

**“ HISTORICALLY TRACING  
THE SYMBOLISM OF  
ELEPHANTS IN HINDUISM ”**

**DISSERTATION**

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Award of the Degree of*

**MASTER OF HISTORY**

**By**

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## **DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree/diploma.

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This project is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for M.A. History from lovely professional university.

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### Statement 2

This project is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “Historically tracing the symbolic representation of elephants in Hinduism” is confided and original work done by Rinny Rebecca, student of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, under my supervision and guidance.

This subject of this dissertation is an original contribution towards the discipline of History and has not previously formed the basis for the award of the Degree, Diploma, Associated ship and fellowship or other similar title to any candidate.

The Dissertation represents entirely an independent work of the candidate under my guidance.

Date-

Place-

Signature of Supervisor

(Dr. Manu Sharma)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*The beauty of the word thank you is that it utters of earthy humility and gratitude, certain virtues that enrich humanism. Flattery goes by but heart-felt thanks remain genuine even by the gone years. Having said so, genuine thanks to the creator of all beautiful things, in whose image he made parents and an extended family of mentors in life. Thanking my parents, my wonderful Comic for her love, also to the supporting half in my life and my mentor Dr. Manu Sharma for tapping in potentials that I often overlooked; thank you for believing in me.*

*A soulful “thank you”!*

## **ABSTRACT**

The lore's of elephants are generations old, a childhood nuance of stories foreseeing them as creators of the jungle. Subtly, the Hindu scriptures of India hint at the prominence of the majestic beast that elaborates itself in the heritage and culture. The perennial existence traced back to its roots, beginning with animal worship, history, in essence, aiming at compiling cultural elements and promoting the altruistic preservation of the live elephants.

**Keywords:** *elephant, Hindu, heritage and culture, history, preservation*

## **GLOSSARY**

Abhishekha: Blessings

Airavarta: Mythical white elephant

Annakotta: Elephant fort

Ashtavinayak: Eight Ganesha's

Asura: Demon

Atman: Soul

Aitihyamala: Garland of Historical Anecdotes

Batik: Wax textile art

Bharani: Elephant of sensuality

Bhimabetka: The sitting place of Bhima

Brahma: God of creation

Chalcolithic: Copper age

Danith: One with the tusk

Darshan: Sight

Dhamma: Plain/ undistorted truth

Dye inade: Dye struck

Ganesha: Elephant head God

Gumpha: Cave

Hastinapur: Land of Elephants

Hastinamukha: Elephant face

Ikat: Traditional textile making method using dye and weaving

Indra: Rain God

Lakshmi : Goddess of Wealth

Linga: Phallus object, related to worship of Shiva

Maya : Illusive

Mahabali: Mythological asura king of Kerala

Mithila/ Madhubani: Art form meaning honey in the forest.

Murti: Idol

Nakshtra: Related to constellations & stars

Paleolithic: Stone age

Pahari: Hill art form

Paper Mache": Craft made of mixture of glue and paper

Papat Kunjar Bhat: Parrot & Elephant

Pelni: Traditional method of joint in saree

Puranas: Hindu Literature means "the old"

Rangoli: Floor art

Saivism: Sect related to the worship of Lord Shiva

Saptapati: Ritual of seven vows in matrimony

Shaccram: Cheque pattern with waved lines at the bottom

Shiva: The destroyer

Vaishnavism : Sect related to the worship of Lord Vishnu

Vahana: Vehicle

Vakratunda: Trunk face

Vedas: Hindu text; collection of hymns and rituals composed during different periods

Vyasa: Author of Mahabharata

Yajna: Rituals/ Sacrifices

Yoni: the vulva (related with the worship of linga)

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## INTRODUCTION

History intervenes with culture and culture is keenly related to society, which again is as kith and kin to history. The interlinked chain these three themes; history-culture-society, is much fundamental. Hence, it becomes essential to study history with respect to the culture that even society continues to exchange. With respect to India, another component essential to Indian culture is that of religion. Tracing time through history, religion has inevitably shaped the consciousness of Indian society. To be specific, a religion that the Indian subcontinent identifies itself with since time we know of is indeed 'Hinduism'.

