

Elephants: The Elephantine Affair in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand

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Human being have dominated the animal kingdom due to their erect posture, superior brain (intelligence), stereoscopic vision , locomotor abilities and the precision grip. He has always lived in close association of different animals and birds. This relationship may have been formed due to dependence for food ,transport, or for the need for security . Some animals were domesticated by him such as the horse, dog and the cow. It is an amazing fact that he was able to tame animals as ferocious as the tiger and that of gigantic size like the elephant.

Two species of elephant are traditionally recognised, the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) The Indian elephant is the second largest mammal on earth. A male elephant may be 2.75 m tall and a female is approximately 2.45m in height .and weighs 3,000–5,000 kg (6,600–11,000 lb) It has large ears though smaller than its African counterpart. It has around body. Its hind feet bear four nails each. It has a long trunk which ends in a tip. Elephant trunks have multiple functions, including breathing, olfaction, touching, grasping, and sound production. The bull bears tusks while the cow has usually no tusk . A female rarely possesses tusks. The skin colour of the elephant is dark grey which becomes lighter with age.

Elephants can live upto 70 years in the wild. They communicate by touch, sight, smell and sound; elephants use infrasound, and seismic communication over long distances.

The elephant is an intelligent and social animal. They live in small or large herds. Female elephants spend their entire lives in tight-knit matrilineal family groups, some of which are made up of more than ten members, including three pairs of mothers with offspring, and are led by the matriarch which is often the eldest female. She remains leader of the group until death or if she no longer has the energy for the role. The mother defends small ones for a long time. The social life of the adult male is very different. As he matures, a male spends more time at the edge of his group and associates with outside males or even other families. They are fond of bathing in pools and rivers. They have a good sense of smell and hearing but their vision is poor. Elephants are herbivorous and can be found in different habitats including savannahs, forests, deserts and marshes The natural habitat of Indian elephants is forest regions of plains and foothills with lots of bamboo or tall grass. In Sikkim they even live in snow.

The Gestation period in elephants typically lasts around two years with inter-birth intervals usually lasting four to five years. Birth of the young ones tend to take place during the wet season.

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Calves are born 85 cm (33 in) tall and weigh around 120 kg (260 lb).[115] Typically, only a single young is born, but twins sometimes occur.

The Utility of The Elephant

The tamed elephant is acquired from the jungle at a young age. It is used in transportation in jungles plains and hills. It is also called the ship of the forest for this reason. The elephant is hunted for its valuable tusks. It is an expensive material used for making decorative pieces and jewellery. In the primitive times it was hunted for its meat.

In historic times we find that in ancient India elephants were used in battles. Accounts of the army of the Indian king Porus who fought against Alexander from Macedonia in 326 B.C.E. mention a squadron of two hundred elephants and the Mauryan king Chandragupta provided Seleucus five hundred elephants for the battle of Ipsus.(301 B.C.E.) against Antigonous I.¹ Many coins of Chandragupta figure a war elephant.²

The ninth and the tenth century Hindu dynasty king used it as royal transport and in wars also. They punished people by crushing the convicts under the feet of the elephant.

In the later centuries elephants were the shooting towers for Maharajas and Mughal rulers in large-scale hunts, especially in tiger hunting. Outstanding bull fight each other in championship matches reported as early as the second century by the Roman author Aelian.³

The Mughals also played elephant Polo. Elephant polo is a variant of polo played while riding elephants. It is played in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Rajasthan (India), and Thailand. England and Scotland regularly field teams. Equipment consists of a standard polo ball and six to ten foot cane (similar to bamboo) sticks with a polo mallet head on the end. The pitch is three-quarters of the length of a standard polo pitch, due to the slower speed of the elephants. Two people ride each elephant; the elephants are steered by mahouts, while the player tells the mahout which way to go and hits the ball. Elephant polo game was originated in Meghauli, Nepal. Tiger Tops in Nepal remains the headquarters of elephant polo and the site of the World Elephant Polo Championships.⁴

Methodology

In the present paper we have utilized secondary sources as well as the primary source of data. We have tried to find out how the elephant has been depicted in various kinds of paintings, carvings, sculpture, folk art and weaving in the Northern states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, India. We have also utilized ethnographic methods specially for collection and understanding of folk and tribal artforms.

Elephant in Religion and Mythology

The elephant has been considered of prime importance in Hindu religion. We have Lord Ganesh as the *Prathampujya* (one who must be remembered and worshipped first while making

offerings or praying) He is the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. According to one story parvati went to take a bath and asked Ganesh to guard the door and not allow anyone to come inside. Then Shiva came there and Ganesh stopped him. Shiva did not recognize him and threatened to cut off his head if he did not allow him inside. So Shiva cut off his head. The other story says that once he annoyed *Shani Devta* and the latter cut off his head. Then Shiva came to know it and replaced his head with that of an Elephant calf. Thus Ganesh bears the head of an Elephant. He is the giver of all knowledge, fortune and wisdom and is blessed with *aashirvaad* (boon) that he shall remain most auspicious in all *yugas* (epochs), therefore people must worship him prior to other gods and goddesses.

