CHAPTER VI

ELEPHANT IN FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE
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The pleasing and queer appearance of the elephant has been charming the people of all sorts from the ancient time. The elephant, with a big and round-shaped belly, a tail, four pillar-like feet, fan-like two big ears, two small eyes quite unproportionate to its body, two long, pointed and white coloured tusks, the trunk which, besides breathing and drinking, serves as the hands for eating, spraying water on its body and breaking trees etc., and its big and tall body covered with a dirty loose skin, was a thing of curiosity to the ancient people. The elephant played an important role in popular belief, practical uses such as war, transport, carrying of heavy load etc. and in different arts and religions. Various legends relating to the elephant have been prevalent in the society, specially in the east from a very early period.

1. Origin of the elephant race:

Different legends regarding the origin of the elephant race are found in the Sanskrit literature. According to one such legend, the eight ancestors of the elephants and their females were created by Brahman from the two empty half-egg shells of Martanda after the birth of Garuda, the sun bird.¹

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¹ HA, 1.1.208-209
GS, 2.20
ML, 1.22
The eight ancestors are Airāvata, Puṇḍarīka, Puṣpadanta, Vāmana, Supratīka, Aṅjana, Sārvabhauma and Kumuda. Their eight females are Abhramu, Kapilā, Tāmrakarnī, Aṅgaṇā, Amupamā, Aṅjanāvatī, Śūbhradantī and Piṅgalā respectively.\textsuperscript{2}

Airāvata was the first and foremost of the eight ancestors. Vedic myth relates the elephant to have been conceived as a part of Vivasvat, the sun. The story runs thus - Aditi, the mother of the Ādityas threw away her eighth son which was a shapeless lump. The divine artisan gave this lump the shape of Vivasvat, the sun; and the pieces of the lump which were discarded in the process fell upon the earth and gave origin to the elephant.\textsuperscript{3}

There are also various legends regarding the effects of curses upon the elephant. The elephant was originally a divine creature and it is believed to have had wings with which it was able to move about in the three regions of the universe and also four tusks and not two. But eventually it lost its divine nature and became the vehicle of the mortal human beings on earth. Also it has some peculiar characteristics such as it has its tongue turned back and has to suffer from inner sweating and burning sensation. It has no knowledge of its own strength and power and is fond of water, mud and its own excrements. It cannot see its own scrotum also.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{2} Gā, 2.42
\textsuperscript{3} Sen A., Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art, p. 17
\textsuperscript{4} Mackenzie, D.A., Indian Myths and Legend, p. 32
The elephant happened to become devoid of two of its original four tusks and the wings and a short-lived inferior type of creature destined to be the vehicle of men through the curse of Đīrghatapas. However, the curse was not to have any effect on the eight ancestors.

Under the direction of Brahman the elephants once entered to the hermitage of Agni to find out if he has been hiding himself there and having come to know about Agni's absence they harassed his wife Svāhā. Being angry with the elephants Agni inflicted a curse that the heat inside their bodies would be prevented from coming out and their tongues would remain turned back. Once in the battle-field, the gods slipped off from the backs of the elephants whose skins were covered with their sweat. Then god Varuṇa cursed them, out of rage, to have their sweat blocked inside their bodies.

Once the elephants of sage Bhṛgu under the intolerable influence of their must' damaged his beautiful āśrama and also defiled it with excrements. The sage then being enraged cursed them to be fond of remaining amidst their own excrements. Being afraid of any harm that might be caused

5. GS, 3.7.10, The story relating to the curse of Đīrghatapas has been illustrated in the first chapter of this work.
6. Ibid., 3.11-18
7. Ibid., 3.22-23
8. Ibid., 3.23-25
by the mighty and strong elephants, the sages once approached Brahman seeking their safety for themselves and thus, it was due to the curse of Brahman that the elephants became ignorant of their own strength and valour.9

On all these occasions the eight ancestors approached Brahman to save their kith and kin from the effects of curses. To get relief from internal heat and blocked-sweating to some extent, Brahman suggested the elephants to take the means of mud and water. Also He predicted the birth of Pālakāpya in the womb of an elephant to take care of the elephants in distress.

2. Superstitions:

People have some strange and interesting superstitions regarding the elephant. The Hindus believe that various deities reside in various parts of the body of this divine animal. According to them God Brahman resides in the head, Śakra in the neck, Viṣṇu in the shoulders, Agni in the navel, Ravi in the eyes, Mṛtyu in the feet, Dharā in the bosom, Prajāpati in the scrotum, Nāga in the trunk, Aśvin in the ears, Dīśa (quarters) in the mind, Vedas in the limbs, Śambhu in the intelligence, and Parjanya in the heart.10 However, variations are also

10. Ibid., 2.62-64
there in fixing the deities as well as their locations. Thus according to the Hast NAVURVEDA Viṣṇu resides in the gait of the elephant, Śakra in the neck, Agni in the stomach, Prajāpati in the scrotum, Vāyu in the prāṇavāyu and apāṇavāyu, the quarters (Diśākṣa) in the ears, the sky (Ākāśa) in the sense organs, Sarasvatī in the tongue, Mitra and Varuna in the legs, Āditya in the eyes, Viśvakarman in its actions, Bhūmi in the body, Rudra in its sound, Vidyut in the skin, Agni in its speech, Brahman in its patience, Parjanya in its heart, the two AŚVINĪKUMĀRAS in its arms, and the Maruts in the part between the shoulderblades (trīka).11 The root, the middle and the end of the tusks of the elephant are also imagined to be the residing places of gods, demons and human beings respectively.12

People also believed the elephant to be the holder of the earth. It was believed that the earth is supported by one elephant known as Mahāpadma which is again supposed to stand on a tortoise.13 Another belief states that the eight ancestors of the elephants are guarding the earth in her eight directions, and the elephants in the four cardinal points are superior to those in the intermediate points.14

