

How the chief was chosen

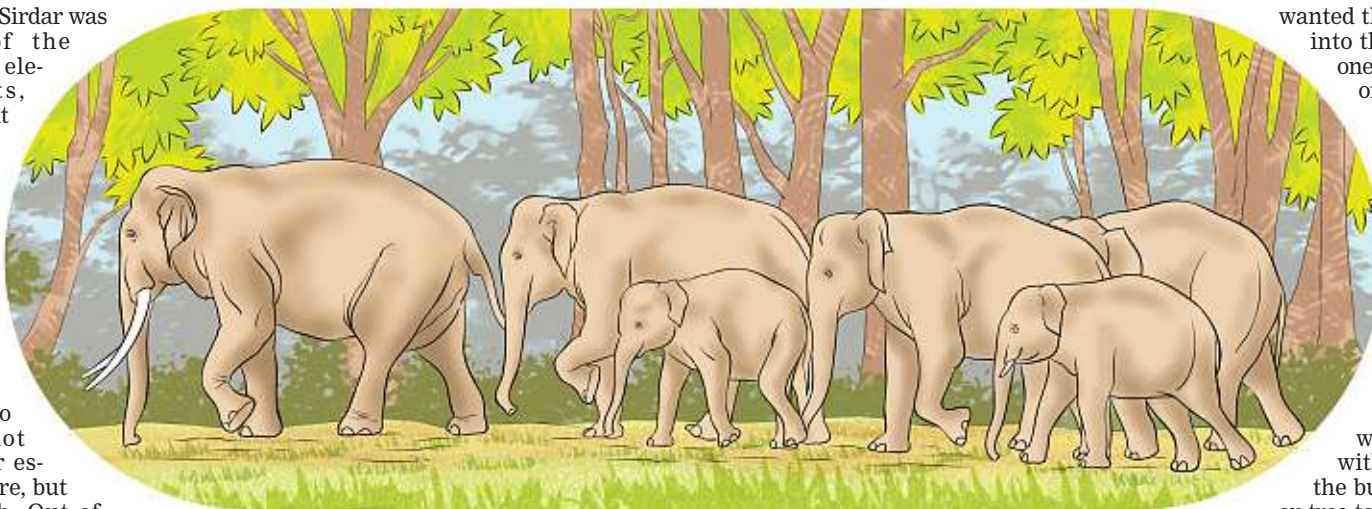
BY DHAN GOPAL MUKHERJI

Though Sirdar was one of the young elephants, without any hesitation the herd made him their chief. This was contrary to all precedent. But it had to be done because the crisis at hand was too great.

After all, to Sirdar they not only owed their escape from capture, but also from death. Out of sheer gratitude and respect for his ability they chose him their leader. In the history of the herd no one only thirty years old had been given that honour before. In fact none of the aged elephants could recall electing a chief who had not seen at least fifty summers. They said, however, "Sirdar is young in years but old in intelligence."

That unusual things happen even among elephants is an old adage. And the series of events that led up to Sirdar's election were most unusual.

One day early in the morning the herd had scented the presence of their eternal enemy — man. The more they moved away from that scent, the nearer it



drew. No matter which way they turned they were faced with the presence of man. They felt caught in a ring of humanity.

Every member of the herd — calf, cow and bull — switched their trunk east, west and north in order to locate in one direction an inch of air that was not charged with the odour of men. Alas, there was none! What were they to do now? Whither must they run for safety and cover? Their ancient chief, ninety-five years old, decided to go north. A fatal decision, no doubt; but they had to obey as soldiers obey a general. Everyone knew that they were exposing themselves too much, for only a mile to the north of them was

open country. How they could hide in such a place from the pursuit of man passed their understanding. But since the way to handle a command of the chief was to obey it, they proceeded to the only direction whence, he said, came no scent of humanity. Thither must they repair first and take counsel afterwards.

Had that aged fellow put up his trunk five feet above his head, he would have learnt that in the north, too, was man and worse — a gigantic trap. Since the hunters

wanted them to go northwards into the Kheddah trap, that one direction was kept free of human scent. For all the men were hiding on trees whence their odour was blown up by the wind far beyond the knowledge of the *hathis*. As they went north, the herd drew close to the Kheddah. All the expert elephant trappers of India had come this year armed with high-power rifles, with the intent to kill all the bulls. They were hiding on tree-tops in order to be able to aim carefully at the most vulnerable parts of the elephant's head. The entire herd knew nothing of that. The hunters' purpose was twofold; they meant to capture most of the herd and to kill those bulls who might flee the Kheddah. Since the males of this particular herd had the best tusks in India, the hunters felt all the more eager to shoot.



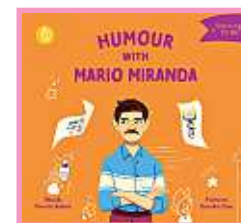
► *To be continued*
 Excerpted from *The Adventures of Sirdar: The Chief of the Herd* by Dhan Gopal Mukherji; Published by Talking Cub (children's imprint of Speaking Tiger)

Illustration: Arka Paitandi

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BOOKWATCH



● This is a board book, with pages made of thick cardboard. Humour is an important part of life and this books tells us about Mario Miranda, one of India's famous cartoonists. Little Mario would scribble and doodle everywhere until his mom got him a notebook! He made people laugh through his drawings. The verse here too will make you laugh.

HUMOUR WITH MARIO MIRANDA
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 PUBLISHER: ADIDEV PRESS