

## **Imagery of Elephant Portrayed in Pallava Art**

**Choodamani Nandagopal**

### **ABSTRACT**

The stages of human development find the path of refinement through the emancipation of art. Artistic expression endowed through ages from time to time sustains human spirit in all ages; past, present and future. A casual expression of early stages of human life finds its fruitful rendition in the historical period under patronage, which involved with specific symbolism, aesthetic sensibilities and representation of nature and environment. In the course of time the art and science of image making receives greater attention where the representation of animal kingdom finds relevance with human forms in all cultures. Among the animals represented, the elephant receives a higher degree of manifestation in Pallava Art. The imagery of elephant portrayed here, is naturalistic and true to the form irrespective of the sizes that emerge on the rocks in a given space. The imagery of elephant in Pallava art stands as a source to the originality of form and content which was treated with metaphysical approaches to suit the canonical specifications of Pallava culture.

The elephants gain the prime place in the iconographic representation of Ganesha, Gaja Lakshmi, Gajacharmambara Shiva, Indra's Iravata and the episode of Gajendra moksha. As the emblem of power and imperial status elephants are given a significant place in the Pallava royal regalia and occupy the sacred precinct of temple architecture. The elephant imagery dominates in the royal as well as divine processions in the artistic compositions, and as the symbol of majesty carved monolith elephants take a prominent place in the schema of architectural edifices. The portrayal of elephants in the natural settings also find place in Pallava environmental representations. This paper explores the significance of the aesthetic principles of semblance and *sadrushya* perceived by the artist while creating the imagery of elephants in the Pallava art with examples from the Pallava themes of sculptures and splendid architectural edifices drawn from the temples of Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram and other sites belonging to the times of Pallava Mahendravarma.

**Keywords:** *Pallava Art, Imagery of Elephant, Aesthetic principles, Sadrushya, Semblance*

Art Historian, UNESCO Fellow, The Culture Curator

Dean Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences Jain University Bangalore