

## **Critical Examination of Elephant Participation in Buddhist and Hindu Religious Festivals in Sri Lanka**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Elephants are traditionally participating almost all religious festivals of both Buddhist and Hindu religious festivals in Sri Lanka. Most important religious places such as Tooth Relic Temple (Dalada Maligawa), Kelaniya Temple, Gangarama Temple, Devinuwara Maha Devalaya, Kataragama Maha Devalaya and many other ancient temples perform their festivals with the help of of beautifully decorated elephants.

According to Hindu mythology elephants are regarded as Lord Ganesha or Elephant God. Elephant God or Ganesha is believed to be very intelligence and clever God. More than five thousand years Hindu believers had great respect for Elephants participation in their festivals.

Also Hindus believe that some rare elephant carries special kind of Gems called (Gaja Muthu). Ivory is also one of the important rare wealth elephants posses.

Elephants are playing very important role in Buddhist Festivals. During the Esala Perahera of Dalada Maligawa or Tooth Relic Temple arrange nearly hundred elephants to participate for their Peraheras. Special tusker will carry tooth relic casket with other elephants in the streets of Kandy city. There is an Elephant Museum to respect the elephant called Rajha, in Kandy. He has given great service carrying Tooth Relic Casket during the festival season. Respect for Elephants dates back to 2500 years in ancient Buddhist History. Mahamaya Devi, mother of Siddhartha Gauthama experienced a dream of a white elephant. At the same time most venerated Dagoba, Ruwanveliseya boundary wall was erected with elephant carving at ancient capital city of Anuradhapura.

Thus elephants are playing very important role in religious festivals connected with Hinduism and Buddhism. Elephants never eat meat, live a longer life than any other animals and the biggest surviving animal in the earth.

***Key words:*** *Religious festivals, Dalada Maligawa, tuskers, Ganesh, Relic casket*

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