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The Sacred Animals of India

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Illustrated with Photographs Belonging to the Author

THE last merrymaking before the Mutiny was at the auction sale of the menagerie of the King of Oudh. The idea that the glory of the Mogul Court was the glory of India, had been long maintained by British Government, but when the court declined to the shadow-of-its-shadow and was found to mean nothing at all to Hindu allegiance, the weak old ghost of an Emperor was kicked off the lowest rung of his lotus-lion-throne, his nine hundred wives turned out into the street to become *nautchis*, and the remains of the royal menagerie put under the hammer—even to the parrot, shrieking insults at his purchasers.

The collecting of expensive animals was always a feature of courts that loved to collect anything extravagant paid for by subjects who earn four cents a day by-the-will-of-God. But when the heroic *Rani* of Jhansi was cut down on the battle-field fighting as a warrior at the head of her troops, with the pearls of Scindia around her throat; and the few rajahs who joined with the rebellious Sepoys had been tied backward to the mouths of cannon, the rest accepted the lesson of patent-steel for war, patent-leather for peace, and secure dynasties forever. Now, much money is spent on modern dissipation; little on ancient glory. Moth and rust may not touch jewels, but they lie unused in *tosha-khanas*; and when the animals die, they are never replaced. The Master-of-the-Universe now finds it difficult enough to be his own chauffeur.

Only the old and outskirt rajah, who divides his long white beard and turns it up at each side under his turban, still comes to town on his superannuated elephant, with lame camels and skinny horses carrying *sowars* in rusty armor set with sapphires and emeralds, with loose pearls running up and down the blood-trenches of their swords. Soon the last of his type will find himself too weak to mount the silver scaling-ladder to the crimson-cushioned howdah. No voices will re-

peat the daily *jai Maharaj!* (Victory, O King!) The wondrous arts will lie on museum shelves simply labeled—"Curiosities of a Heathen People."

The great Khandarao of Baroda, himself a human leopard, had an arena where tigers and elephants tore each other to pieces; the buffalo fought the rhinoceros; a donkey kicked a hyena to death. But the present Guikwar rarely goes there, though he sometimes orders an elephant-fight for European guests. I saw one. It was very tame. Money is money now—the elephant too costly a beast to smash his forehead against another's. No king to-day spends half a *lakh* of *rupees* on the marriage of his favorite pigeon with that of his Prime Minister.

But the real glory is not departed. India's pets are not royal but celestial. To write of animals in the land which keeps its Vedic prayers and forgets the names of its emperors, one must leave solid ground and ascend to heaven, must speak in poetry, not prose, in hyperbole rather than in plain speech. The question of animals cannot indeed be soberly treated. Everywhere one sees acts toward them that can be explained only by their sacred and legendary importance. One can scarcely believe one's senses. This attitude is not the fantasy of a moment nor the *bête-blanche*, so to speak, of a single author. It is the accumulated national delirium of thousands of years. To detach such animal-worship from Indian life is to tear the rug to pieces, and we can weave nothing more beautiful.

The place held by these creatures in India is different from that accorded them in any other country. Every animal is looked upon as but the covering of a spirit. Is not its mind with God? Are not its *auras* and vibrations far purer than ours? May not even the soul of our grandmother look from its eyes? May not we ourselves return to lower than its state if we give it not reverence?



LORD CURZON AND THE VICTIM OF A ROYAL TIGER HUNT.

Such conceptions are not culled from obsolete thought, but from the vibrant life and life of India to-day. Once is always in the Orient. "It is your misfortune that you have to talk so much of progress," said a sage to me—"we have progressed."

Some one has called Hindu worship a religion based on the care of the cow. Certainly the affection and veneration bestowed upon this animal cannot be even dimly grasped by the Western mind. "Brother to the ox" is no poetic fiction on lips that daily speak, "Our Mother the Cow."

The idea may be traced back to the primitive naturalism of the prayers of the *Rig-Veda*, whose sonorous Sanscrit *m's* and *n's* invoke but cows. God is Cow-Giver, Lord-of-Pastures, Bestower-of-Cattle. The symphonies

of these eucharistic songs sound like the lowing of cows for their new-born calves.

