

## **‘Elephant’ in Pali Literature**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The ‘elephant’ symbol is used to portray the conception of the Bodhisatta and His renunciation in Pali literature. The metaphors like ‘elephant look’ in the scriptures are compared with the Buddha's qualities. This directly relates to the thought in Buddhism that suffering is caused by the untamed mind. Elephants once tamed however, obey their masters far better than any other animal. Sometimes it describes how one overcomes this untamed evil by “binding the elephant with mindfulness” within a closed gate. The job of caging an elephant, as described in the poem *-I shall fasten you, mind, like an elephant at a small gate... When fastened, you will not go, like an elephant not finding the gate open (Theragāthā)* is not a small thing to be argued. By using an elephant as the key animal, he effectively pays homage to the challenging task of meditation. In Pali literature like Digha Nikāya ; Majjhima Nikāya; Dhammapada, Thera and Therīgāthā of Saṃyutta Nikāya , elephant is used as an innumerable metaphor from the story of birth to the life of the Buddha .

The Buddha had a special fondness for elephants adjudicating by how often he referred to them. He seems to have been impressed by their intelligence, their awareness, thoughtful behaviour and particularly the males' fondness for living alone in the jungle. He said: ‘On this matter the enlightened sage and the elephant with tusks as long as plough poles agree, they both love the solitude of the forest’ (Ud.42). In some ways the Buddha even considered elephants better than humans.

The paper would try to illuminate various types of similes of elephants used in Buddhism as well as Pali literature. The most popular parable of ‘the blind man and elephant’, the birth story of the Buddha given in Bharhut inscription or Chaddanta Jataka story would also be narrated in the example of allegory of elephants.

**Keywords:** *Elephant, Buddha, Buddhism, Pali literature, meditation.*

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