11. MA, 3.7, p. 403; 3.8.21-24
12. BS, 94.8
   Ra 1.50.17-18
14. Hopkins, E.W., Epic Mythology, p. 17
Strange superstitions prevailed in the society regarding the structure, defective limbs, voice, smell, spots and signs on its skin as well as on the tusks and movements etc. An elephant having a trunk full of spots is an indication of death of the king; that with a narrow right cheek, of quarrel among its master and his sons; that with a narrow left cheek of disagreement of the king with his ministers. A drought or famine is believed to be indicated by the possession of a dumb elephant and in case of a deaf elephant, the indication is in respect of ruin and fear from enemies. Constant flow of water from the eyes of the elephant brings misfortune to the family of its master. The elephant having a charred-looking skin indicates destruction of its master's house by fire and that one having an unproportionate limb is considered to be unlucky. 15

The voices of the elephant resembling the sound of conch-shell, cloud, kettle-drum, and the voices of gander, tiger, lion and bull are considered auspicious. 16 Those resembling the voices of dog, crow, jackal, hog, monkey are insuspicious. 17 Schneider mentions a very curious primitive belief, i.e., the voice of an elephant, which serves as a symbol of heaven is high pitched as it is a large animal. 18

15. Sillar F.C., Elephants Modern and Ancient, chap. 14
16. C. 8.98
17. Ibid.,
The smell of the elephant's sweat, ichor, urine and vomit is considered auspicious if it is like that of ghee, fried rice, lotus and plant called Usīra, Jāti and Pāṭala; and inauspicious if it is like that of a goat, anus, porcupine, a candala and crow. 19

The elephant is regarded auspicious if its movements are like those of wrestler, lion, parrot, tiger, leopard, bull etc. and inauspicious if its movements are like those of wolf, chameleon, ass and mongoose etc. 20

The elephant is also judged by the position of different marks resembling things like conch-shell, lotus, earth-pitcher, fish, a mystic diagram called Vardhamāna, wall, mirror, bull, lamp, building, gate, altar, sacrificial post, spear, a sharp-edged instrument called Pattīsa, bow, chowrie, goad, umbrella etc. on its body. 21 It is considered auspicious if the marks are found in the limbs such as sides, buttocks, neck, throat, bosom, chins, scrotum, belly, feet, nails, tusks, tail, central part of the body, trunk, head, the part between the forehead and the temples, the part between the tusks, joints and the sensitive parts.

19. Gā, 8.48-50
20. Ibid., 9.1-4
21. Ibid., 9.12-16
If the marks are found in the rest of the limbs of its body, it is inauspicious.\(^{22}\)

The colour of the tusks, the smell coming out of the tusk at the time of cutting and the spots appearing in the cross-sections of the tusk were also objects of superstitions in the society. The elephant whose tusks have a colour like that of honey and soil is a favourable one and one having ash, or grey coloured tusks is considered inauspicious.\(^{23}\)

If the tusks, when cut, smell like Candana (sandal wood), Agaru and newly wet earth then it indicates victory and prosperity of the state and gain of land. If they smell like the flowers Pátala, and Utpala and Padma, it should be recognized as the indication of general auspiciousness. If the smell is like that of a garland then that is an indication of the gain of wealth in the near future. When the smell is like that of dry cow-dung then that is an indication for the rise of bovine wealth.\(^{24}\)

If on the other hand, the smell is like that of pus or blood, it indicates a danger. Similarly a smell like that of a dead body, indicates a great danger in the form of a famine or epidemic in the state.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{22}\) Gś, 9.17-19

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 10.45-46

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 10.47-49

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 10.49-50
If the marks of ornament, Svastika (the celebrated Svastika symbol) and mirror appear in the cross-section of the tusk, that should bring success in an expedition. Marks of a palace, a weapon called Sakti, a tree called Sṛīvrksa or the mystic symbol called Varsha should imply victory in the war and expansion of the kingdom. The mark of a bed implies gain of a woman and continued pleasure of the mind. The signs of crocodile, snail, conch-shell, lotus and lily should indicate a general prosperity. An oily or depressed cross-section should indicate the loss of territory. A mark like a blue flower indicates a great danger. Signs of smoke-coloured flowers indicate the loss of the vehicles of the king. Marks of monkey, boar and the black cobra indicate the loss of the kingdom. 26

Elephants having the marks of coral, pearl, diamond, and lapis-lazuly are worthy of worship. Marks of Śrīvrksa, Varsha, Chatra (umbrella), Dvaja (banner), Cāmara (chowrie) seen in the cross-section bring forth victory, wealth, prosperity and happiness. Weapon-like marks indicate victory and the marks of whirlpool indicate regain of lost territories. 27 When the sign is like a Praharana (a weapon), the result ends in victory. The sign of a Nadyāvarta (whirlpool) signifies gaining of a lost country, and Losta (stone)

26. GŚ, 10.51-56
27. Ibid., 10.56-57
sign is for recovering a state lost previously.\(^{28}\)

The sign resembling a female figure is, for loss of wealth, a *bhṛṅgāra* (the fig-tree) is for the birth of a son, a *kumbha* (earth pitcher) is for gaining jewels, and a *danda* (stick) is for the troubles in the journey.\(^{29}\)

The signs of *kṛkalāsa* (lizard), *kapi* (monkey) and *bhujāṅga* (snake), bring forth drought, disease, and victory of the enemies. The signs of *grdhra* (jackal), *ulūka* (owl), *dhvāṅkṣa* (crow) and *śvēna* (falcon) are for the death of the people, signs of *pāśa* (goad) and *kavandha* (headless trunk or comet) indicate the death of the king.\(^{30}\)

If the cutting of the tusks causes blood-shed, and if the blood is blackish, dirty and odorous, the incation is for inauspicious happenings.\(^{31}\)

The operation of these superstitions is also seen at the time of the selection of the royal elephants. The elephants having reddish-brown lips, face and palate, eyes like those of a sparrow, equal and prominent tusks, a developed and bow-shaped back-bone, temples shaped like tortoise, thick and nice hair, prominent nails numbering from eighteen to twenty, a well-shaped trunk marked by three circular

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28. BS, 94.3
29. Ibid., 94.4
30. Ibid., 94.5-6
31. Ibid., 94.6
wrinkles, a long figure, a voice like that of a waterful cloud and whose ichor and breath smell like lotus is only fit to be kept with the king.  

