

Gaja-Sthāpatya: Elephant in Ancient and Mediaeval Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Elephant is ubiquitous amongst all the indigenous Indian animals, thus representing and symbolising Indian subcontinent in many ways.

From its name, associations and characteristics, the elephant has entered into oral and textual traditions of Indian literature.

In various *vāstuśāstra* and *śilpa* texts, we see a tendency to name certain forms and features by considering some metaphor based on natural phenomena. Such terms are prescribed for both, religious and secular architecture. These metaphors are derived from floral and faunal forms and associated character or behaviour. An animal as majestic and versatile as elephant, finds its place in such texts which were further translated in the diverse material forms of architecture in Indian subcontinent. These architectural forms defined after elephants, can be studied for their function and for the terminological association with elephants. This brief paper attempts to present and review the textual and material in association with the elephant and its physical and behavioural characteristics in Architectural forms across subcontinent.

Keywords: *Elephant, architecture, sthāpatya, vāstu texts, Indian subcontinent*