

LETTER TO CORK

Dean Mahomed

*Dean Mahomed (1759 -1851), a native of Patna, Bihar, is the first known Indian author in English. While in the service of The East India Company, he travelled to different parts of India, Ireland and England and wrote his observations and letters addressed to a friend Cork. This was printed under the title **Mahomed** by J. Connor, 17, Corner of Castle- and it describes the of selling and prevalent at that time in*



*experiences in a series of friend Cork. This was **The Travels of Dean** at the circulating Library, no street. This is Letter no XXIV features as well as the way purchasing of elephants India.*

LETTER TO CORK

Dear Sir,

1. Of all the animals in the East or elsewhere, none can equal the elephant in magnitude. To excite your wonder, and, at the same time, afford you some entertainment, I shall here give you a particular description of this **quadruped**, which is ...the largest in the universe. It is from twelve to fifteen feet high, and seven broad: it's skin about the belly is so tough, that a sword cannot penetrate it: the eyes of it are exceeding small, the ears large, the body round and full, and the back rises to an arch: it is of a darkish colour and very much seamed: on each side of it's jaws, within the mouth are four teeth or **grinders**; and two teeth which project outwards: in the male, they are stronger and thicker; in the female, they are sharper and smaller: both male and female use one, which is sharp as a defensive weapon, and the other which is blunted to **grub up** trees and plants for food. The teeth of the male sometimes grow to the length of ten feet, and have been known to weigh three hundred pounds each; the teeth of the female, though less, are the most valuable ivory. They naturally shed their teeth once in ten years, and bury them carefully in the earth, to prevent, as it is

imagined, their being found by man. The elephant's tongue is small, but broad; the feet round and ample, and the legs have joints, which are flexible: the forehead is large and rising; the tail resembles that of a hog; and the blood of this creature is colder than that of any other; but the organ which most peculiarly distinguishes it, is the trunk. This singular member is hooked, grisly, and pliant, about seven feet in length, three in circumference, and gradually diminishing to the **extremity**. At the root, near the nose, are passages, the one into the head, the other to the mouth; through the first, it breathes; and by the later, it receives it's provisions, the trunk serving the purposes of a hand to feed it, and a weapon to defend it. So strong is this powerful animal, that it can lift a prodigious weight; and so delicate in the sensation of feeling, that it can take the smallest piece of coin from the ground. It delights much in water, and will swim a great way.

2. They are taken by stratagem in different parts of India, as they descend from the mountains, where they feed, to the lakes or rivers, to water. The hotteewallies, or people employed to take them, dig deep trenches in their direction, which they conceal with reeds covered over with earth and grass; the elephants, on their way to the watering places, unacquainted with the danger before them, fall into the pit contrived by these artful men who often risqué their lives in the execution of such hazardous projects. The old animals, by some means extricate themselves, and escape to the woods, but the young ones, who thus become an easy prey to their pursuers, are suffered to remain in this situation, for some days without food, till they are almost spent, and unable to make any resistance: an easy descent is then opened into the pits or trenches, and collars thrown round their necks, after which they are mounted, and following a tame elephant as their leader, conducted with great facility to the next town or village. When a considerable number of them, is collected in this manner, they are regularly trained by the hotteewallies, for the use of the Nabobs and other great men; and when rendered by age unfit for their amusements, they serve to carry the equipage of camps and other burdens. Under the management of their tutors, they are taught to do anything, and, in a short time, become as tractable as the horses of the most famous riders in Europe.
3. It is related of one of them, that when the child of it's keeper, lay some time in a cradle, crying for want of nourishment, in the absence of the parents, this huge but generous animal took it up gently, gave it suck, and afterwards laid it down in the cradle with the utmost solicitude. This tenderness, which is not unlike gratitude in our species, proceeded from the kind treatment of its keeper.

4. An elephant is commonly sold by measurement; and some of those animals, which are young and well trained, are purchased at the rate of 150 rupees per cubit: they are measured from the head to the tail, which is about seven cubits long, and at this calculation will amount to above one hundred pounds sterling each.
5. Next to the elephant in bulk and figure, is the rhinoceros, called by the modern Indians, *abadu*; it is not unlike the wild boar, but much larger, having thicker feet, and a more unwieldy body. It is covered with large hard scales of blackish colour, which are divided into small squares, raised a little above the skin, and nearly resembling those of the crocodile. It's head, which is large, is wrapped up behind in a kind of **capuchin**; it's mouth is little; but its snout extends to a great length, and is armed with a long thick horn, which makes him terrible to other animals, it's tongue is as rough as a file, and a sort of wings like those of the bat, cover the belly.
6. In the eastern territories, there is no beast more useful than the camel, either for burden or dispatch: some of them will carry a thousand weight, and travel, at least, seven or eight miles an hour: they have no teeth, except in the lower jaw, and one **bunch** on the back: none of the brute creation, of such a bulk, less voracious than this creature. They lie down on their bellies to receive their loads, and are always governed by the voice of the drover, who could never mind their pace, by beating them. They are naturally fearful, and extremely patient under fatigue.

LET'S THINK AND DO

1. Dean Mahomed says that an animal is commonly sold by measurement? Does the practice continue even today? How is elephant sold now?
2. How many animals does the author describe in his letter? Which are they? Do they have anything common about them?
3. Write a letter to your foreign friend describing your favourite Indian animal.