A major consensus as to trace back the existence & consolidation presence of Hinduism looms at 5500 BCE as the oldest surviving religion. In part the shadows of culture that have been mirrored along the times are in forms of symbols and icons; Hinduism is full of them but some prominently stand apart.(Shubodh Kapoor, 2002) The testimonial witness to this is that the symbol of 'Elephant', showing its prominence and being expressed in numerous ways is much indigenous. In addition, all the more, the religions that stem from the Indian subcontinent including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism have all held Elephant in relevance and prominence.

Hinduism in its grandeur has been synonymous with nature and its practices in the earliest days, binding people to bountiful nature. For example; the perennial rivers such as Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, certain elements like fire in 'Yajna' (rituals/ sacrifices) or animals like cow, bull, tiger, elephants. This legacy of Hinduism has gained itself controversies yet has helped in furnishing Indian history to center with its focal point drawn with the origin of Aryan Culture. Among the hypothesis's one contends that Vedic religion and Sanskrit language lay the foundation of Hinduism which in its attribute links with Aryans and henceforth its descendants.

Hinduism as a religion has extensive roots. It denies homogeneity, segmentation, or a unified structure and has a blend of various social segments that reflect the complexity of Indian society. It covers expansive geography (including countries other than India), various languages as a tool of expression, different creeds, and sects, racial diversity which truly makes it heterogenic. Manifestations of Hinduism take many forms varying from intellectual philosophies to metaphysical concerns like yoga to tales and legends; which in themselves hold symbolism as means of teaching and expression that took dines in courses of time. The Paleolithic stage of rock engravings and paintings, transcending to icons of civilizations, namely the Indus valley civilization, further to the dynastic culture and its apparatus of expressions such as paintings, forts but especially temples and its resonance. The antagonistic or rebellious outlawed beliefs that grew as religion such as Buddhism and Jainism also need be mentioned to have engulfed various cultural segments from their originator Hinduism such that its expressions are felt in various artistic or legends myths of that stand true to its existence. (A.L Bashan, 2004) The expansive yet conducive natures of Hinduism that are both of striking contrast are enveloped in the religion. This specific nature is absorbed from the people and its transitive society, an exchange that evidently took place is chronologically evident.

The earliest expressions of human survival have been journaled as in Rock caves. One such is the Bhimbetka rock shelter in Madhya Pradesh a Paleolithic archeological site; declared as a World Heritage Site in 2003. Closely related in deriving its name from the Epic Mahabharata hero; Bhima, it literally means ‘the sitting place of Bhima’. It is tremendously popular depiction is enclosed in caves VI & VII known as the ‘Zoo Rock’ which bears artistic translation of elephants, sambar, and bison among others. (Benjamin Rowland, 1954)

Another set of the fresco is the murals of rock-cut monasteries of Ajanta that date 475 CE, cajoling elephants in pools of water. The immense collaborative and nurturing relationship between humans and nature found its expressive

apparatus in whatsoever means that was specific to their age and times. Obvious was the engravings or paintings of animals, a response to their immediate environment, relationship and existence. Elephants, thus since times magnanimous has been expressed. (Jennifer Reazer, 2013) This formative relationship in another transitive age towards religion finds its place in it, thus animals hold relevance and significance in Hinduism.

