

## Attributes of Elephants as Seen in Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā

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### ABSTRACT

‘Elephant’ in *pāli* as *hatthi*, *nāga* is known for its attributes. It is said that elephants have many additional attributes we humans lack; incredible long range infrasound, communicating in voices we never hear, such sophisticated hearing that even a footfall is heard far away, and, of course a memory that far surpasses ours and spans a lifetime. *Pāli Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā* highlights many of such attributes which can be studied along with the wonderful stories of the past life of Buddha that enhances their qualities. *Dummedha Jātaka*, *Samgāmāvacara jātaka*, *Upāhana Jātaka* are some of the *jātaka*-s which highlight the listening, learning, remembering capacity of the elephant. As seen in the verse about the elephant who was instructed to stand on two legs and the elephant stood on his two legs;

“*dvīhi purimapādehiyeva ṭhapehī*’’*ti āha,*

*mahāsatto dve pacchimapāde ukkhipitvā purimapādehi aṭṭhāsi*”

It is said that elephants display many other attributes of humans. They can be happy or sad, volatile or placid. They display envy, jealousy, throw tantrums and are fiercely competitive. They grieve deeply for lost loved ones, even shedding tears and suffering depression. These qualities can be seen from ‘*māti- posaka jātaka*’ where the elephant does not eat remembering his blind mother and at the same time the mother elephant laments missing her son who is caught by the king. Finally the king lets the elephant go saying,

“*Muñcathetaṃ mahānāgaṃ, yoyaṃ bharati mātaraṃ;*

*Sametu mātaraṃ nāgo, saha sabbehi ñātibhī*’’*ti.*”

Elephants also have a sense of compassion that projects beyond their own kind and sometimes extends to others in distress. They help one another in adversity. This paper is an effort to bring out some of the attributes of elephants as seen in the Pāli Jātaka aṭṭhakathā literature.

**Keywords:** *Jātaka aṭṭhakathā literature, attributes of elephants*

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