

Lion and Elephant Motif or Gaja-Simha and the Gajamauktikas

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ABSTRACT

The poetic verses devoted to the elephant-lion war in literature as well as in the epigraphs mention the final victory of the lion, and the lion gains the *Gajamauktika* - *Gajamuktā* or *Kunjaramāni*, the treasure of precious pearls of elephants. These lustrous and beautiful pearls are always described as being found in the forehead of elephants. These poetic conceptions of lion's victory over elephants, seen in classical Sanskrit literature and epigraphic records, seem to be the basis for the fight between the lion and the elephant in the later plastic art; the 'Gaja-Simha' motif. The motif is usually thought of as decorative in manner. However, it appears to be the metaphor of natural phenomenon of rain. The motif beautifully conveys the idea of rain bearing clouds, thunder and hailstone shower by using the metaphor of the lion as thunder, the elephant as rain cloud and hailstone showers as *Gajamauktika*, the mythical elephant-pearls. In this article, an attempt is made to understand different poetic, inscriptional, folk inspirations, and their symbolism which are reflected in the elephant-lion, the Gaja-Simha motif, mostly seen in the rock-cut architecture, temple architecture and also in other decorative embellishments.

Keywords: *Lion and Elephant motif, Gaja-Simha, Gajamauktikas*