When the legendary *Samudra manthan* took place then 14 ratnas came out of the Ksheer sagar. One of them was Aravat (a white elephant), which is extremely rare. It was given to Lord Indra who is the god of rain.

There are nine mounts of Shani Deva and they are: Horse, Elephant, Donkey, Lion, Dog, jackal, Crow, Deer, Vulture. When he rides over an Elephant he brings money along with him, over a horse he brings comfort and wealth to your life, over an ass he brings losses, over a lion he brings kingdom and fame, over a deer he grants death like pains, Over jackal he takes away all the intellect, Over a dog, gives threat of theft and make him a beggar.

According to another Mythology due to affliction of *Shani dosh*. Shankar turned into an elephant and roamed in the jungle eating grass for three days.

In Vaastu Shastra (Hindu science of Architecture) Goddess *Lakshmi* in a sitting posture being bathed by elephant pouring water on her from either sides, is considered propitious and can bestow good luck on the owner of the house. In this pose she is known as the *Gajalakshmi*.

In Hindu cosmogony the elephant represents the eight cardinal directions are each guided by a colossal elephant (lokpals or the dikpalas). They together carry the world on their back. Each one of them has a deity as their master.

In Hindu Astrology there is a *nakshatra* by the name of *Hathiya*. It finds mention in local folklores of Uttar Pradesh, it is believed that there is heavy rainfall during this *nakshatra*.

Hathiya soodh larkave to buda paani aave

Some mythological stories are well represented in paintings.

The fierce looking Blue complexioned *Kali* is Charging against demons. Several head and other organs of many of them lay scattered all over the ground. Crushed under her right foot lies the horse-demon *Hayagriva*, and with her right hand the goddess is flinging away the elephant demon *Gaya*. The force which her anatomy reveals is tremendous.

Besides the Hindus the Buddhists also believe that the elephant is a noble powerful and wise animal that plays a prominent role in the story of prince Siddharth or Shakyamuni or the historical Buddha. The legend tells us that Maya had a dream about a white elephant which came down from

heaven during a full moon night and entered her right side. She got her dream interpreted by the astrologers who told her that she would give birth to a miraculous son who would become a great king or spiritual leader.



fig.1

Vishnu came down to rescue his ardent devotee the *Gajendra* who has been caught by the crocodile while bathing. The painting depicts Vishnu approaching Gajendra whose one foot is in the mouth of the crocodile. Vishnu's *vahan* the *garuda* is shown as a tiny figure in the top left corner.

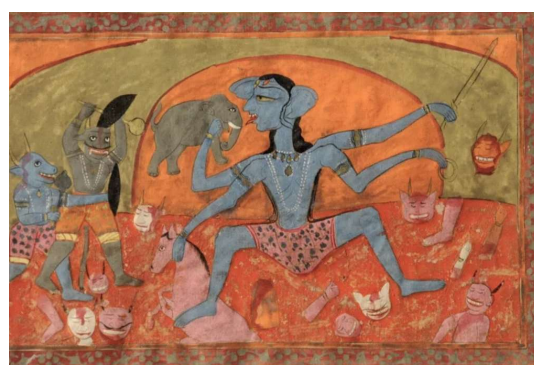


fig.2

The fierce-looking blue-complexioned *Kali* is charging against demons. Several head and other organs of many of them lay scattered all over the ground. Crushed under her right foot lies the horse-demon *Hayagriva*, and with her right hand the goddess is flinging away the elephant demon *Gaya*. The force which her anatomy reveals is tremendous.

Representations of Elephant in Artforms of Uttarakhand

Painting

The first area where we find the depiction of elephants is the Miniature painting. This style is of the Garhwal school, which is an offshoot of the Kangra School of art. Here the elephant is the vehicle of the kings on both sides. Both *Ram* and *Ravana* and his army leaders are seen perched on elephants.



fig.3 Miniature painting of Garhwal School of Painting, Uttarakhand

(Pahari painting showing Ram and Ravan's army . We can see the monkeys and bear in Ram' army and the devils in Ravan's army . Both the emperors are seated on an elephant.)

Woodwork in tribal area of Jaunsar-Bavar

The houses in this area are made of stone and deodar wood. Mostly the houses are multi-storeyed. The deodar walls are carved beautifully on their exterior side. In one of the houses in Haaja village we find that there is depiction of hunting caravan. The caravan is lead by an armed man on the horse. He is followed by the elephant on whom a person probably a king is seated a man on the horse is guarding him from the back. The caravan is chasing a herd of deer.