On the contrary the elephant which lacks in ichor and excitement, possesses more than twenty and less than eighteen nails, small and crooked tusks, a visible penis, a trunk of varied colours, and which is small in structure or tuskless or is devoid of generative potentiality or a female one possessing the qualities of a male elephant or looking like pregnant should be abandoned.  

An interesting superstition regarding the birth of the four classes of the elephant viz. Bhadra, Manda, Mrśa and Miśra were born in respective four Yugas viz. Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali. In the course of creation as described in the Mārkandeyapurāṇa the elephant is said to be created at the beginning of the Tretā Yuga and was regarded as wild animal.

3. Position of the elephant in Buddhism and Jainism:

The elephant is endowed with religious value in the eastern countries like India, Burma, Syam, Malaysia and Combodia etc. Numerous tales relating to the elephant are found in the literary works of these countries and through

32. BS, 67.6-7
33. Ibid., 67.9-10
34. Ibid., 67.1-4
these stories the honest and dignified nature of the elephant is depicted very beautifully. The Buddhist Alīnacītta Jātaka contains a story about an elephant and his son. The elephant was grateful to some carpenters who extracted a thorn from his foot. So he and his son rendered service to the carpenters out of gratitude. After the death of the elephant his son was sold to the king and this young one also saved the kingdom from the enemies after the death of the king. The elephant is an emblem of endurance and self restraint for the Buddhists. Buddha himself is called Nāga, the elephant or Mahānāga, the great elephant. The reason of this name is that Buddha was a Sudanta (well tamed like an elephant). He descended from the Heaven in the form of an elephant to be born on earth. 35

According to the Chāddanta Jātaka story, Lord Buddha in one of his previous births as a Bodhisattva assumed the form of an elephant named Chabbisāṇa (Sans. Sadvisāṇa). His feet and face were red and his big tusks which were silvery, used to emit six coloured rays. He lived with his two wives Culasubhaddā and Mahasubhaddā in the Golden Mountain near the lake Chaddanta in the Himalayas. One day he struck with his globes the branches of a Šola tree (shorea robusta) blooming fully in the north west corner of the lake. At this moment

Culasubhaddā stood to the windward and Mahasubhaddā in the leeward under the tree. So dry twigs mixed with dead leaves and red ants fell upon Culasabhaddā's person and on the other hand, flowers with pollen and stalks fell on Mahāsubhaddā's person. Culasubhaddā considered it to be a partiality of her husband towards Mahāsubhaddā and then conceived a grudge against her husband. Again one day Chabbisāṇa presented to Mahāsubhaddā a large lotus flower with seven shoots offered to him by an elephant. Then also Culasubhaddā could not tolerate this and thus again conceived a grudge against her husband. One day when Bodhisattva was entertaining his five hundred Pacceka buddhas, Culasubhaddā offered them some wild fruits and prayed so that she might be reborn as a royal maiden, Subhaddā, in the royal family of Madda and be the queen of Benares. Accordingly she became so in her next birth. One day she pretended to be sick and told her husband that she had seen in her dream a big six-tusked white elephant which had a herd of eight thousand elephants. She would be all right if she got the pair of tusks of that elephant. At her request and selection a hunter named Sonuttara was sent with all requisites to the forest where that dream elephant i.e. Chabbisāṇa lived. Sonuttara dug a big hole on the spot where Chabbisāṇa generally used to stand and thus making the elephant fall into the pit, the hunter tried to cut his tusks. When Chabbisāṇa came to know that his tusks were wanted by Subhaddā, the queen of Kāśī,
he immediately understood that she was no other than Culasubhaddā, his dead wife, and she in fact, wanted to kill him. He came close to the hunter and laid his head down so that the hunter could reach his tusks to cut off. The hunter climbed up the trunk of the elephant, stood up on the forehead, inserted his foot into his mouth and thrust the saw into his mouth. But even shifting about from place to place and making the animal suffer from excruciating pain, the hunter was not able to cut the tusks with his saw. Then Chabbisāṇa took the saw from the hunter with his trunk and moved it backwards and forwards and cut off the tusks and gave the same to the hunter. Then losing the tusks the omniscient Chabbisāṇa fell into death.

In conformity with this Jātaka story Māya, the mother of Buddha, is believed to have seen a white elephant, descending from the heaven in her dream and then to have conceived Buddha. Perhaps it is the reason of paying high esteem to the white elephant by the Buddhists.

Hindu kings keep elephants for the welfare of their subjects and to give a white elephant away would make the ruler very unpopular among his people. Buddha, as a Bodhisattva, was born as the prince of Viśvantara. He gave away the white elephant of his father's realm to a neighbouring country suffering from drought and famine. His subjects thereupon felt betrayed and forsaken, and forced him to exile. 36

36. Zimmer, H., Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p. 107
In the countries like Malaysia, Siam, Burma etc. the appearance of a white elephant is believed to bring fortune to the country and it is kept in the royal court with great respect. Its soul is regarded as that of a human being. If such an elephant is killed, the killer is punished severely, sometimes even punished to death. The death of such an elephant is mourned and funeral deeds are performed as in the case of a human being. \(^{37}\) 'The king of white Elephant' was the proudest title born by the old kings of Ava and Siam. \(^{38}\) In a Burmese superstition it was considered to bring prosperity to the country and victory in war. Therefore, their death was regarded as national calamity. At such time the entire nation shave their heads and perform such deeds of sorrow and mourning as was customary on their loss of nearest and dearest of their relatives.

