

## Behavioral Psychology of Elephants as Studied through the Pali Jataka

### Atthakatha

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### ABSTRACT

**“Purāṇacorāna vaco nisamma, mahiḷā mukho pothayamanvacārī;  
Susaññatānañhi vaco nisamma, gajuttamo sabbagūṇesu aṭṭhāti.”**

The Pali Jataka Atthakathas as told by the Buddha is a rich source of moral stories of past births. The Bodhisatta is seen fulfilling his paramitas before attaining Buddhahood. It also provides a great source to understand the behavioral psychology of various animals.

Buddha had observed many qualities in elephants like intelligence (pañña), leadership, gratefulness (kataññu), understanding, capacity to observe minutely, follow advice, tremendous learning capacity (Susikkhito), logical thinking, patience, bravery (sūro), powerful (balavā), vigilance, protective of his herd and dependents, responsibility towards aging parents, caring, respect towards mother-child relationship, kindness, helping nature, compassion and making tools. In the Jatakas, it is seen that the elephants possessed many human qualities, when the Bodhisatta is born as an elephant, he goes beyond those humanly qualities, as he sacrifices his own life for the safety of his community/herd, being a leader.

This paper attempts to understand, with the help of various Pali Jataka Atthakaths, the qualities of elephants that Buddha had observed 2500 years ago. Some of these qualities are now studied through experiments by scientists like Diana Reiss, Preston Foerder, Louis Irwin, Cynthia Moss, Joshua Plotnik, Frans de Waal, Edward Topsell and Joyce Poole.

**Keywords:** *Behavioral psychology, Pali Jataka Atthakatha, qualities of elephants*

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