

Diversity of Elephants: with Reference to Pali Literature

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ABSTRACT

Pali literature uses multiple terms for elephants such as *gaja-nāga-hatthi-kuñjara-mātaṅga-ibha*. Nevertheless, the aforesaid terms have varied meanings in different contexts. The most famous term in Pali literature was “*hatthi*” while the term “*gaja*” is also significant. Apparently, the term *hatthi* was used in a sacred sense. Particularly, it appears with an adjective *ratana* – gem (*hatthiratana*). Nonetheless, the different terms stand for different meanings. In a deep study, it is found that the Pali commentaries namely differentiate the elephants into ten groups based on their powers. Especially, describing the bodily power of the Buddha, the Pali commentaries reveal that the Buddha had congenital power which is ten times the power of the elephant Chaddanta.

The clan Chaddanta is considered to be the tenth and the highest group of all kinds of elephants that appears in the commentaries. All ten groups, respectively are known as *kālāvaka gaṅgeyya, paṇḍara tamba piṅgalaṃ gandha maṅgala hema uposatha* and *chaddanta*. Though the texts note that these groups are recognized by their bodily power, any acceptable criteria has not been given to measure their energy. In this case, the certainty with which the elephants are grouped in Pali texts could be questioned. Therefore, this paper attempts to find possible meanings of the terms of ten groups and an authentic basis for grouping elephants in Pali literature.

Keywords: *Dasabala, hatthi, gaja, kuñjara*

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