In later mythology, every god has his animal vehicle or *vahan*, inseparable from him; every epic-hero is aided by some beast endowed with human powers. Poem and parable carry on the strain; till with the Hindu instinct to make of everything an emanation from God, animals have become even more sacred than men.

I remember once playing in an Indian theater, where a calf, in attempting to leap the wooden fence of the compound, became impaled on the pickets. It lay there for three days. Its groans could be heard all over the house, but no one dared rescue it for it might be killed during the act. A peculiar insensibility to suffering, even when personal, prevails all through the Orient. It is the *killing* that is the crime. God will kill when He is ready. If we had endeavored to remove the calf there would have been a riot. It is the sorest point of the British occupancy that the red-coats feed on beef. It was the enforced touching of cow-greased cartridges to the lips that caused the Mutiny.

From Sanscrit legends we may learn how deep-rooted are the religious convictions on which the sacredness of the cow is based; the tender regard in which she is held; the affectionate companionship accorded her; also the horror with which our eating the flesh of "our mother" is regarded. Everything about the cow has been observed and noted. Every emanation from her body is venerated and used in worship. "As much water as will lie in a hole made in the mud by a cow's hoof," is a well-known Aryan measure.

The sacred *Brahmani* bulls almost constitute an order of religious mendicants by themselves. They feed at will from straw-pile, fruit-seller's basket, or evening meal at door of hut, making holy any dish which they touch. The older ones are fully alive to their privileges, and select the finest fruit. Sometimes a patient *halwa*-seller will remonstrate: "My brother, eat not from my stall, it is not worthy! The man across the way makes much better *gulab-jam*; he is richer than I, and can better afford to have thee for a friend! May it please your holiness to go!—nay!—nay, brother—it is too bad! But take thy will."

Even a foreigner can almost feel this affection for the royal bullocks that draw the gold

and silver carriages of state, can respond to the sweetness in their forest-glances which invite caress of white velvet flanks and admiration of gold-tipped horns and gold-shod feet. The jeweled harness with trailing cloths stiff with precious handiwork completes the richness of carved metal, inlaid teak and ivory, and wind-swept curtains from which glance dawn-flashing, dawn-reflecting eyes, their pupils black bees caught in white jade lotus-prisons. The cart may be red lacquer, with peacocks gilded on the poles and Burma rubies seeded in its diapers. Wreathed with scarlet flowers the cattle look indeed of celestial origin and like no animals we know.

There is an old legend that the Emperor Hoomayon, when taking his favorite *begum* to drive, used to act as charioteer in a carriage drawn by beautiful white oxen. Most of the orthodox wealthy natives still prefer this curtained vehicle with great carved hubs and rough-hewn spokes, and all royal ladies, excepting, perhaps, the *rauis* of Gondal and Cooch-Bihar, who are thoroughly Europeanized, still see the world through gold nets fringed with pearls. In Kashmir it is the shawl-bearing goat that plays the rôle of

India gives but little milk, and never except when the calf sucks; the great-horned-one has abundant yield, especially rich in cream. Observing how pale the butter looked in Delhi, I asked the cause, and found to my horror that it did not come from cows but from these creatures. Brown bread and buffalo butter is a favorite five-o'clock Anglo-Indian alliteration.

What the cow is to the humble is the elephant to royalty. In every palace courtyard stands this king-beast-of-the-stables; as in the center of every royal cow-shed one finds a tiger in a cage; for singularly enough this animal is said to bring good luck to cows, probably by increasing their milk through fear. The great beast *Hathi* often roams unattended through the bazaars and seems to know everybody, quite with the air of the "oldest inhabitant" of a New England village.

The gorgeousness of the state elephant has often been written, but no circus reproduction of *Darbar*-pageant gives any idea of his accoutered glory; the paintings of the late Edwin Lord Weeks were in no way exag-



HIS HIGHNESS, THE GUJWAR OF BARODA, DRIVES IN A VICTORIA OF SOLID GOLD.

sacred cow. The Kas'miris told me that Adam came to their Vale, after being driven out of Paradise, to buy shawls for Eve.

