

Elephant Myths and Domestication of Elephants

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to trace and interpret certain stories about elephants in ancient Sanskrit literature that show the process of domestication of elephants. There are some stories highlighting the aspects of celestial origin and habitat of elephants. There are certain stories that bring heavenly elephants to the material world and present their prior wild nature changing into tamed humanized character. The wildness of elephants is depicted in the form of their malevolent character in such stories while their goodness can be seen in their tamed character. When such domesticated elephants were used in trade, warfare and other human activities, gradually they became the symbol of wealth and power. In the course of time when elephants acquire prominent place in human life, they are again raised to the holy, divine position as Gajalakṣmī on one hand and vehicles of deities on the other. All these aspects of gradual domestication of elephants highlighting the shift in their typical nature will be shown in this paper by interpreting some stories about them.