Animals in Hinduism is a much relevant and significant as an individual theme, catapulting back in times when nature worship as an ordeal was prominent and today its representation in the Indian culture acts as a reflection of religious and culture synthesis. The Vedic Literature is a storehouse in keeping records of known animals and also segregating the one's that they found important. Mentions of several animals such as Deer, Boar, Fox Antelope, Gazelle, Jackal, Lion, Monkey, Rabbit, Wolf, Bear, and Rat are found. The uses of domestication of animals such as Cow, Bull, Elephant, Sheep, Horse and Goat aren't solely for religious purpose but also sores high in economic activities of the time. Also in ancient India, knowledge of animals or Pasu Vidya was widely studied subject rooting in the belief that animals could contain the souls of the ancestors or that there might be a rebirth in forms of their family members or friends. Though not all animals are regarded to hold the same place of honor and reverence; a few such as Elephant, Cow, Bull, Boar, Tiger are considered much sacred and have spiritual importance. Legends, myths, folklores carry this precisely either as a representation of God and his characteristics or traits, the importance of animals and their associations with symbols of prosperity or to the utter contrast death, animals hold a specific relevance.

Hinduism as a tradition has evolved from pre-historic times but the earliest known texts date from Vedic times, known as Vedas; a collection of hymns and rituals composed during different periods. The earliest known Veda is Rig- Veda comprises of praises to Indra who is placed high over above other Gods, his 'vaahan' or vehicle being an elephant.

Of among the legends, myths, beliefs and prominent God's in Hinduism, the tales of Ganesha, about his origins, faith, and popularity one needs to trace in depth details. A sect is solely dedicated to Ganesha; the Ganapatya Hindu sect where he is recognized as an elephant head and human body, that represent the duo of the soul (*atman*) and the physical (*Maya*) aspect, respectively. In this likeness, he is credited with being the patron of writers, remover of obstacles, thus worshiped alike by traders or students, or just before any new commencement of new endeavors.

Hinduism places a good amount of emphasis on 'darshan' (a Sanskrit word meaning sight); a two-way process. The eyes of God thus depicted are real big and some have eyes more than two, which has a symbolic and metaphorical meaning. Popular Gods like Shiva and his son Ganesha, the elephant-headed God have a third eye located on the forehead. One of the quotes helps to get a better understanding of the same. To quote Devdutt Pattanaik; *"Within infinite myths lies the eternal truth. Who sees it all? Varuna has but a thousand eyes, Indra has a hundred, You and I, only two."*

According to the famous mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik who gives a crude exponential explanation to the infamous subject of animals in Hinduism, he says *"Animals play a critical part in Hindu mythology. Some serve as symbols to communicate metaphysical ideas. Others, as in the story earlier, are animal forms of the divine. Most commonly they serve as 'vahanas' or vehicles of the gods."* This stands true for Elephant named Airavarta who is the 'vahan' of Indra. Airavarta; whose name means *"the one who knits or binds the clouds"* goes on well with the myth that Elephants are capable of producing clouds.

The metaphysical idea is well translated in another dimension when one learns of Goddess Lakshmi is also associated with Elephants. Further to be associated with cardinal points of direction. And profusely interesting is their connection with 'Nakshatra' (astrology). This holds true to the legend of Bhairani; the male elephant is linked who in turn is linked with sexuality and sensuous nature indicating fertility. Another legend links Bharani with

Ganesha. According to British Association for Vedic Astrology, *“Elephants symbolism also shows Bharani being larger than life, respected by others, strong personality. Elephants usually work for others. They are strong beautiful animals who do not recognize their own beauty. They are also vegetarians – showing a sattvic nature that forms part of the elephant/Bharani psyche.”*

