

Hatthi Vijja: The Knowledge Pertaining to Elephants as Seen in Pali Literature

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ABSTRACT

Information regarding elephants is scattered throughout Pali literature. It comes in the suttas, in the Vinaya-s of the Tipitaka-s and comes very often in the atthakatha-s, especially in the Jataka atthakathas. The Vamsa literature also gives accounts and importance of the elephant historically and the related information of elephants like its state, religious, social and political value. Though we do not find any direct information about the elephant and related knowledge, indirectly Pali literature is a rich source of information regarding the elephant and knowledge pertaining to the elephant of the period which is called 'Hatthi vijja'.

This paper takes the account of the elephant and elephant trainer [*hatthi damaka*] which is the occupation prevalent at the time as the *mahavata* or the *mahuta* is the caretaker of the elephant. Words like the *hattharoha*, *hatthigopaka*, *hatthibandhaka* indicate the occupations related to the elephant. Pali literature talks about the ordinary elephant, war trained elephants, the special or auspicious or the mangala elephant, boddhisatta as an elephant with super-human qualities, and the special skill or knowledge pertaining to taming the wild elephants. It gives insight into the occupation related to jewelry-making from ivory and its greed leading to killing of elephants and the political supremacy between the kings to possess elephants to show their strength and power.

Pali literature gives the account of elephants who could run long distances in a day, took care of the Buddha like any other human being and could be tamed with music known as *hatthikantavina*.

This paper is a data collection of elephants from all the available Pali sources. This is done with the objective of drawing a historical, political, literary and religious picture of the elephant from ancient India.

Keywords: *Hatthi Vijja, Pali Literature, Vamsa literature*

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