

The Elephants in Brahmī Inscriptions and Mahāvamsa

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Introduction

It is undoubtedly accepted, elephant is an animal that has a value of the economic, historic and religious. The elephant played a significant role in the Buddhist tradition. The dream of queen Mahamāya, the story of Nālagiri is famous among the Buddhist community. The objective of this research is to identify the elephants in Brahmi inscriptions and Mahāvamsa during the 3rd B.C.E to the 4th C.E.

According to the written records like the *Mahāvamsa* and the *DīpavaCsa* history of Sri Lanka may have begun from the arrival of the prince Vijaya circa 6th B.C.E. Although the history begins from the 6th century B.C.E., the literary sources were not recorded till the 4th century C.E. The first Chronicle, the *Dīpavamsa* was written between the 4th and 5th C.E., while the *Mahāvamsa* was written a century later in the 5th or 6th C.E. The authors of these Chronicles of the 4th and the 5th centuries impose their values and partial judgments over the events that have taken place in the 6th century B.C.E. Beside these drawbacks we are lucky to get some facts which has historical value regarding the elephants during the 6th B.C.E to the 4th C.E.

Elephants in Brahmi inscriptions

In this research I have drawn my attention on the Brahmi inscriptions which belonged to the 3rd B.C.E to the 1st C.E. The Kaduruvāva inscription which is found in Vanni hatpattu in the Kurunāgala district speak of a superintendent of an elephant (I.C., 1970, vol. i, no. 993).

.....*ati-adi(ka)*.....

(the superintendent of elephants)

In the administrative system elaborated in the Arthaśāstra, there were number of important departments of state each placed in charge of a superintendent, with the title of *adhyaksa* (I.C., 1970, xciv). Although this inscription is fragmented the word *ati-adika* is preserved. In Sanskrit it is called *hastyadhyaksa*.

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The Tantirimalē inscription in Vilachchiya Kōrale of Nuvaragampalata west in the Anurādhapura district shed light on an elephant trainer. The word *Ati-ajariya* refer the elephant trainer.

Ati-ajariya- Batiya mata upaśika- Nagaya

The female lay devotee Nāgā, mother of Bati, the elephant trainer (I.C., 1970, vol. i, no. 112). As inscribed here the ati-ajariya's name was Batiya. His mother's name was Nagya as well as she was having the epithet of *upasika*. The people who were economically strengthen donated the caves to the Sanga. Hence the people like ati-ajariya's or the elephant trainers must have gain a some sort of an income from the rulers in this particular period of time.

The Nāvalārkulam inscription in the Ampāra district mentioning a cave, donated by a chief of the elephant trainer.

Ati – acariya – gamani paduma puta padumagutaśa

piyadaśanenama lene śagaye niyate

The cave named piyadassana of Padumagutta, son of Paduma, the chief of elephant trainer, is dedicated to the Sangha (I.C., 1970, vol. i, no. 494).

Vegiri devāle inscription in Mādapalāta Kōrale of Udunuvara in the Kandy district indicates the ivory worker called Sumana.

Bata- śumanaśa Tiśaha upaśika (śuma)naya upaśika Tiśalaya upa(śaka)(ku) maraśa gapati Dutakaśa Kubakara.....Sonha datika.....Sumanaśa (I.C., 1970, vol. i, no. 807). The meaning of it is the cave of lord Sumana of Tissa, of the female lay devotee Tissalā, of the lay devoteeKumāra, of the householder Dutaka, of the potter, Sona, and of the ivory worker Sumana. In this inscription it is clearly depicts that there were ivory workers during the period of 3rd B.C.E to the 1st C.E.

The elephants in Mahāvamsa

The king Pandukābhya (437-377 B.C.E.) had a commander called sivurangasen (Mahāvamsa, 1967, 10: 66). The name sivurangasen may be repressing the four fold army of him or the Chaturangani Sena. The four fold army consists with Elephants, horses, chariots and battalion. The enthronement of the king Devanampiyatissa (307 B.C.E) give evidences that there were pearls called elephant pearls. These pearls has not taken from the elephants and it has emerged out of the ocean. Mahāvamsa further mentions pearls of the eight kinds, namely horse pearls, elephant pearls, wagon pearl, myrobalan pearl, bracelet pearl, ring pear, kakudha fruit pearl and common pearls came froth out of the ocean and lay upon the shore in heaps (Mahāvamsa, 1967, 11: 14).