The Hindu Puranic images follow a set patterned thesis that classifying the images as ‘bodily’, ‘tactile’ and ‘visual’ images, most of which corresponds with sensations. They vary in lines of ‘real’, ‘fantastic’, ‘distorted’, and ‘abstract’ which emphasizes on visual quality. Hinduism recognizes various sects such as Saivism (dedicated to Siva), Vaisnavism (dedicated to Visnu), Ganapathyam (dedicated to Ganapati), Saktism (the followers of the goddess) and Suryam (the followers of Sun God). Each of the sects endorses its images differently. Idols (Murti) are held as the deity of the temple. Ganesha is fondly found all over India since the 6th century in varied forms. Ganesha’s idol in the configurative standard image is, him holding an axe or a goad in the upper arm and a noose in the other arm. Ganesha’s iconography also depicts him in various juxtapositions like in fearless gesture or the “Abhaya mudra”.(Gopinath Rao, 1994) His most popular forms are that of Vigneshvara, Ekadanta, and Siddhidata yet he is identified in 32 forms in total. Ganesha is closely knit to Buddhi or knowledge and in essence with the Hindu mantra Aum or Om, more precisely Omkarasvarupa. Elaboratively there are sacred festivals celebrated which are associated with Ganesha namely; Ganesha Chaturthi, Ganesha Visarjana, Vinayaka Vratam & Markali Pillaiyar, Pancha Ganapati. (V. Ganapati, 2006)

The earliest evidence of Hinduism how so ever is poignantly found in Indus Valley Civilization and the icons and prototypes, the worship of Linga and Yoni associated with Shiva and Shakti. The revering force makes Shiva to be an esteemed deity of the times with another strong evidence to support it, the prototype of Hindu God Shiva; the ‘Pashupati seal’, with him being regarded as the Lord of all animals, commanding over nature and surrounded by four

animals; Rhino, Buffalo, Elephant and Deer. Choodamani, in her *Arts and Crafts of Indus Civilization*, writes, “The sculptural forms which blossomed then are considered to be the primary sources for studying the major streams of Indian history.”

The reverence to Elephants would be incomplete without the antagonistic and rebellious offspring's; Buddhism and Jainism. It is also in these religions we find Elephants elevated to a revered position. Legends are associated with Buddha's birth, of a dream of an elephant by his mother; this is considered much auspicious in the Buddhist tradition. Similar is the accord with Hindu tradition. The Sanchi Stupa also has much elephants carved and molded giving a reference point to the importance of symbolism in Buddhism, yet again. The Buddhist philosophy holds elephant related to Buddha's birth episode and the stability of the Dhamma. The lion implies the “Roar” of the Dhamma”. The bull showcases the strength of the Dhamma and the horse represents the endurance. The elephants of the Buddhist kingdoms are widely found on the coins with their trunk raised or dangling, with or without the rider. In Jainism, tales like Story of Elephant and six blind men: what is an Elephant! is much famous one to contemplate. (Upinder Singh, 2008)

Since time anew, dynasties have propagated their held religion, the sojourn of patronage to a deity or religion was an evident testimony as to what society too in large followed. For instance, Mauryan Dynasty under Chandragupta Maurya saw Jainism rise, in times of Ashoka it was Buddhism, Gupta dynasty saw ardent Hindu emergence etc. Tracing the elephants further the coinage of dynasties also gives us relevant amount of information about Hindu practices and animal relevance in accordance to it as well. This is well known after the decline of Mauryan Empire which also had punch marked coins that had engravings of Elephant and wheel; various dynasties came up like the Satvahana Dynasty upholding its rule during the period 1st BCE- 3rd AD consecutively letting it have the longest tenure over Southern India. The coins of this dynasty help us trace the linkage between Hinduism and animals in the contemporary time, as so it stands true for the Pandaya Kingdom during the

Sangam age, the Andhra dynasty, the Kongani dynasty (or the Ganga dynasty) and the Maisur dynasty. (Robert Jackson, 1913)

A follow up of the representing nature has been clearly identifies with the architectural bland like the caves and the temples. Leave alone the caves, findings report that places or gates of prominent buildings have been named after elephant, if not graced with it, like Hasthinapur or Hathi Darwaza. Supporting this are the evidences Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves, Hathigumpha, Ganesha Gumpha in the state Orissa. In continuance to this the Sun temple and the Orissa's cult of Jagannath Temple adorn the virtue of elephant in glimpses. Maharashtra is another hub clubbing elephants in stocks of array, the Elephanta Island (named so true to elephant) and the withstanding time & wreck, the Ajanta & Ellora caves have added to the rich heritage.

