

Elephants their Habitats: Uses and Maintenance in Medieval India

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ABSTRACT

The growth of objective pictures of birds and animals, plants and flowers, etc., during the sixteenth-seventeenth century reflects the passion of the Mughal emperors for nature and wild life.

Akbar had as many as 101 elephants for his personal use, each given a name, an exalted position, trained staff for proper upkeep, special diet, *shikar*, sport including the elephant fight and for the battle field. There are numerous pictures of elephants in several historical, biographical, religious, and literary manuscripts illustrated for Akbar and other Mughal emperors in his memoirs and other official historical accounts like *Baburnama*, *Tuzuk-iJahangiri*, *Iqbalnama-iJahangiri*, *Majalis-iJahngiri*, *Ain-i Akbari*, *Akbarnama*, *Padshahnama*, *Shajahanama*, *Maasir-iAlamgiri*, *Ruqqat-iAlamgiri*, etc.

In 1616, Muqarrab Khan presented Jahangir with a small elephant brought from Abyssinia. Jahangir took notice of its peculiarities. He writes: "In comparison with the elephants of Hindustan, it presents some peculiarities. Its ears are larger than the ears of the elephants of this place, and its trunk and tail are longer."

Here, he also takes notice of a young elephant (African) presented to his father Akbar by Itimad Khan of Gujarat in the year 1567.

Both the Persian and the Mughal court provided a logical basis to the artist's acquaintance with animal character and behaviour. Among such works at the Mughal atelier, the most favourite texts were the *Anwar-iSuhaili*, the *Iyar-i Danish* and the *Ajaib-al Makhluqat* in which the animals are the main characters and an integral part of most of the themes. Numerous copies of these manuscripts repeatedly illustrated at the Mughal atelier during sixteenth century bear testimony to the depiction of wild-life.

The theme of animal fight mainly illustrates combats between cocks, goats, rams, deer, buffaloes, camels and elephants. These, as a matter of rule, show careful studies of animals engaged in violent action.

An attempt has been made in the research paper to use the text of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in perspective of ecology or the environment, to find out what was

the condition of elephants, their habitats, distributions, uses and maintenance during the medieval period.

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