of the glorious reign of Akbar, elephants in jeweled trappings were counted by the hundreds. Abdul Rizak, the Persian historian, records having witnessed a festival in the fifteenth century in which a thousand elephants took part. Amir Kasra says: "When the Malik came to muster the elephants they extended over nine miles."

Of course an American princess in tailor garb feels that she outweighs a hundred elephants or a thousand dancing girls, even though they be exiled Queens of Tanjore. And so she does.

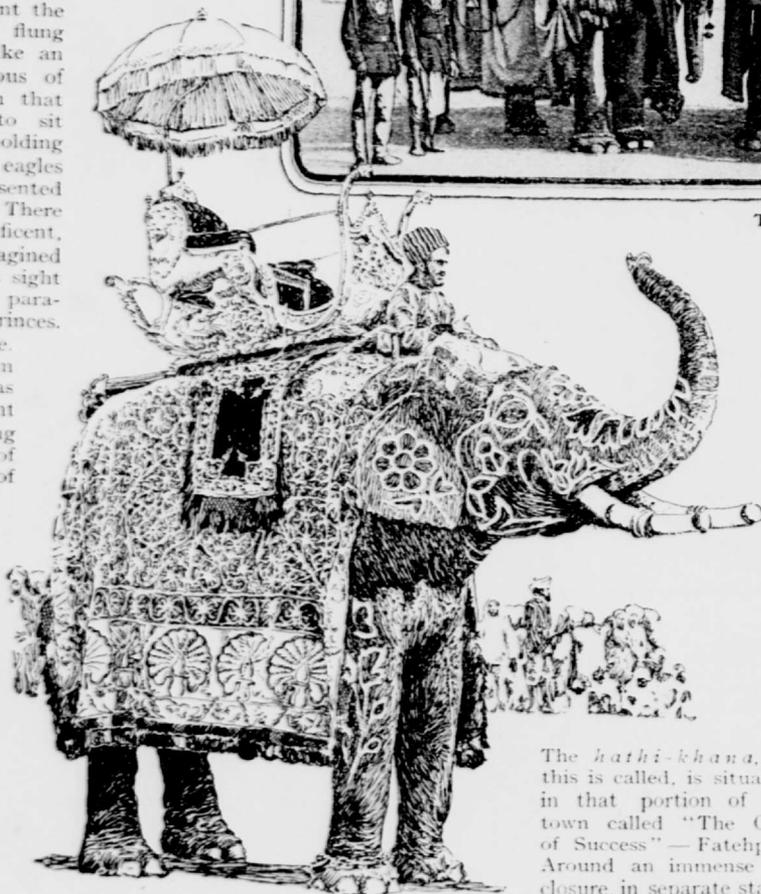
But still, let her not make us forget what India can do in the matter of royal elephants.

I had an opportunity of studying the royal beast *chez lui* and of inspecting his wardrobe. This was at the court of the Guikwar of Baroda.

Sivaji Rao Guikwad, one of the most cultured of India's princes, whose whole interest in life is the advancement and welfare of his people and his State, inherited all the costly caprices of his predecessors; but takes little interest in them—jewels valued at twenty millions, a necklace of seven rows of pendant diamonds, carpets of pearls, cannon of silver and of gold, last but not least a great stable of elephants.



Three Royal Elephants of Baroda



Giving a Salute to Lady Curzon

The *hathi-khana*, as this is called, is situated in that portion of the town called "The City of Success"—Fatehpur. Around an immense enclosure, in separate stalls, stand thirty-six elephants, eight of which are females.

One rare animal is spotted like a serpent, and called *Cobra-Hathi*. While I was in Bombay his highness presented one to Queen Victoria called "The Jewel of Enchantment."

A *hathi* is attended by four servants, and consumes an immense quantity of flour, clarified butter, grass and a sweet food called *gaul* also many tree branches, from which he deftly strips the leaves and twigs with his nasal finger,

eating only the bark. When a jungle is convenient he is taken there every day and permitted to select for himself. He is inordinately fond of sugar and sugar-cane, but is allowed these only sparingly, as they are too heating.

He has a *materia medica* of his own, and rolls up little balls of red earth, or seeks certain herbs, as he may require them. If not well fed, he lies awake, expecting more food, and as he sleeps only a few hours and is constitutionally nervous an elephant is easily upset.

In the center of the elephant sheds, this vast enclosure filled with swaying mammoths, stands the treasure-house of cars and trappings. No eye that has not seen can imagine the accoutred glory of the royal beast when he kneels while the great silver scaling-ladders are brought for his master's lotus feet. The saddle may be a peacock of solid gold, or two tigers rampant, one gold and one silver. He is led by chains of flowers or of uncut jewels over ways powdered with gold-dust, carmine and pearls, with servants waving fans or ivory *chowries*, and clinging by straps to the howdah's side. Troops of dancing girls dazzle around him. Wild cavalry dash past with diamond aigrets, and flashing spears. And his eye is the eye of the old "star" in his day of triumph.

On the jeweled howdah, leopards spotted with star-sapphires chase topaz tigers with emerald eyes. The forehead-plaques are of Jeypore enamel fringed with pearls; the leading chains, the anklets, the goad in the form of Vishnu's lotus—all are profusely jeweled.

In the treasure-house the howdahs—great chairs for the elephants' backs—are of gold, silver, ivory and sandalwood. That used by the Guikwar on ceremonial occasions has three seats—one in front for his highness, and two smaller ones behind for Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister.

The little princes sit on howdahs decorated with silver antelopes which have golden horns.

Those of the ladies of the court have purdah curtains of kincob, the royal cloth of gold, and are lined with mirrors. As these pass, swaying in majestic procession, one catches sight only of an eye, flashing from the folds of a gold-wrought *sari*, or, holding back the curtains, a hand the back of which is covered entirely with a plaque of gems tied to each finger by ropes of pearls.

In the main room are large cupboards full of the elephants' wardrobes for festal days.

Great dish-like rings of silver or red gold, pierced by thousands of tiny rubies, are for the fan ears. Beautiful bangles and anklets, of hammered repoussé, tell the loves of Krishna or of Rama. Immense necklaces, four yards in length, are studded with cabochon gems of every hue. Chains are fringed with bells in open designs of tigers, peacocks or serpents. Mantles or coverings of cloth of gold, cloth of silver or embroidered velvet have deep fringes which sweep the ground. Hundreds of silken pillows for the howdahs are incrustated with embroidery inches deep or sewn with pearls.

Although not the most expensive, the trappings of old yellow leather, set thick with turquoises, with



An Elephant Fight at Jodhpur