The buffalo is more in use for ordinary purposes. A dreadful looking beast he is, of sweaty leather that seems well chosen as the *vahan* of Yama, lord-of-death. The cow in

generations of his magnificence, which, overpowering as it seems to-day, history tells to be but a glimmer of former splendor. In old temple-sculpture may be seen endless processions of elephant-massing. When Chandra Gupta, Emperor, received the daughter of Seleucus in marriage, he gave to her father,



LEOPARDS KEPT IN LUXURIOUS CAPTIVITY AND USED IN HUNTS.

one of Alexander's generals who founded the Scythian monarchy after the Greek invasion (not conquest, as so often stated), a present of five hundred elephants, and promised an annual gift of fifty more. It is said of Akbar, that his elephants were so covered with precious stones that they were no longer animals but moving mountains of jewels. The historian Amar Khusrū tells of the Mohammedan conquest of the Deccan that when the *Malik* came to muster the elephants they extended over three *parasangs* (more than nine miles).

In ancient times a royal princess was allowed to select her husband—as in Sir Edwin Arnold's description of the *Syamvara* or bride-choice of *Ysodhara*. In some cities

when kings died and left no successor, the marriage garland was thrown over the trunk of a female elephant allowed to roam at will, and whosoever neck she wreathed it with was proclaimed king. Sometimes she would roam for days, then suddenly stop, make obeisance before the chosen one, lift him on her back, and return in triumph. If a woman was chosen, she was crowned queen.

Scythe-girded elephants must have made wonderful dramatic effect as they mowed down Northern invaders. They were retired by the invention of gunpowder, as a flank turn of fear-maddened mammoths was most destructive to the ranks of their owners. Aurungzeb, in a great fight on the plains of Delhi with Prince Darra, chained his elephants to posts



SAIDEE HORSE OF THE ROYAL HOUSE OF JEYPUR, DRUG WITH NET OF PEARL AND GOLD.



FIGHTING RAMS ARE A FEATURE OF THE ROYAL STABLES OF INDIA.

to show the army that there would be no retreat. Wonderful the descriptions of epic battles where—"Mountains of arrow-pierced elephants lay heaped on the field, whose dismembered trunks seemed black alligators swimming in a sea of blood."

From Hindu tales that have come through the Chinese, who give us most of our Indian records—the *rishis* were dreamers and not recorders—we have this story of Buddha:

The Lord demanded one day of an elephant-trainer what were the means he employed to subdue his beasts.

"Three," said the *mahout*—"one applies to the mouth a hook of iron which he attaches to breast-clasp, and the elephant cannot lift his neck. Then one gives less and less food till thin and weak; and finally beats."

"And what does one accomplish by these means?" asked He-of-the-yellow-light.

"The *crochet-de-fer* serves to overcome the resistance of the head. The deprivation of food and drink, the violence of the body. The stick subdues the spirit. After this all is easy."

The Nimbused-bronze-one said:—

"I also have three ways to subdue:—

"First, by perfect sincerity I control what goes forth from the mouth. By affection and charity I harmonize the irregularities of the body. By inward vibration of thought I calm the spirit. Did you ever think of trying these on the elephant?"

In the morning when the gem-sellers, the purveyors of shawls and ancient weapons spread their wares at your door, *Hathi*



ROYAL BULLOCKS, GOLD-SHOES, HUNG WITH JEWELLED HARNESS.

tayar hai! ("the elephant waits") resounds from one side, while perhaps a carriage drawn by curry-colored camels sweeps up on the other. The dash with them is superb. A doctor told me that a daily ride would cure all bodily ills. The shock when the leader stops to turn round to see what the others are doing, while they go on, is especially beneficial. Near by, men hold the fighting rams for your pleasure, with scarlet cloths and paper wreaths ready to crown the victor. A crowd of all the relatives of all the servants comes to scramble for the shower of silver with which the sahib is expected to salute the tremendous butting of heads together.

