

## Symbolism of Elephants in Buddhism and Hinduism

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### ABSTRACT

Elephants have been utilized in different cultural and religious depictions since the Stone Age. They are depicted on petroglyphs and inside caves and also represented through different methods of art and craft as well as sculptures, architecture, ivory crafts and ivory paintings. In different mythologies the elephant is a sacred animal. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the elephant has been a strong special power that has spiritual significance. In Hindu mythology, one acts as the custom vehicle of Lord Indra who is considered as the God of heaven and additionally Ganesha was offered his head by the elephant when he was once beheaded by his own angry father. Hence the elephant has the honour and respect and is therefore celebrated and worshipped by the Hindus of India. In Buddhism many symbols represent the Buddha, and in Buddhist iconography a white elephant is an albino elephant. The white color is a sign of purity and holiness in Buddhism. The elephant is commonly known for its power and wisdom, and white elephants also have the all these characteristics. Queen Maya the mother of Buddha also claimed that in a dream a white elephant flew in the air and inserted his trunk in her right side resulting in the birth of Buddha. The symbols of Buddhism means “Om Mani Padme Hum”. The lotus flower, dharma wheel, stupa and white elephant are common symbols which represent the presence of Buddha.

**Keywords:** *Elephants, Mythology Hinduism, Ganesha, Buddhism, Queen Maya, Lord Buddha, Gandhara Art*

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