Triśalā, the mother of Mahāvīra Jaina is also described to have had a dream of a four-tusked white elephant before she conceived Mahāvīra. \(^{40}\)

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38. *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, p. 328
4. The concept of the white elephant:

Although the cult of white elephant has enjoyed immense symbolic importance in the eastern countries, in fact, the whole conception of a white elephant appears to be a vague one. There is not a single work on the science of elephant that bears any testimony to the existence of a white-coloured elephant. However, legends and myths are there which give the impression of the Airavata, the vehicle of Indra as a white elephant. Sanskrit literature illustrates at least four different pure colours of the elephant viz. yellow, red, white and dark. But at the same time, it is also declared that all these coloured elephants, except the black one, are not found on earth. The skin of the so-called white elephant on earth is, in fact, not pure white in colour. It is an ordinary specimen with some white patches in some parts of its body such as the edges of the ears, tip of the trunk, nails etc. One such white elephant is described by Frank Vincent in his work *The Land of the White Elephant* as: "The Mandalay animal I found to be a male one of medium size, with white eyes and a forehead and ears spotted white, appearing as if they had been rubbed with pumica-stone or

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41. B, 3.28.24
42. HA, 3.8.24-29
ML, 8.15
sandal paper, but the remainder of the body was 'as black as coal',"^{43} From the medical point of view this may be an effect of the humour kapha, when it is more in the body of the elephant. Sometimes due to its pink and yellow coloured eyes and reddish hair, it is distinguished from other elephants.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, it can be concluded that the white elephant is more or less a product of imagination.

5. The elephant in Hinduism:

The elephant also plays a significant part in the Hindu religion. It is regarded as a vehicle of Indra, the god of heaven, and also of Viśvakarman, the divine artisan. The greatest evidence of high esteem for the elephant in the Hindu religion is that Gāṇeśa, one of the Hindus' most popular gods, is depicted as an elephant-headed god in each of his numerous expressions. He is worshipped at a wide range throughout India in different representations. Various names are attributed to Gāṇeśa such as Gaṇapati, Gaṇanāyaka, Vighnesā, Vighnesvāra, Vighnakṛt, Vighnāri, Ekadanta, Gajadanta, Adanta, Vakradanta, Śūrpakarna, Śaṅkukarna, Samukha, Karimukha, Gajānana, Tilocana, Mahānanda, Āmoda, Niraṇjana, Dvijihva, Dviraṇḍaka, Vṛṣabhadvaja, Akhuratha, Kaparṇī, Pramodaka, Dwimātura, Grāhagaja, Mṛtamūrti, Śivottama, Puravīra, Ekapāda, Varadā, Vāmdeva, Sanānī,

\textsuperscript{43} Frank, Vincent, \textit{The Land of the White Elephant}, p. 65
\textsuperscript{44} GŚ, 8.35
HA, 3.8.26,29
Gramani, Matta, Vimada, Mattavahaka, Jati, Manji, Khafigi, Varenya, Vaksapriya, Meghanada, Vapi, Dvidehaka, Siddhidatta, Lambodara, Lambakarna, Heramba etc. and all the names prove the extreme popularity and the deep regard of the Hindus towards this god. Ganesa was regarded as the leader of the ganas of Siva under the name of GanapatI and he became a popular deity towards the 10th century A.D. He is considered to be the first deity to be invoked at the beginning of every type of undertaking: such as ceremonial sacrifices, business affairs, literary compositions, journeys and building of houses, so that he may not create any obstacle but remove all the troubles and give a successful end. He is regarded as a god of prudence and policy, a patron of learning and as a good scribe. Tradition says that it was Ganesa who under the dictation of Vyasa wrote the whole Mahabharata at a stretch.

The image of Ganesa is described by various writings, sculptures, carvings etc. in various ways. It is generally described as to have possessed a dwarfish form with an elephant head, pot-belly, stumped legs, and bulgy girth. He wears serpent threads and uses a mouse or a lion as his vehicle. He is depicted in different postures such as sitting,

45. Thomas, P., Epics Myths and Legends, p. 25
46. Astava-kavacamalag (Ganesashottaradatanama-strotvam), Vasumati-fahitya Mandir
standing and dancing with various number of head and hands carrying different things in hands like battle-axe, goad noose, sweet-cake, tusk, snake, lotus flower etc. 47

The thread and the instrument goad which are often seen to be wielded by Ganesa are signs to prove that the deity was formerly worshipped as a propitiatory measure to protect devotees from any harm that might come from wild elephants. This further suggests that the worship of Ganesa was originally a practice of worshipping the elephant which probably arose in regions infested with wild elephants. 48

There is a variety of legends accounting for the birth and the elephant head of Ganesa. One is that, Pārvatī, out of fondness for her child asked Sāni to look at her child forgetting the effect of Sāni's glance. At the glance of Sāni, the head of Ganesa fell down on earth. 49 To pacify Pārvatī in her distress, Lord Kṛṣṇa replaced the head with the head of the king-elephant Airāvata. 50

Another story stages that Pārvatī keeping her son at the door to prevent Śiva from entering, went to her bath. Śiva wished to enter and was opposed by Ganesa and being

47. Sen, A., Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art, Plate No. XI, XII, XIII
48. Ibid., p. 18
49. BP, Ganesākhaṅda, 12.1-7
50. Ibid., 20.51-62
wild with rage he cut off the head of Ganesa and to pacify Pārvatī he replaced it with an elephant head.\textsuperscript{51}

Another idea is that Pārvatī made him (Ganesa) to suit her own will. It is also stated that Ganesa lost his head due to the curse of Kāśyapa and this was replaced by the head of Indra’s elephant. The episode of the loss of one tusk is also represented by the legend which states that Parasūrāma, who came to Kailāsa to visit Śiva, was opposed by Ganesa to enter as his (Ganesa’s) parents were lying asleep at that time. Parasūrāma being enraged broke the tusk of Ganesa with his axe. Thus Ganesa has one tusk and is known as Ekadanta.\textsuperscript{52}

Ontologically the image of Vināyaka conveys the idea of kingly auspiciousness. The head of an elephant is an emblem of royalty and has signified the victory and success. The royal seal accompanying the copper-plate grants of ancient Kamarupa Kings invariably bears the figure of an elephant head.\textsuperscript{53} The elephant is a symbol of strength

\textsuperscript{51} J.Banasarthita, Chapters 18-34
\textsuperscript{52} BP, Ganesākhandā, 43.10-19
\textsuperscript{53} Sharma, M.M., ‘Inscriptions of Ancient Assam,’
Plate No. xi (Dubi Plates)
Plate No. xii (Parvatīa Plates, Bunch)
Plate No. xiii (Parvatīa Plates, Seal)
Plate No. XLV (Guvāmuchi CP Grant of Indrapāla)
Plate No. LIII & LIV (Khanāmukh CP Grants of Dharmapāla)
Plate No. LXIV (Puṣpabhadra Grant of Dharmapāla)
wisdom, prudence, sagacity, success, forbearance, peace and happiness. Even the vision of an elephant brings the worthy fortune for the king.  