In Junagadh, Kathiawar, I saw the royal rhinoceroses wander as freely through the bazaars as elephants, though with their reptilian horned snouts they look utterly untamable; and, indeed, if of African race, would be so—but all Asiatic beasts are of milder nature. They follow the processional-steed and bedizened elephant in state-*sowaris*. Lady Curzon was snapshotted when she rode on one of them, but claimed the negative. Very vicious ones used to be kept for the great animal-fights of Khandarao of Baroda, the last Indian monarch who really lived in ancient style and personal power.

There was one in the fort of Gwalior before it was restored to the Maharajah, with whom the garrison officers used to have exciting times that they called "Football with Rhino." Of exceedingly violent temper, he was confined in a small enclosure surrounded with iron pillars wide enough to allow the lithe turbaned trainers to slip through, but too close for his monstrous bulk to pass. Somewhere in the enclosure lay his food bucket, and this the players, taking opposite sides, used for the ball. It was a dangerous game. Only two besides the rhinoceros could play. One would step inside and give the bucket a fearful kick; the instant the beast heard the bang he was after him like a horned locomotive. Then the other player would dash and get in a good whack while Rhino was chasing his companion—and his turn it was to flee while the opposite side got in its innings. Had one stumbled or been caught he would have "kicked the bucket" indeed. After half-time was called the rhinoceros would often begin to play cunningly and lurk near the pail. When the Maharajah Scindia took on the fort and the garrison departed, poor Rhino pined away, he so missed his daily football-flirtation.

His Highness the Nawab of Junagadh also enjoys the distinction of keeping the only preserve of lions left in Hindustan. In the days of the great fossil saber-toothed tiger, these beasts—"who bore an implacable animosity for the race of elephants and in the fore-points of whose crooked claws stuck the pearls torn from mammoth frontal-bones," roamed all over India; but now only a small herd is left in the sacred Girwar forest in this little corner of the Mahratta peninsula. They are almost tame, are known and called by name. A few are kept around the palace of the king. So long ago the memory of the lion faded away in India, no word remains in ordinary vernaculars. The natives call them *onia-waghs*, or camel-colored tigers.

There is something about the skin of a leopard that seems to make all neighboring color richer and more passionate. Orange, turquoise, scarlet never so vibrate as when in juxtaposition with this spotted tawinness—even tiger skin has not its tone-value. With collars of jewels, leashed by bronze attendants, they give a sultry fierceness and grace to the siesta of somnolent palaces, and their eyes look as the eyes of the Hindus themselves would if they dared. They are used for hunting, as is also the lynx. When the *cheetah* (*chit*, "spot," from which root comes our word "chintz") springs on buck or doe, the *shikaris* run up and cry, "Be it lawful!" before cutting the throat.

Though English life is pushing very far, in the jungle lithe forms still crouch, great eyes gleam like golden balls as bloody tongues lap the dark waters. The jungle butcher-bill is very large. One man-eater has been known to keep in terror thirty villages, another to close a great public road to travel. In the Central Provinces alone there were more than a thousand persons killed by tigers last year. A friend of mine dashing through a jungle-road, with carriage and pair, near Bangalore, came on a turn plump upon a tiger, so suddenly that no one, not even the horses, was frightened—that is, no one except the tiger. For a tiger can be frightened; in Bengal they have an expression—"The night was so terrible it would have scared a male tiger into a female one."

Cherubic Lord Curzon, standing on the dead body of the royal-slain, looks little like the great *shikar*-of-the-jungle he is, and suggests that it is rolling at his feet to bring



ELEPHANTS STANDING READY TO TAKE ROYALTY FOR AN OUTING.



THE DAY'S KILL AFTER A ROYAL HUNT.

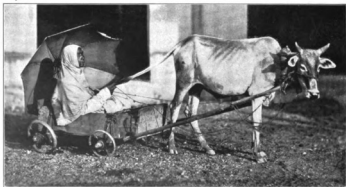
the homage of India. The photograph was taken when the Viceroy was the guest of the dashing young Maharajah Scindia of Gwalior. There had been a hunt, and as every viceregal moment is laid out, while the tigers were being brought in the party retired to don frocks for the reception to follow, and the royal George apparently saw no incongruity in being photographed standing on the dead cat, looking as though he had just killed it with his cane.

