

## **Symbolic Elephant Motif in Traditional Indian Textiles and Embroideries**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is the only living species of the genus *Elephas* and distributed in Southeast Asia from India in the west to Borneo in the east. India had always been known as the land that portrayed cultural and traditional vibrancy through its conventional arts and crafts. Widely used as motif in Indian textiles, Elephant is a symbol of wisdom, fertility, prosperity, strength and royalty. Elephants are important in Indian mythology too. Lord Ganesha bears an elephant head, symbolizing great intellect and wisdom. As *vahan* of Indra, the Vedic deity, the elephant is associated with rain and fertility. It was depicted on the seals excavated from Indus valley sites and on the Hindu and Buddhist architecture. Elephants are also a symbol of royalty.

In Asian cultures, the elephant is a symbol of good luck, happiness and longevity and have been interpreted in the motif as the result of religion, customs, natural surroundings and social beliefs of that particular area to which its creator belongs. A motif is the most basic unit or the smallest unit of pattern. The motifs in textile design may be classified as geometric, realistic or natural, stylized and abstract and are linked to natural, cultural, religious and socio-economic factors prevailing in any society. Though always speculative, the meaning of the motifs used in decoration of textiles may change with cultural context but the symbolic meaning of various motifs remains the same wherever they are applied, be it the famous *Pipli* applique work of Orissa, *Madhubani* paintings of Bihar, *Patola Ikat* weaves of Gujarat, *Pochampalli* weaves of Andhra Pradesh or the little known *Manjoosha* painting of Bihar.

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