Ganésá, the bestower of success, bears the omens of all these attributes fit for a king and can remove the obstacles. To express his capacity on all these spheres his head is imagined in the form of that of an elephant, the auspicious, royal and venerable animal.

6. Different terms for the elephant:

The elephant is known in the literature by the names Dantavala, DvIrada, Viśāṇīn, Radanin, DvIpā, Dīrghamāruta, Drumārī, Padmin, Pīlu, Piṇḍapāda, Pañcanakhā, Puṣkarin, Pecila, Vilomajihva, Varanvya, Liṅgin, Latālaka, Mātaṅga, Mataṅgaja, Mahāmṛga, Mahāmada, Mahāvala, Stambherama, Starama, Sindura, Sāmaja, Sinduratilaka, Sāmayonī, Śūrpakarna, Śṛṅgārī, Saṣṭhihāyaṇa, Kuṇjara, Karī, Kataki, Karena, Kumbhi, Karṇikī, Aṣṭaprabharaṇa, Karabha, Anekapa, Ibha, Antahsveda, Nāga, Jalakaṇki, Vāraṇa, Rājīva, Bhadra, etc. These names are given to the elephant according to its mental and physical dispositions. It is called DvIrada, Viśāṇīn, Radanin for having tusks; Dīrghamāruta for its capacity to take a long breath; Anekapa and DvIpā for its habit of drinking 

54. Gā, Supplement, vv. 1-10

Ibid., Preface, p. 7
in two ways — by the mouth and by the trunk; Drumārī for attacking the trees; Padmin for its fondness towards lotus; Pāncanaṁha for its five nails like the animals Saśaka, Sallakī, Godhā, Khaḍgī and Kūrma; Puṣkarin for having puṣkara at the tip of the trunk; Pecila for having a pecaka i.e. a tail, Vilomajihva for having its tongue turned back; Vāraṇa for guarding the world; Līṅgin for having a subtle body; Mahāṁrga for its big size, Mahāmada for possessing large quantity of ichor, Mahāvāla for having great strength; Stambharama for its liking for grass; Sāmaṇonī and Sāmaja for its origin at the time of chanting the sāmanas by Brahman; Sūratakarna for having big ears like a winnowing basket, Sūṅgārī for its amorous nature; Saṭṭhihāvana for its longevity upto sixth stage; Gaja for its roarings; Karī for having a hand; Kaṭī and Kaṭakī respectively for its temples and its sides like that of a mountain; Aṣṭapraharana due to its attacking with eight limbs; Karabha for its trunk resembling a hand; Karatī for its cheeks, Antaḥsveda for its internal sweating; Nāga for living in the mountain and for going everywhere; Rājīva for moving in a heard; Jalakāṅkṣya for having special attraction for water; Bhadra for being an auspicious animal; and Mataṅgaja for its origin by the sage Mataṅga.
The representations of the elephant through seals, plates, wooden and stone carvings, paintings and literature have been found to be common in both the eastern and western countries from a remote early period. In India a large number of seals and copper plates of the pre-Indus Valley civilization period bear the evidence of popularity of this animal like the bull. From these representations no religious attachment of the elephant to the society can be inferred in that period. It can be deduced that popularity of this animal in the society was due to its gigantic figure and its physical strength. The symbol of elephant in some amulets of that period was perhaps a propitiatory measure.

In many copper plates of the Sunga, the early Andhra, and the early Buddhist periods, the elephant is depicted in various styles. It is depicted as seen in a dream by Māyā, the mother of Buddha.\(^{55}\) Śrī or Lakṣmī is shown to be taking a bath being assisted by two elephants.\(^{56}\) The association of a pair of elephants with the figure of the goddess Lakṣmī is a feature of the Buddhist art in the second and first centuries B.C.\(^ {57}\) A Yakṣi is shown to be standing on an elephant,\(^ {58}\) a creeper is also depicted to be coming out

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56. Ibid., Plate No.V
57. Zimmer, H., *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, p.102
of the mouth of an elephant.\(^{59}\)

The association of the elephant with goddess Lakṣmī and the creeper, gives an impression that the elephant was regarded as a 'life giving force' of the nature. The idea is that Śrī or Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune, is bathing in the water of life to maintain the vegetative world, i.e., the agriculture, alive.\(^{60}\) In the early ritual devoted to rain god for the fertility of crops, fecundity of cattle and man, and the general welfare of the kingdom, the white elephant, so constantly associated with the goddess Lotus, plays a significant and conspicuous role. In one chapter of the fourth \(ṣṭhāna\) of the \(Hastāyuvṛṣe\)da, there is a description of such a festival. An elephant is painted white with sandal paste and then led in procession through the capital. Its attendants are men wearing women's dress and making merry with clownish, salacious remarks and witticisms. The elephant is finally worshipped by the high officials of the realm, both civil and military.\(^{61}\) A similar idea can be conceived from the representation of the creeper issuing out of the mouth of the elephant. The idea indicating that an elephant in dream forecasts the conception in a womanhood has been pointed out by the dream of queen Māyā. The elephant

\(^{59}\) Sen, A., *Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art*, Plate No.VII
\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 14
\(^{61}\) HA, 4.22
was, sometimes, shown as a Vāhana of the goddesses. This idea was also present among the lower-stratum of society and it is evidenced by the plate where a Yakṣa female is standing on an elephant.

