

An Elephant (Gaja) in Ancient Indian Art- A Preliminary Survey

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ABSTRACT

India is a land of elephants. There are two types of elephants in the world, African and Asian. Compared to Asian Elephants, African Elephants ear and tusk are much bigger and even the size of Asian Elephant is smaller than the African Elephant. In Ancient Indian Arts, elephant depiction comes from Indus civilization art and the journey still continues. After Indus Art, chronologically chalcolithic, megalithic, early historic period, *Maurya-sunga* period, *kushana* period, *gupta-vakatka* periods, elephants can be seen in art. Elephant depiction comes in various forms during different periods. The context of depiction of elephant in art is also different as a natural animal, as a *vahana* or carrier, in war scene as a fighter, on Buddhist *stupas*, in *jataka* stories as a load carrier. Elephant shape amulets and beads show that the society has a faith on elephants.

The journey of elephant in ancient Indian art between Indus civilizations (4th cen B.C.) to Gupta period (4th cen A.D.) can be seen in this article. The chronologically continuation of elephant depiction in various mediums is consider in the article. Also he comes in art with different context such as religious, natural animal, political, economical etc. Elephant is a symbol of strength, stability, protection because of these qualities and his nobleness he got important position in Ancient Indian art. This we can see from the evidences in sculptures, paintings etc.

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