

The Elephants in Brahmi Inscriptions and Mahavamsa

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ABSTRACT

It is undoubtedly accepted that the elephant is an animal that has economic, historic and religious value. The elephant played a significant role in Buddhist tradition. The dream of queen Mahamāya, the story of Nālagiri is famous among the Buddhist community. The objective of this research is to identify the importance of the elephant during the kingdom of Anuradhapura. The elephant trainers were referred to as the “Ati acariya”. The Nāvalārkuḷam inscription in the Ampāra district mentions a cave, donated by a chief of the elephant trainer and the Kaduruvāva inscription in the Kurunāgala district indicates the presence of a superintendent of the elephant.

Two elephants called Mahāpadumaya and Kunjaraya have been used by the king to demarcate the boundaries of Mahā Vihāra. An elephant has been used to deposit the relic at the Thuparamaya by Dēvanampiyatissa. In the later period elephants have been used for many activities. King Parakkramabahu I traded elephants with Burma. He used many rules and regulations regarding the trade of elephants. There was a massive demand for pearls extracted from the elephant’s tusk. The kings used to travel on elephants. The elephant is considered an auspicious object. Most of the kings who ruled the kingdom of Anuradhapura had a mangala hasti raja. King Duttagamini had an elephant called Kandula. King Elara and king Kashapa too had mangala hasti rajas.

It is said that the elephant is intelligent enough to be selected for kingship. In some occasions subjects have given the opportunity to the mangala hasti to select the king. The elephant has been used to decorate the ceremonies. This paper proposes to discuss the significance of the elephant during the kingdom of Anuradhapura.

Keywords: *inscription, Chronical, significance, mangala hasti, kingship*

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