In the wooden and stone carvings, the elephant has been depicted, specially in the east, for decorative and religious purposes whereas in the western art, the elephant symbolizes power and longevity. The figure of the elephant is seen to be carved in the walls of most of the Hindu temples in the east and that of the tusked-elephant is found to be engraved in the rocks, in the wood, and the walls of the caves in the west.

The representation of the elephant in the sculptures, for religious purposes, is in the figuring of the elephant-headed god Ganesa in the walls of many temples.

8. Decorative use of elephant:

Another artistic representation of the elephant for decorative purpose is in the ceremonial processions. Elephants were used to increase the beauty and the gravity of the processions which were, generally, taken out at the time of coronations of the princes, marriage celebrations and

62. Sen, A., Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art, p. 16
63. Sillar, F.C., Elephants Modern and Ancient, Chap. 14
social functions. Draperies of the elephants, used for this purpose, were made of costly ornaments and clothes and the skin of the elephant was painted nicely to increase the splendour.

9. Elephant in Vedic Literature:

Apart from the visual art, the elephant has been, very frequently, mentioned in the literature. The use of the terms *mrgahastin* 64, *hastin* 65, and *vārana* 66 in Vedas proves the familiarity of the Vedic people with this animal. *Mrgahastin* meaning an animal having a hand, might have denoted an elephant. Here *hastin* is used as an adjective to the term *mrga*. The use of the term *hastin* as a proper noun to denote an elephant is a later development. In the beginning of the Vedic period, people regarded the elephant as a wild beast.

64. *RV*, i.64.7
   iv.16.14
   *AV*, xii.1.25

65. *AV*, i.11.22.3;
   iv.36.9;
   vi.36.2;
   70.2;
   xii.1.32

66. *MS*, i.11.14.8
   *VS*, xxiv.29
   *TS*, v.5.11.1
   *P.BR.*, vi.8.3

66. *RV*, viii.33.8;
   x.40.4
and praised its strength and virility and there is no clue of using this animal in any kind of work in that period. Due to having the trunk which serves as a hand, the elephant is ranked with man and monkey in the Vedas. The use of the term hastins which means an elephant gives an idea that the elephant was tamed and domesticated towards the later part of the Vedic period and the tamed elephants were used to catch other elephants and not for any other purpose.

10. Elephant in the Puranic Literature:

Three consecutive chapters (viz. 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4) of the Brhadbhagavatapurana contain description of a fight between an alligator (Graha) and a chief tusker (Gajendra) and finally the emancipation of the alligator and the freedom of the tusker from the grip of the alligator. The tusker lived in the mountain Trikuta of beautiful scenic grandeur situated in the sea of milk (Kairasagara). One day the elephant was playing with other elephants in the transparent and nectarine water of the lake situated in that mountain. While playing in that lake with the she-elephants with great joy, the elephant became intoxicated with passion and thus he was deprived of good sense by the illusory will (maya).}

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67. RV, loc. cit
68. Ibid., vi.70.2
69. VS, xxx.11
70. Bh.P., 8.2.26
and could not know that he was caught by a danger leading to death. A great alligator which lived in that lake caught him (the elephant) by the leg in a fury instigated by fate. Having fallen into this mishap, the mighty elephant put forth all his strength to free himself from the alligator. Other elephants also tried their best to free their leader from the grip of the alligator, but they could not succeed. The elephant and the alligator were thus engaged in pulling each other respectively from inside and outside of the water of the lake for one thousand years, but neither of them was dead. All celestials got marvelled to find them still alive. The mental vigour, strength and energy of the great elephant were, however, exhausted by the long fighting in the water and as a result he was sinking. The reverse was happening to the alligator. Being unable to release himself, the elephant then realised that he was in a great peril threatening his life itself and then pondering for a long time he decided to place himself in the hands of the Supreme Lord Hari. Concentrating his mind upon his heart he started reciting the holy hymns which he learnt in his previous birth. Then Lord Hari, the soul of every being, came to the spot, dragged out both the animals, cut down the head of the alligator with His discus and delivered the elephant from the danger.

71. Bh.P., 8.2.29
A Gandharva named Huhu having been imprecated with curse by Devala was born in the form of an alligator and now he got free from the curse by the grace of Hari. On the other hand, the proud elephant was also liberated from the fetters of ignorance by the touch of the auspicious hands of Hari, and his body was transformed into the likeness of the Lord.

In his former birth the elephant was a sage king named Indradyumna and was devotedly attached to the worship of Viṣṇu. Once while he was engaged in the worship of Viṣṇu in the hermitage Kulascala, Agastya, the famous sage came to that hermitage. On seeing Indradyumna silently seated in solitude without paying him due homage, Agastya became enraged and imprecated a curse on Indradyumna by saying, "This is an evil and wicked creature with an un instructed mind. He is guilty of insulting Brahmans and immovable in his pride like the elephant and so, let him become one (elephant) and fall into the darkness of ignorance."

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72. Bh.P., 8.4.3
73. Bh.P., 8.4.6
74. Bh.P., 8.4.10
Indradyumna was reborn as an elephant. But even in this life he could recollect his past by virtue of the worship of Hari and so by the grace of Lord Hari, he became free from the alligator and got the high status as that of the Lord. The intention of introducing this symbolic scene of fight and emancipation of the chief tusker is to praise the grace of Lord Viṣṇu. It is not denied to the animal world and so the huge-bodied elephant, a symbol of pride, haughtiness, dignity etc. is easily caught by the alligator, a symbol of fetter of ignorance, but was freed by the grace of Lord Hari.

This interesting scene is depicted by the later literateurs in different languages. Sankaradeva, the great Vaiṣṇava preacher and writer of Assam describes this episode of Graha-gajendra in the Kirtana very beautifully.

Graha, i.e. alligator is mentioned as one of the fifteen causes of death to the wild elephants. From this point of view also the capturing of the elephant's leg by an alligator is significant.

