

Asian Elephants in Christianity (India and Abroad)

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ABSTRACT

The Asian elephants have contributed to Indian religions in a great way especially with their representations in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain art. The contribution to a foreign religion, Christianity is evident but scarce in comparison with the religions which originated in the Indian sub- continent .This is merely because the theology of Christianity and its literature was already codified or in the process when the religion arrived in India. Thus from Biblical sources we get few references, not to the elephant itself, but to its valuable ivory. This for one indicates the value of the animal product – ivory, than the animal itself. The process of trade of Indian elephants and ivory continued in the period of first few centuries BCE and CE as part of Indo- Roman trade. The trade reduced with the decline of Indo- Roman trade and the preference for African elephants, despite the fact that Asian elephants could be trained better. Another reason was that Roman Circus's and gladiator fights went into disuse with the coming of Christianity in Rome. The Christian connection in India appears once again when Christians coming from Ancient Persia (Syria) were granted the privilege of riding an elephant amongst other luxuries, due to the community's importance in trade. The elephant connection with Rome and Christianity is re-established in the 16th Cen C.E when an Asian elephant 'Hanno 'is presented to the Pope. The role and impact of this elephant in life and death has been well documented, influencing many an artwork in Rome and beyond. In this paper the researcher aims at compiling the connection of the Asian (Indian) elephant with Christianity since biblical times, with this an attempt will also be made to study the context and impact of the elephant on the particular Christian communities with which it interacted.

Keywords: *Elephant, Asian, Christianity, Rome, Hanno.*

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