Thus we see that the elephant is not only the regal vehicle it is used as a safe seat in hunting also. At the same time it is easy to move on it in the jungle.



fig. 4 A wood carving displaying elephant being used in hunting. Village Haaja- District Dehradun , Uttarakhand

Folk Art

If we look at the folk art in Kumaon region of Uttarakhand we find that the elephant is worshipped here as a sacred animal. Through this painting we can see a reflection of this cultural belief.



fig.6 Painting of a Kumaoni women making folk a painting on the wall where an elephant can also be seen, Almora , Uttarakhand

Made by Padmshri Prof Yashodhar Mathpal

Representations of Elephant in Artforms of Uttar Pradesh

Sculpture

The Lion Capital at Sarnath

The capital is carved out of a single block of polished sandstone, and was always a separate piece from the column itself. It features four Asiatic Lions standing back to back. They are mounted on an abacus with a frieze carrying sculptures in high relief of an elephant, a galloping horse, a bull, and a lion, separated by intervening spoked chariot-wheels. The whole sits upon a bell-shaped lotus. The capital was originally probably crowned by a 'Wheel of Dharma' (*Dharmachakra* popularly known in India as the "Ashoka Chakra"), with 24 spokes, of which a few fragments were found on the site.⁵



fig. 7 The base of the lion capital which is the national emblem of India bears an elephant, Sarnath Uttar Pradesh.

Historical Monuments

Another historical monument *Nawab Sdar-ee-jahan Ka Rauza* at Hardoi has an interesting gateway. This is made in red sand stone and is of the Mughal period. The gateway exhibits an interesting carving of an emperor mounted on an elephant. The king is on a hunting expedition. The tiger is attacking the elephant. It is interesting depiction of the wild encounter.

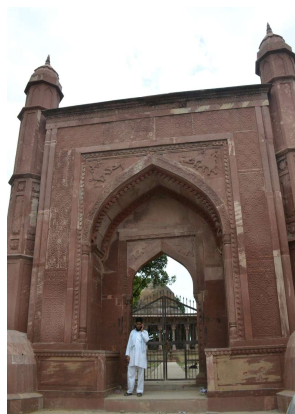


fig. 8 Nawab sadar –e-jahan's ka Rauza (gateway), Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh

Benarsi Saree Weaves

The silk sarees of Benaras or Varanasi are known throughout the world for its eloquence. One of the designer piece is known as Shikargarh saree. It is a rich weave showing animals and birds in all over weaving .One can see the peacocks, tiger rabbit and ofcourse the hunters . The prominent feature is the Mahavat sitting on an elephant.



fig. 8 A Benarsi saree bearing the weave of Elephant along with other animals. One can see the elephants being lead by the mahavat. It is an exclusive weave and this design is known as

Stone carving at Aligarh

The city of Aligarh is famous for its stone carving. Some of the exquisite pieces are of elephants , cows with their calf etc. These statues are made in marle and granite in various sizes. They sere as decorative pieces and souvenirs.



fig. 9 Arved inlay work elephant from Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh

Paintings of Oudh Region

The paintings of Oudh region show how popular the elephant was in this region since historical times. It is represented in the different styles of painting of the Oudh region of Uttar Pradesh.



fig. 10 Catching wild elephants,
Oudh India, Circa 1750

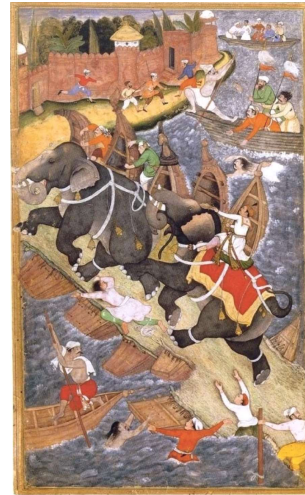


fig.11 Akkbar's Adventure with elephant
Hawa'i in 1561 by Basawan
and Chetar Munti (1590-95)

(Gouache and ink on paper two men trapping a wild elephant to center placing ropes around its ankles elephants playing in the water to foreground and in rocky landscape behind)

Brass Statues

The city of Moradabad and Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh are famous for their brass statues. The favourite animal to be sculpted in brass is the elephant in all sizes and posture. They are also exported throughout the world.



fig. 12 Brass Elephant statue

Wooden carving items

The wooden furniture and statues of Sharanpur city in Uttar Pradesh are famous for their craftsmanship. They are very popular decorative items throughout the country and abroad



fig. 13 Wooden carving

Folk Art Of Uttar Pradesh

The state is famous for its folk art called *chouk* and *Bhittichitra*. These are made on the occasion of different festivals either on the walls or on the floor. Sometimes vegetable colours are used. At other times geru is used to make them. The *chouk* represented here are from Lakhimpur district of Uttar Pradesh. We see that the elephant is an important subject in all these artistic representations, Since it is considered very auspicious animal.



fig. 14, 15 Folk Art



fig. 16 Folk Art

The elephant is thus not only important because of its utility to human beings, instead it has been revered as a god among the Hindus. It is thus a totemic animal in India. The people do not kill it for any purpose. It is a symbol of Luxury , power and royalty. Its strength is unparalleled. It is very popular among the young and the old. They enjoy its ride also.

The various representations in Art, Literature and Culture prove its popularity among Indians. If they see it moving around on roads they consider it good omen and believe that their wish will be fulfilled. The mighty animal has ruled our hearts and minds since ages and will continue to do so. There are attempts to kill this animal for ivory , but we should try to protect and conserve this beautiful gift of Nature.

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