11. Elephant in epic literature:

The ancestors of the elephants are described in the epics to be of divine nature and the vehicles of the Lokapālas i.e. the World-Protectors. Originally the ancestors

75. Hā, 1.3.12-13
76. Hopkins, E.W., Epic Mythology, p. 18
were only four and they were regarded as the mythological guardians of the quarters. The four original ancestors were Airāvata, Vāmana, Aṅjana and Supratīka or Sārvabhauma. But Mahāpadma is also named among these four tusked steeds. Sārvabhauma is the vehicle of god Kuvera and Airāvata is of Indra. The sons of Sagara while digging the earth in search of their missing horse saw Virūpākṣa, supporting the earth on the East, Mahāpadma in the south, Saumanas in the West and Bhadra in the North. They are called diggajas or disāgajas. They are described as living in Himavat. The theory of creation in the Rāmāyaṇa describes Śvetā and Mātaṅgi as the mothers of the space elephants.

Airāvata is also mentioned as Airāvana in the Rāmāyaṇa. It is described as the son of Irāvatī. Another and totally different account of the origin of Airāvata and his consort Abhramu, appears in the celebrated myth of the churning of

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77. R, 1.6.24
78. Ibid., 4.36.61
79. Ibid., 3.28.24
80. Ibid., 1.3.12-21
81. Ibid., 1.40.30
82. Ibid., 1.41.7
83. Ibid., 1.6.23
84. Hopkins, E.W., Epic Mythology, p. 200
the milky ocean (Dadhisaśara). After the gods and titans had labored at their task for a thousand years, a curious assortment of personifications and symbols began to arise out of the milk of the universe. Among earlier figures were the goddess Lotus and Airāvata. 85

The Airāvata, a four-tusked beautiful elephant, is the vehicle of god Indra who used it in times of fighting as well as at the time of taking a quiet journey. 86 The body of Rāvana is described to be marked by the strokes of the tusks of Airāvata in the battle. 87 Airāvata also helped Indra to rain on earth by drawing up water from the underworld for Indra. 88 It is of white colour and is accompanied by two females. 89

A considerable importance is attached to the elephant Supratīka in the epic literature. It is regarded even as the ancestor of Airāvata, Vāmana, Kumuda and Añjana and is judged as the best among the four chief elephants. 90 It belongs to the north and is ridden by Kuvera. 91

85. MBh., 1.18.40
86. Zimmer, H., Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, ed. by J. Campbell, Bollingen Series, VI, p. 105
87. MBh., X. 26
88. MBh., 5.10.15
89. Ibid., 5.99.7
90. Ibid., 5.99.15
91. Hopkins, E.W., Epic Mythology, p. 126
The name of the elephant ridden by king Bhagadatta in the Mahābhārata war was Supratīka. This elephant showed seven temporal glands instead of three in the battlefield. But the identity of this Supratīka with the ancestor elephant Supratīka is not shown anywhere.

Classifications of the elephants are also made in the Rāmāyana. Numerous references to the elephant in this epic prove the popularity and importance of the elephant in the society of that time. Wild elephants were captured with the help of trained elephants by making them to fall in artificial pits. Practice of riding an elephant was a part of learnings for the prince. There are copious references showing that elephants formed a regular arm of the army in the army in the time of Vālmīki. At Ayodhyā there was an independent elephant unit and ten thousand elephants with full military accoutrements are said to have followed Bharata in his march to Citrakūta. Rāma considered it to be a duty of a king that he should personally see the elephants everyday in the morning and in the evening.

92. [Mbh., 6.95, 24
93. R., 1.6.25
94. Ibid., 5.43.20
   Ibid., 5.90.44-46
95. Ibid., 2.3.18
96. cf. daśa nāgasahasrāṇi kalpitāni yathāvidhi
   R., 2.94.3
elephants were provided with food.\textsuperscript{97} To capture elephants the king occasionally undertook an expedition to the forest.\textsuperscript{98} Elephants were trained for the purpose of war also. In Lanka, Hanumān had seen trained elephants which were invincible in the war by foes and capable of crushing hostile elephants.\textsuperscript{99}

12. **Elephant in the Classical literature**:

The poets of classical period also mention the elephant frequently in their compositions. In the description of the nature, the elephant is regarded as an excellent object by them. Their effort to depict a rāttān-elephant is remarkable.\textsuperscript{100} The sharp-smelled ichor of the elephant enhances the charm of the forests in the eyes of the poets. The sharp-smell of ichor of the elephant is like that of the juice of Saptacchada flower.\textsuperscript{101} The black-bees are enchanted by the smell of ichor of the elephant.\textsuperscript{102} King Aja, while advancing towards the svayamvara of Indumati, could know the presence of the wild elephant by the cluster of black-bees overwhelming the bubbles rising to the surface of the water of river Narmada. This wild elephant was sage Priyaśvāda lying under a curse. It would be freed from the

\textsuperscript{97} R, 2.114.33
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 2.95.4
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 5.4.37-38
\textsuperscript{100} ŚV, 4.60; 5.33, 35-40
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 6.50
\textsuperscript{102} ŚV, 6.50
\textsuperscript{Raghu, 4.57
curse when its temples would be pierced by the touch of Aja’s weapon and that is why it is waiting on the path of Aja. At the fearful sight of this runten elephant from whose temples there is oozing out ichor, the trained elephants and the horses of Aja are hurrying away out of fear. The elephant is injured all over its body by the rocks of the mountain due to its playful butttings against the hill. Its tusks are also torn by the strikes against the rocks. Raising and lowering its trunk, frequently, and screaming loudly, the elephant looks as if it is trying to break its chain. It stops discharging ichor for a while when it reaches the bank of the river by pulling the roots of water-lilies. But at the sight of the tamed elephants of Aja, it again starts discharging ichor. The army of Aja got frightened at the violent appearance of this elephant. King Aja slightly touched this runten with elephant his arrow. The king, who is seeking fortune, should not kill an elephant except in the battle-field, because the elephant is a symbol of royal fortune and wealth. That is why Aja slightly touched the elephant so that it may not die. Being grateful to Aja, Priyamvada, the cursed elephant, presented Aja an arrow called Sanmohana. Sanskrit poets were fond of often introducing such incidents involving elephants.

