Elephant: As a Royal Mount

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ABSTRACT

Elephants, in Indian culture, especially in Hinduism, are the most widely worshipped. In fact, the Hindu god deity is Lord *Ganesha* – 'The Elephant God'. *Ganesha*, as he is commonly called, is an elephant-headed god who has an extensive legend. He represents royalty, power, wisdom, fertility and longevity. He is considered to be the 'remover of obstacles' and a 'bestower of prosperity'. Ganesha is also called *Ganapati*. '*Ga*' means 'knowledge', '*na*' means 'salvation', and '*pati*' means 'lord'.

Since time immemorial elephants have been inherently associated with human life, especially in Indian culture. Hindus have worshiped elephants for centuries, and this gigantic animal has also enjoyed tremendous popularity and a prestigious status in other parts of South Asia as well. Even now, many Indian temples and festivals demonstrate the significant role of elephants. In Kerala, richly decorated elephants carry the deity during annual festival processions in the temples. These elephants are loved, revered, groomed and given a prestigious place in the state's culture. They are the living embodiment of power, strength, wisdom and royalty. In ancient times, elephants were also the essential part of any battle or war, they served as royal transport which is evident through numerous miniatures of the Mughal period. They were also used in armies as living tanks and troop carriers. Elephants have also been closely associated with Indian weddings and other grand processions. Elephants have always been pillars of Indian life and culture.

This paper will dwell on various aspects of the relationship between elephants and humans since time immemorial and how an animal has been symbolized as a royal mount.