Elephants, in caves & temples are sometimes much synonyms to that found in forts and palaces of Hindu rulers. Thus, temples were the reflection of society and culture in addition to that of legends, myths and religion. There has been regional centralization of elephants as well; this is clearly seen in state of Maharashtra, the land of 'Ashtavinayak Temples' which in Sanskrit literally means 'Eight Ganeshas'.

A pilgrimage to these temples is set in a pre-ascertained sequence; these temples are geographically located around Pune. Each of these temple has its own individual legend and history distinct from another like that of the form of each murti of Ganesha, particularly his trunk is differently put one from another. The legend of this region goes by the saying "Ganapati Bappa Morya" coined by Morya Gosavi. Another legend has it, Shivaji in his younger days having a miraculous healing from eye problem by a saint, upon becoming the emperor, ordered annual state funding for Ganesha Chaturthi, thus setting a tradition that was carried forward by the Peshwas. Only after the Peshwa era, there was a decline in the festivity due to the lack of state funding.

In the later years it was Balgangadhar Tilak impressed by a hear say from his friend; that he was stuck with an idea of Sarvajanic Ganeshotsav; open for all, the Ganesh celebration. Tilak showered praises of this in his newspaper Kesari in 1893, generating a widespread appeal fostering brotherhood in likeness that intertwined different castes to mingle in raising offerings of puja, thus began his initiative creating a patriotic-nationalistic attitude against the British, akin to Maharashtra's populace. This gathering was leaped forward in times with different meaning.

Moving downwards, the tip of south India, the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, elephant festival such as Pooram are celebrated in great pomp & show, a temple festival that adore temple elephants to other heights. The elephant tradition and legends of these states are well narrated in local legends of Kerala named *Aitihyamala* ("A Garland of Historical Anecdotes") by Kottarattil Sankunni compiled in eight volumes; each volume ending with a story or legend about a famous elephant. Temple activities of Kerala aren't exclusive to these alone, architecturally, historically & traditionally it houses *Anakkotta* (elephant fort) constructed in Punnattur Kotta, that serves a home for 59 temple elephants, presently. A facility used to train the elephants to serve Lord Krishna as well as to participate in many festivities that occur throughout the year. But behind the pageantry, the Kerala elephants endure "hell", as Sngita Iyer puts it in her documentary *Gods in Shackles*. The film enlists the lives of these temple elephants. Kerala houses some 600 captive elephants, the vast majority males. Iyer notes that these animals are shackled, tortured, beaten, or starved on a daily basis. The status of live deaths of elephants between 2012 and 2015 was 174. Howsoever, the elephant owners say that using captive elephants in Kerala's religious ceremonies is integral to the region's cultural heritage. Demanding these festivals be protected. A disaccord with the innumerable laws & regulations is evident. India must perhaps be the only country that has drafted so many acts and laws for animals yet enforces so few of them. In such a case it becomes important to protect the wildlife and enforce the measures. Akin to the cultural heritage, in tangible &



intangible form, a record, briefings, preservation & restoration needs to be manifested.

This study thus focuses on Elephants as in Hinduism it finds an expression through icons, scriptures, mythology, legends. The expressive apparatus has its canvas evolved in time with synthesis of religion and culture, some of which takes a negative course. The perennial existence and consolidated permanence of Elephants in Indian society makes this study relevant. The symbol of 'Elephant', showing its prominence and being expressed in numerous ways is much indigenous. As to how and when the nature changes its course, this discourse is better served with historical evidence and its deep roots with the culture that continues to interact with the society and give its functional norms, rituals and practices, of which Elephants can not be any meagerly erased in existence or prominence. A symbol of status, prestige, honor, royalty and much allied to religion, India is rightfully known as an Elephant land for a reason.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