103. Raghu, 5.50
104. Ibid., 5.57
105. Abh.ś, act I, v.33
The colour of ichor is blue and reddish. Its smell is very sharp and pungent. The water of the river Kaveri was rendered fragrant when the armies of Raghu took bath in the river. Its water was rendered fragrant because the bodies of the armies were besmeared with the ichor of the elephants they rode in the battle. The elephant discharges ichor at the sight of rival elephants. Discharging of ichor in the elephant's body is necessary as it makes the elephant angry and excited enough to fight with full spirit. The activities of an angry king are compared to those of a wrathful elephant.

The huge body of the elephant is compared to a mountain. The falling of ichor is compared to the waterfalls in the mountain. The elephant is often compared to a cloud due to its colour, shape and voice. The piece of cloud sometimes appears in the poet's eye to be an elephant engaged in playful butttings against the hill.

Airāvata is described to be a divine elephant having beautiful bodily splendour. The beauty of sage Nārada is even

106. ŚV, 3.27
107. Ṛṣiśrī Rāghu, 4.45
108. Ibid., 5.47
109. ŚV, 1.55
110. Ibid., 5.31
111. ŚV, 12.29
13.5 cf. vapakriḍāparinātajapreksanīyam adarsa MD, pūrvamegha, v.2
compared to that of Airāvata. The ancestors of the elephant are called dik-gajas. They used to roam about in all directions in ancient time. Once being beaten by the elephants of Rāvana they used to stay in their respective directions and then only the term diggaja came to be applied to them. Since then they stopped discharging ichor.

The steady movement of the king is compared to the stately gait of an elephant. The beautiful thighs of a lady are also compared to the trunk of the elephant. Sanskrit literature contains descriptions of the coronation of princes when the princes visited the cities riding on elephants.

The enjoyment of elephant-fighting called vāhyālivinoda was considered an important enjoyment and pastime for the kings. The Mānasollāsa describes widely about this enjoyment in the chapter called Hastīvinoda.

In the field of music, and writings on love the elephant is given an important place. In the metrical works also there is a metre named Gajagati which should literally mean the

112. ṢV, 1.8
113. Ibid., 1.64
114. Raghu, 3.37
115. Raghu, 4.4; 17.32

YC, Chap. II, p. 495
116. Mānasag, 4.3
gait of an elephant. One of the four classes of women is also called Hastini.

In the broad and universal sense the elephant is a symbol of strength and of the vital energy. According to Indian tradition, elephants are the bearer of kings and queens. Because of their round shape and grey colour, they are regarded as symbols of cloud. A mountain top or a piece of cloud, elephant-like in outline, could represent an axis of the universe; and perhaps for this idea people use this animal as an emblem of wisdom, of moderation, of eternity and also of pity.

13. Elephant in the field of architecture:

In the field of architecture also the elephant is not left out. The Bhratasamhitā and various Purāṇas mention buildings which are built in the shape of the back of an elephant. Widows were also constructed in the shape of the eye of the elephant. The temples, specially the Śiva temples, had

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117. cf. nabhalagā gajagatiḥ,

118. cf. sthūladhārā stūlanitambabimbā sthūlāṅgulīḥ sthūlacūṣā susilā kāmotuka gādharatipriyā ca nitaṁtabhokṭrī khalu hastini syāt. Ratimanjari


120. AP, chap. CIV, vv.19-20
    GP, chap. XLVII, vv.29-30
    Indian Antiquity, Vol. XII, p. 104-105
halls shaped like an elephant's back. The temples of Maniamañgalam, Sumanagalam, Pennagalam etc. can be mentioned here. The staircases were also built sometimes in the shape of the trunk of an elephant.  

The Brhadārāṇava prescribes the making of seats and bedstead with various woods studed with ivory or in combination with ivory for auspicious reasons.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing survey and exposition of the writings in the Sanskrit language bearing on an elephant should perhaps convincingly show as to how rich, extensive and penetrating the elephant lore in Sanskrit was. Capturing and taming of elephants is still a living art and this queer animal has never ceased to lose its importance despite tremendous progress in technology; for, the elephant is still now largely demanded as a beast of burden, as a decorative piece for religious or secular processions and as a popular show of the zoological gardens. But yet the large band of men directly dealing with the elephant all over India is hardly acquainted with any of the Sanskrit treatises on elephantology. These men, directly concerned with the capturing, taming and care of the elephants, acquire their knowledge and skill from verbal

121. Manasāra, p. 141
122. PS, 79.19
instructions and practical training imparted by respective professional predecessors. Thus the Sanskrit works remained far out of the reach of the men of the trade for the last several centuries.

In course of time, however, for obvious reasons, the Sanskrit texts had to make room for adoptations in regional languages, and one such adoption is known to us under the style of Hastividyarnava in Assamese. It is composed in prose by Sukumar Barkath under the patronage of the Ahom king Siva Singha and his queen Ambika Devi, with multi-coloured paintings drawn by artists Dilbar and Dosai in saka 1656 (A.D. 1734). But the multiple copying of such an illustrated manuscript must have been quite a formidable task in those days when there was no printing mechanism. Probably that is why there arose the tradition of writing more convenient smaller treatises in Assamese which are generally known as Hatiyipthis.124

To-day the learned world has once again started taking interest in the traditional works obviously for their own intrinsic worth. This interest is evidenced by the International Conference of Traditional Medicines held in the Australian National University in the month of September 1977. Under such circumstances it may be hoped that more vigorous and penetrating researches in the domain of the elephant lore in Sanskrit literature would yield more and more useful results.

123. Hastividyarnava, Publication Board, Assam, 1976
124. Stracey, P.D., Elephant Gold, p. 42