

## **Significance, Symbolism and Representation of Elephants in Gandhara Buddhist Art**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Elephant being the symbol of stature, prosperity, wisdom and dominance is the most represented animal in the antiquity of South Asia. Since the dawn of Bronze Age, the depictions of elephants remained the choice of artists on priority basis. Similarly, the sculpting of elephants also remained a focal point during the Buddhist occupation of the historic Gandhara, the ancient name of present day north-western parts of Pakistan, the holy land of Buddhism. Around the end of the first century BC, it gave birth to a Sculpting Art devoted to the faith of the Buddha. The art was not a natural continuation of the Ancient Indian Arts but exhibits clear evidence of Hellenistic influence, though, it is significant to elaborate that the purpose of this art was the propagation of Buddhism through the images carved revolving around the Buddha's life stories and other associated legends. So far, the case of elephant depictions is concerned, preliminary, the birth of the Buddha drawn by an elephant to miracles and up to representation in architecture, elephant continued to be the most celebrated animal in the Gandharan panels.

The present research is an attempt on one side towards the significance and symbolism of elephant depicted in various postures where, on other side to eliminate on zonal workshops based on stylistic ground. Since the basic problem with the Gandharan sculptures is the absence of provenances, especially, those recovered in the early nineteenth century, the stylistic study is always adopted for affixing them to their probable zones. Similarly, the paper will also make an effort to reconstruct the glorious faunal past of that zone.

***Key words:*** *Elephants, Gandhara, significance, symbolism, representations, workshops*