When staying at Agra, I heard of a strange beast captured on the roof top of a neighboring bungalow the autumn before—a tiger with purple stripes, which on being killed

was found to have its teeth filled with gold. It was probably the escaped palace-pet of some Maharajah, who had read of the purple cow and had had the tiger dipped in diamond dyes, in order to be up to date.

Sometimes they come very near. A lone native operator in a railway station telegraphed: "Tiger dancing on the platform—please arrange."

Hill tribes worship both the *bagh-bhut*, or tiger-spirit, and the living tiger. In this spirit-worship a wonderful thing happened not long ago in Rangoon. A half-starved tiger stole at night through the throng of worshippers that always surrounds the great *Sui Dagon* temple and began to climb the gold-



IN THIS CHARGE THE INDIAN BHOJAR-WOMAN TENDS COMFORTMENT.

incrusted carvings where the roof slopes in gradual steps to the *pagoda*. In the morning the prostrate throng marveled to see a lean and mangy golden-shape half up the roof of gold with spirit-eyes glaring down upon them. It was thought to be the ghost of a king, and great were the protestations to the English—who would shoot anything, even a god, if they got the chance—for the slaughter would bring down a horde of spirit-tigers hot for vengeance.

The giving up of the mastery of the horse and the sword I have always felt to be an incalculable loss to modern man. It has been replaced by slavery to the machine. One day man may become master of the machine likewise and realize what it is good for and what it is not, and then beauty and art may revive again.

The Indian princes show some of their old training on the polo grounds, which they flash over like swords from jeweled scabbards. A few *rajahs* keep up expensive racing stables. The college of royal princes in Kathiawar has its own amateur cavalry corps, and the new Imperial Cadets, forming a body-guard to the Viceroy, is the most admired division of the Indian army, and never fails to evoke wildest enthusiasm. They sit as melted to their horses and hold themselves with princely pride and dignity. A distinguished correspondent from the Durbar wrote:—"I have seen the grand reviews in Germany, and in Russia and England, but I never saw so thoroughly satisfactory and fascinating a corps as the Imperial Cadet Corps of India." This is formed of young *rajahs* and *raj-kumars*. The commander is that superb old veteran, Rajah Sir Pertab Sing, a great friend of King Edward, who, to give this favorite dignitary distinction over the maharajahs who attended Queen Victoria's Jubilees and were offended at their place at the end of the procession behind even the Queen of the Sandwich Islands, made him one of his own *aides*, and so kept him in first rank. Coal-black horses housed with snow-leopard skins, cream-white uniform with pale blue facings and turbans with corps-cipher in gold, make a most beautiful effect; though the princes would shine still more in their traditional vesture.

The state-horses still are held by sapphire and beryl reins, are hung with pearl-wrought nets of gold, but these are of ancient make and used only once a year. The armorers of the king are no longer the artist-artisans

of ancient days, but mere machinists and blacksmiths. The horses' tails are still dyed pink, but there are no more moonstones and star-stones in the manger.

When any king wished or felt himself ready for universal dominion he made an *asvamedha*, or great horse sacrifice, the most wonderful festival of ancient Aryan life, which proclaimed him *chakravahti* (Lord-of-the-wheel, or radius) from sea to sea. A white horse was chosen by certain marks, then sent to wander at will for a year and a day, and every kingdom he entered must either give battle or acknowledge sovereignty. At the end of the year the sacrificial-posts were overlaid with gold, the great eagle-altar raised, the sacrificial-pit dug, and all the new-made feudatories joined in the feast-of-the-horse, which was sacrificed with at least six hundred and nine other victims of all kinds—"tame and wild, terrestrial and aquatic, walking, flying, swimming, and creeping" (princes were never vegetarians in India, except in old age when they became ascetics).

