

The Blind Men and the Elephant

INDIA



A large, gray elephant stood eating the lush greenery in an ancient, walled garden. It paused for a moment and trumpeted loudly. Just then, three blind men came along.

“What made that sound?” asked the first man.

The second replied knowingly, “That sound was made by an elephant.”

“What is an elephant?” asked the third.

“I am not completely certain,” said the first man. “We should investigate.”

The first blind man went forward with his fingers outstretched until he reached the elephant’s rear. His hand moved along the elephant’s tail, which graced its posterior slope. “Aha!” he said. “An elephant is thin and long, just like a dangling rope.”

The second blind man went forward with his fingers outstretched until he arrived at the elephant’s head. His hand moved along the elephant’s ear, which rippled with thick, heavy hide. “You are wrong!” he said. “An elephant is not at all like a rope. Just like a rug, it’s wide!”

The third blind man went forward with his fingers outstretched until he reached the elephant’s knee. His hand moved along the elephant’s leg. He measured the girth of its thigh. “You are both wrong,” he said. “An elephant is not like a rope or a rug. Just like a pillar, it’s high!”

“An elephant is like a rope!” screamed the first.

“An elephant is like a rug!” shouted the second.

“An elephant is like a pillar!” insisted the third.

They began to pound each other and yell.

“A rope! A rug! A pillar!

A rope! A rug! A pillar!

A rope! A rug! A pillar!”

Meanwhile,

The elephant stood inside the walled garden,

nibbling the leaves of a tree.

His ivory tusks curved toward the sky,

a miraculous sight to see.

With billowing minds and bellowing mouths

to opinions these blind men held fast.

While the elephant stood, quite undefined,

in the garden of ancient past.

posterior: rear end (the elephant’s butt!)

girth: width

pillar: a thick pole

billowing: filling and swelling with air

bellowing: yelling

held fast: If you hold fast to something, you hold on to it tightly.