When the people gathered to listen the doctrine of Mahinda thero who arrived from India, the king Devanampiyatissa said “Here there is not enough space for all these men let them cleanse the hall of the state elephants”. (Mahāvamsa, 1967, 14: 61). The hall which belonged to state elephants

have been used to accommodate the people. This shows that there was a separate building for the state elephants which is under the control of the king. Two elephants called Mahāpadumaya and Kunjaraya had used to demarcate the boundaries of Mahā Vihāra by the king Devanampiyatissa (Mahāvamsa, 1967, 15: 191).

The elephant has been used to deposit the relic at the Thuparamaya by the king Dēvanampiyatissa. When the relic was brought to Thupārāma king Devampiyatissa made a wish “ If this is a relic of the Sage then shall my parasol bow down, of itself, my elephant shall sink upon its knees, this relic urn, coming toward me with the relic shall descend upon my head” (Mahāvamsa, 1967, 17:24-27).

Thūpavamsa mentions of the very first day of the birth of Prince Dumugāmunu, seven ships full of gold arrived at the port (*Thūpavamsa* 1994:145). Unfortunately the author has not mentioned the name of the port. It is further mentioned on the merit of the prince one baby elephant from the Jaddhantha Lake of Himalaya came here and it was left aside by the mother elephant near the bank of the river (*Thūpavamsa* 1994:145). This evidence shows us that there were foreign trade relations during the 2nd century B.C.E. As a result of this seven ships full of gold might have come to Sri Lanka and an elephant from India might have been imported to Sri Lanka during this period.

Most of the kings who ruled the kingdom of Anuradhapura had a mangala hasti rāja. The king Dutugāmunu had an elephant called Kandula. The King Elara and the king Kashapa too had mangala hasti rajās. Once the prince Saddhatissa has taken his mother and the elephant Kandula with him and for fear of his brother went to Dihavapi (Mahāvamsa, 1967 24: 13-14). The king Dutugāmunu sent a letter to his brother asking for his mother and the elephant (Mahāvamsa, 1967 24: 18-20). At the time of the fearful battle between Dutugāmunu and the Elāra Dāmilas who stood upon the gate tower balls of red hot iron and molten pitch poured on back of the Kandula. The Mahāvamsa further mentions the way that they treated the elephant. They had covered him with a cloth and had bound upon his skin a seven times folded buffalo hide and above it had laid a hide steeped in oil he set him free. At this movement king said to the elephant his willingness to give the lordship over the whole island of Lanka to the elephant.

It is said that the elephant is an intelligent enough for selecting the kingship. In some occasions subjects have given the opportunity to the mangala hasti to select the king. Once the king Ilanaga (38 C.E - 44 C.E) punished the Lambakannas. Because of this action of the king lambakannas came together and taken the king captive and imprisoned him and they themselves administered the government. The king’s consort send their little son Candamukhaśiva with a message to the state elephant. “This is thy lord’s son, thy lord is in prison, better is it for this boy to meet his death by thee that by the enemies, then slay thou him. That is the queen’s command” having heard this message elephant began to shed tears and broken pieces the post which he was chained. The elephant pressed forward into the palace and dashed against the gate with fury broken down the door in the room where the king sat. He made him mount upon his back and went towards Mahātitha and there the elephant made the king embark on a ship (Mahāvamsa, 1950, 35: 19-25).

Summery

In the later period of time elephants have been used for many activities. King Parakkramabahy I had trade elephants with Burma. He has used many rules and regulations regarding the trade of elephants. There was a massive demand for the pearls that gain from the elephant's tusk. The kings used to travel on the elephant. The elephant is considered as the auspicious object.

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