The study aims to scrutinize the transcending relationship of elephant drawing from Hinduism in order to explore elephant's legacy in religion and cultural practices in India. Elephants as an icon of amalgamation of varied regional Indian culture need to be examined so as to ensure needful for preservation of the tangible Indian historical heritage and conserving Indian Elephants in natural habitat.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY:**

This is an original documentation of 'Elephants' from a clear historical perspective. The study follows up keenly with the patterns of main subject as well its allies, analyzing the available resources, to form a concrete research. The study aims at contributing to applied historical research which means to draw a conclusive report after rigorously studying the sources. In particular it is synthesis of data that follows a historical course. The aim of which is to give back the essence of religious, cultural and societal studies with historical theme underlining its significance furthermore.

The study particularly aims at eliminating and distinguishing the symbolic representation of Elephants, its unification with different cultures and also the diversified representations of Elephant in the culture. The historical studies that studies society, religion and culture is levered to produce an entity to find an identity for humans. It aims to provide the humans a sense of belongingness, a shared ideal, rituals, practices and even elude the practices different to them.

The study also explores the possibility to fill up the research gap of the prior works done. The earlier works been focused mainly on one aspect religion, culture or society or in other cases with only one particular theme such as a civilization or dynasty. This study aims to fulfill the historical tracing with evidence and condense the related themes together, chronologically.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study uses qualitative method of research. The qualitative approach used in this study is done to explore the behavior, pattern, perspectives and experiences of changing or conflicting themes. The particular research is context bound. Hence, the study uses historical research as a mode of analysis, to review and interpret data based on secondary sources. Historical research uses interpretative or descriptive approach to understand the sources as an interpretive narrative, using causal mechanism to explore underlying themes. This mode also helps in understanding the multi-casual explanations with deduction based on analysis.

The study scrutinizes secondary source of data which includes research papers, journals, articles and books on the works that have been done on this theme priorly. The means of procurement is private collections of books as well as digital library and internet archives. The method used helps in drawing conclusions based on analysis by evaluating the secondary source by internal and external criticism to generate a historical narrative.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

- **The book “The wonder that was India” by A.L Bashan** is a guide to understand the passage of India be it dynasties, religion, culture. The expressions of sculptures, icons, temples all have been well documented. The book also illustrates elephants found in Indus Valley seals, in regional Orissa’s Konark, in Buddhist art, in Ajanta Caves, Mughal murals.
- **The book “A history of Ancient and Early Medieval India” by Upinder Singh** traces India back from the Stone Age highlighting the depictions of animals in the caves. The book also accounts civilizations, the scriptures, dynasties, their religion and practices. It explores themes of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It traces history of India from the Stone Age to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.
- **Professor Gavin Flood in his article for BBC titled “History of Hinduism”** documents the earliest traces to Hinduism. The evolving nature of the religion, as the oldest religion is closely linked with socio-cultural and political developments, such as the rise and fall of different kingdoms and empires. Hinduism embraces various traditions in such course. The article outlines chronologically various ages of Hinduism. Before 2000 BCE: The Indus Valley Civilization, 1500-500 BCE: The Vedic Period, 500 BCE-500 CE: The Epic, Puranic and Classical Age, 500 CE-1500 CE: Medieval Period, 1500-1757 CE: Pre-Modern Period, 1757-1947 CE: British Period, 1947- Present: Independent India. Hinduism along this course has been identified with various traditions, worship and icons.
- **In the book “Ancient History Encyclopedia”** the topic of Hinduism is traced back to the origins and its expression through practices and worship. It also discusses the origin of Buddhism and Jainism owing to

Hinduism as the parent religion. The article also emphasizes on 'darshan' or visual experience of deities with popular gods like Shiva and Ganesha have a third eye located on the forehead.

