

Name _____ Date _____

The Raja's Elephants

Hundreds of years ago, each of India's many provinces was ruled by a raja. The raja was a wealthy prince. Among his most prized possessions were his elephants.

The rajas used their elephants to haul great blocks of stone. The stones were used to build palaces and temples. The elephants were also used to haul trees and logs and to plow fields. Later, when machines became available, it was no longer necessary to use elephants to help with heavy lifting. However, elephants are still used to haul logs in places where there is no heavy machinery.

Elephants were used in wars. The elephants wore platforms on their backs where soldiers sat and threw spears at the enemy.

The rajas also used their elephants in royal weddings, state ceremonies, and religious processions. On special occasions, the elephants would be bathed in pure water. Then they were sprinkled with perfumes. An artist would paint designs on their heads and ears in bright colors.

The elephant's tusks would be scrubbed clean and decorated with gold paint. A fancy cloak of red, gold, purple, and yellow would be draped over each elephant's back. Then the elephant was ready to be paraded in public for all to admire. Several people rode in an elaborate wooden seat called a *howdah*. It was strapped to the elephant's back.

Elephants were usually treated very well by the rajas. The elephants helped the rajas be successful. Elephants made it easier for them to build things and to develop and protect their land. A raja with many elephants was considered to be very powerful.