Buddha's clemency and later the edicts of his royal disciple King Ashoka put an end to this sacrifice, but for long it was the touchstone of Rajput supremacy. The scene must have been of stupendous grandeur. Queens desiring child slept all night beside the dead steed, and one hundred *asvamedhas* raised the sacrificer to equal rank with Indra, god-of-the-lesser-heavens, who was always jealous of this ceremony, as bringing mortals too near him.

But no head may lift higher than that of the *rajah's* personal friend, the monkey. Well may this be, for is he not of both sacred and royal origin? All over India monkeys run in and out the pattern of life. You will see them looking in through your window as you take your *chold-hazri*, or "little-breakfast"; they scamper over the roofs holding their young in distressingly human fashion, sit down on their blue or orange pelvic-cushions, and perhaps hold up in derision some object they have just stolen from the table. I heard of one who caught a small pig and, apparently struck by a thought when he heard it squeal, took it in his arms and began twisting its tail round and round like the handle of an organ.

In palaces they assume the gravity of princes; in temples, the holiness of priests. Many live in hollow trees in Benares or hide in the recesses of the sanctuary to pick up

the grains that fall from pilgrims' offerings. They extend hands horribly repulsive, often covered with cheap rings that the *bayadères* of the temple have given them. They have even been known to seize a strip of veil and go through a mock marriage ceremony with unprompted precision.

"And where do I come in?" says *naga*, the serpent. "Do I not hold the world on my seven heads of bronze-inlaid-with-silver? Am I not at once couch-and-canopy for the lotus-sleep of Vishnu till he calls white Kalkin? Do I not kill eleven-twelfths of all human beings slain each year by wild-ones, and yet they still worship me and set me pans of spice-milk?"

Yes, it was thy wish to kill me, too. I found thee in my bed one night, coiled under the *chuddah*. I salute thee and pass. Thou art too great for our feeble wisdom. We admire thy jewels, but our hearts hold no place for thee.

"Forget not the dog, O Sahib! Forget not the dog! Did he not accompany Yudhisthira to heaven? He must have place!"

No, we will not forget the dog, remembering even the puppet of Sahu of Satara, grandson of great Sivaji, who, having been saved by a dog, dressed it in brocade and jewels, put a turban on its head, and made Mahratta chieftains bow before it in full durbar; but the Ulysses-hound of Vyasa's epic, the most celebrated minor animal of Indian history, he shall have place of glory!—companion to the king of the Pandavas, his brothers and the peerless Draupadi, even to the gate of Swaga.

After the great wars of Bharat, the forest exile, the return, the victory, Yudhisthira and the rest were minded to be done with earthly things: "We will find death who seeketh other men." All fall on the way to the golden mount, for their little-sins-of-sinless-souls, unworthy to enter heaven without dying. All but Yudhisthira, and even to the gate of glory—"the hound followed him, only the hound." When told it was unclean, he must drive it away, it could not enter heaven, the great king refused. Tempted still, to the last he holds. The hound vanishes and in its stead stands Dharmas, Lord-of-Eternal-Justice.

"O, thou true king! . . .
Hear thou my word! Because thou didst not mount
This car divine, lest the poor hound be shent
Who looked to thee, lo! there is none in heaven
Shall sit above thee, . . .
Thou shalt throne with us!"

The tiger-striped bee that's honey-drunk from lotus cups sings: "Speak of me! no lover's song, but tell I form the line of Kama's bowstring." Sarasvati's peacocks stop their dance to sing, "Of me." The *raja-hansa*, royal swan, "Of me! tell them of Damayanti and the Swan!" The *köil* nightingale sings: "Have you any bird like me!" The parrots wheel, a flight of emeralds, and as the vessel leaves the shore we see a living sunset of flamingoes flame on scarlet tree, and feel like poor *chakra* and *chakri*—birds that keep happy company all day but at evening separate, doomed to pass the night on opposite banks of the river calling piteously for each other.

November

By ELIZABETH K. REYNOLDS.

GRAY skies and leafless trees;
The drip of falling rain;
A sodden path—a lonely hut—
And memories.