

Mangala Hatthi: The Auspicious Elephant as Seen in Pali Literature

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ABSTRACT

*Tatthaddasā kuñjaraṃ chabbisāṇaṃ, sabbasetaṃ duppasahaṃ parebhi;
Rakkhanti naṃ aṭṭhasahassanāgā, īsādantā vātajavappahārino.*

There dwells invincible in might, this elephant,
six-tusked and white, with herd eight thousand strong for fight.
Their tusks to chariot-poles are like, Wind-swift are they to guard or strike.

These are the characteristics of *Mangala hatthi*- the auspicious elephant, which differentiate them from the ordinary elephants.

Characteristics of Ordinary Elephants: Generally they are black in colour, well developed to do things as directed by the master- *Hatwana*. They do not possess the capacity to judge what is wrong and what is right. When they become wicked or wild, they even can kill their master or caretaker. They belong to the animal world or the *Tiracchana* world of *Apayabhumi* in the 31 planes of Existence.

Characteristics of Auspicious Elephants: Mangala elephants are mostly white, possess admirable qualities as *Bodhisatta* along with physical marks as seen on the *Cakkavatti* king or *Sammāsambuddha*. These bodily marks are due to the perfections being performed. The other characteristics of the *Mangala Hatthi* as seen from Pali literature can be described as follows:

- *Mangala Hatthi* protects the kingdom/state in absence of the king and wins the war
- His faith in *Maha Bodhi Mandapa* is astonishing and he always honour of Bodhitree
- Possesses supernormal powers and helps men in danger even if it is an enemy
- His tusks emits six coloured rays
- He possesses the characteristics of *Bodhisatta* and completes his *Pakata Parmi* in presence of any past Buddha

This paper is an attempt to study the *Mangala hatthi* as seen in the Pali literature and find out why they are *Mangala Hatthi*. What are the characteristics which makes them different

from the ordinary elephants? How do they attain these characteristics? What is the role of *Mangala hatthi* in *jataka* or previous lives of the Buddha? All such and many more questions are addressed with the help of Pali literature to know more about the *Mangala Hatthi*.

Keywords: *Mangala hatthi, ordinary elephants, auspicious elephants*