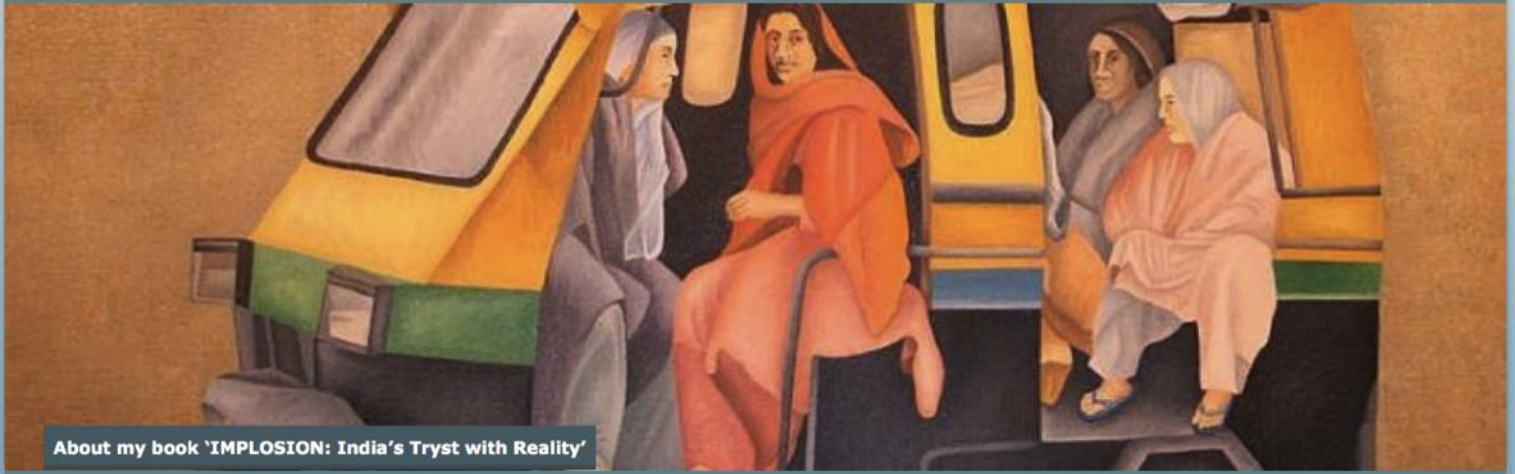


Riding the Elephant

From vultures in Delhi, to coups in Pakistan, a journalist's un-edited take on current events



About my book 'IMPLOSION: India's Tryst with Reality'

■ Bajaj rickshaw sold for £100,000 in aid of wild elephants Posted by: **John Elliott** | July 2, 2015



auction auto-rickshaws, built to the same engineering specifications as those in India with 198cc petrol engines, have been roaming the streets of London for the past month with a top speed of 35mph. They were launched by actress Goldie Hawn (below with the friend egg paintwork).

The campaign will be continued in November when 40 more ordinary auto-rickshaws will race 500kms across the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh to Kipling Camp on the edge of Kanha National Park. The participants will come from the UK and elsewhere and each rickshaw team has pledged to raise £10,000 for the cause.

Several of the rickshaws went for between around £15,000 and £35,000 but top prices were achieved when between two and four determined bidders rivalled each other, encouraged by an enthusiastic auctioneer, Henry Wyndham, chairman of Sotheby's Europe.

They included an intriguing bunch of backgrounds. There was Sir Evelyn de Rothschild from the banking family, who was involved in farming and retail investments in India a few years ago. He paid the top price of £100,000 for the London taxi look-alike, conceived by Benjamin Shine, an artist and designer.

Vijay Mallya, whose Kingfisher airline defaulted and stopped operations in 2012, and whose massive corporate debts have lost him control of his family's market-leading liquor business and Kingfisher beer brands, bid unsuccessfully for Golden Voyager.

This stylish bronze coloured rickshaw sported the British and Indian flags (above, carrying Prince Charles and Camilla). Designed by The Paintbox, custom car specialists, it went for £40,000. That was just a step too far for Mallya, who later paid a more modest £15,000 for a bright blue and red rickshaw styled by Mulberry, a luxury brand.

In India, the iconic Bajaj auto rickshaws or tuk-tuks cost around Rs200,000 or £2,000. Two nights ago, twenty were sold for up to £100,000 each in brightly coloured designs at a wildlife charity auction hosted in Lancaster House by Prince Charles and his wife, Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall.

There was a London taxi lookalike, a bamboo framed vehicle suitable for the jungle, one with bodywork covered with splashes of fried eggs, and a fluffy looking model called Princess Tickey-Tuk.

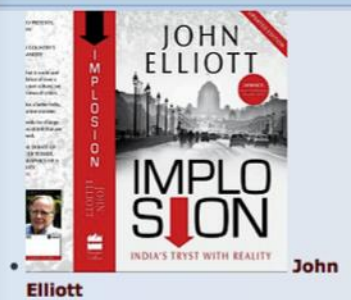
A total of over £700,000 was raised in aid of Elephant Family, a charity set up by Mark Shand, a writer and colourful adventurer – and Camilla's brother – who died after a fall in New York in April last year. His death meant that the cause of protecting wild Asian elephants lost one of its most vocal and passionate champions.

His involvement began in 1988 when he bought a scrawny beggar elephant called Tara and rode her over 600 miles across India (right). He then wrote a best-selling book, *Travels on my Elephant*.

The



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Other bidders included Olivia Harrison, widow of ex-Beatle George Harrison, who bought one lot for £55,000, Hilary Weston, the owner of Selfridges department store, who bought two for a total of £80,000, and Garreth Wood, entrepreneur and charity-organiser son of Sir Ian Wood, a Scottish oil industry businessman. Wood bid for several of the vehicles and bought one for £45,000 plus a 10ft high model elephant (see below). He plans to use them at restaurants and pubs he owns in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

Behind the party's flowing drinks, the trays of canapés, the presence of royalty, and the flamboyant bidding, lies the plight

of the wild Asian elephant – there are only 35,000, down 90% over the past 100 years.



This 10ft high model of an elephant, symbolising Tara, was also auctioned for £42,000

These grand animals are under attack not only from poaching and accidents on railway track and from electrocution. A more serious threat is conflict with local people who attack the animals when they roam through their crops and villages.

Elephant Family, now headed as joint presidents by Prince Charles and Camilla, aims to create 100 elephant corridors within the next ten years, starting with a major one in the north-eastern state of Assam. A memorandum of understanding was signed by five non-governmental organisations to achieve what Prince Charles described as "an enormously important cause, particularly because of its human-animal dimension".

Since it was set up by Mark Shand in 2002, the Elephant Family charity has raised over £9m, often through art related events. In 2010, £4m was raised by auctioning model elephants that were paraded around London.

Now about 55, Tara lives a gentle life (below) in Kipling Camp, the destination of the November rickshaw race. India's first private wildlife camp, it is run by Anne Wright and her daughter Belinda, who founded the Wildlife Protection Society of India.

Elephant Family's target is to raise £1m, and the £700,000-plus achieved at the auction, organised with the Quintessentially event-organising foundation, means that it is well on the way. And,

as Prince Charles put it, the campaign will help to ensure that Mark Shand's legacy is maintained and enhanced.



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