

Elephants in Rashtrakutas Art, Architecture and Literature: A Brief Study

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ABSTRACT

The elephant had been an integral part of *Rashtrakutas* of *Manyakheta* (AD 753-982) Art, culture and heritage. The *Rashtrakutas* most remarkable temples are Kailashnath Temple (ellora), Jain group of temples (ellora), Kashi Visvesvara Temple (pattadakal), Jain Narayan temple (pattadaka) and Elephant Caves Temple etc. Large numbers of elephants are painted on walls of the above temples, the most important, being that of the Kailashnath Temple. In Kailashnath Temple the magnificent panels of 'Gajalaxmi' with four elephants pouring water on the deity represent the four cardinal directions, the '*Gaja-simha*' or the "Lion standing on elephant" motif on the roof of Kailashnath Temple. The 'Gajasurari siva' panel is one of the largest panels in the Kailashnath. Even one of our Gods 'Ganesh jee' has the head of an elephant panels in Kailashnath. There are free standing life size statues of elephants in the courtyard and base of the main Kailashnath Temple has been carved to suggest that elephants are holding the structure aloft. The *Mahabharata* scene depicted on the exterior wall of the Kailashnath, illustrated elephants with jewellery and *howdah*. On the railing of Kailashnath Temple a large number of elephants are depicted. In the Jain Temple of Pattadakal there are two life size elephant statues on either side of the doorway to the *Sabha mandapa*. 'Gajasura siva' sculpture and pillar capitals are decorated with elephants in Kashi Visvesvara temple. These sculptural depictions are substantially supplemented by the literary descriptions found in the contemporary work such as Jinasena's *Mahapurana* (AD 848) and Somdeva's *Yasastilaka champu* (AD 953) whose author was associated with the court of the Rashtrakuta Kings. Their books provide brief description of *Hastitatwa* (elephantology), categories of war elephants, riding techniques and size of elephants etc.

Keywords: *Rashtrakuta, Kailashnath, Ellora, Pattadakal, Panel*

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