- **The research paper “The Proto- Shiva seal or Pashupati and the five pranās depicted on an Indus seal”** discusses the five animals including elephant on the famous Indus seal and helps understand the abstract concept further in relation to Shiva.
- **In the book “RBS Visitors Guide India: Odhisha’s Travel Guide”**, the mention of Udayagiri & Khandagiri Caves and the depiction of Elephants in them have been discussed in detail. The culture of Orissa having an inclination towards elephants makes this book relevant for regional symbolism of elephant icon study.
- **In the article “Coinage of Ancient India” of Pratyogita Darpan**, the coins of various kingdoms and their depiction of elephants are discussed through Kushanas, Satvahanas, Gupta, Post-Gupta and South- Indian coinage.
- **The book ‘The dominions, Emblems and Coins of the South Indian Dynasties’ by Robert Pilkington Jackson** concentrates on the numismatic study. The varied depictions of animals, precisely elephants in the coins of the south Indian dynasty are relevant. Further, the dynastic lineage and their characteristic nature through particular engravings of coins are given in detail.
- **In the article “Coinage of Ancient India” of Pratyogita Darpan**, the coins of various kingdoms and their depiction of elephants are discussed through Kushanas, Satvahanas, Gupta, Post-Gupta and South- Indian coinage.

- **The book “Elements of Hindu Iconography” by T.A. Gopinath Rao** is a detailed guide of all the elements of icons and their meanings, the visual representation as well as the relation of icons between different deities. This book gives a detailed account of minor and major forms of icons, feminine and masculine representative forms, weapons and other instruments held by the images, head gears and ornaments, hand poses and seating of images.
- **The book Indian Sculpture and Iconography: Forms and Measurements by V. Ganapati Sthapat** discusses the patterns, themes and depictions of deities. The abstract forms are discussed concretely; the elements of measurement and their meanings are profoundly explained. This book is a detailed study of idol sculpting since time immemorial.
- **The book “The caves of India: Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta” by David Raezer and Jennifer Raezer** gives an illustrated as well as written account of the caves of Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta. The transition of animal depiction from elephants of Buddhism to Lions as new icon of Hinduism is clearly reflected.
- **In the editorial article by Sonal Srivastava for the “Speaking Tree” titled “Ganesha’s third eye”**, she discusses her travel to Ranthambore forest and the Trinetra Ganesha Temple located inside Ranthambore fort. This Ganesha Temple is one of its kinds as it houses, presumably, the only three-eyed Ganesha idol in the country.
- **Komilla Sutton in her article on “Animal symbols of the Nakshatras”** explores the theme from an abstract to concrete perspective. The symbolic representation of various animals, the masculine & feministic energies, the study dwells on providing an understanding to this particular theme. Bharani, the male elephant, usually linked with sexuality is related to Ganesha. This connection is

further elaborated in the myth of the birth of Ganesha and is reflected in Nakshatras.

- **The book ‘Devlok’ by Devdutt Patanaik** is a dialogue of questions related to Hinduism. The book also gives answers to the prominence of animals in Hinduism as Vahanas/ vehicles of deities or deities themselves and also relevant recurring themes related to elephants.
- **The book “99 Thoughts on Ganesha” by Devdutt Patanaik** recounts recollects and restores the varied stories of Ganesha. The regional and local stories of the elephant head God also shaping the regional culture has been given a due.
- **Devdutt Pattanaik in his article “An elephant called Ashwathama”** retells the story in the episodic war of Mahabharata. The story recounts the Krishna’s help extended towards Pandavas by tricking their opponents. The elephant “Ashwathama” becomes relevant in this respect.
- **Devdutt Pattanaik in his article “Sacred Beasts” published in “First City Delhi”** explains the symbolic representation of animals with respect to Hindu scriptures. The article highlights Goddess Lakshmi riding elephants. Elephants are seen as symbol of power and prosperity. Elephants are also associated with Indra; king of the God’s representing rain- clouds and water.
- **Devdutt Pattanaik in his article “Canvas of my world” published in “Speaking tree”** mentions the story of Ganesha the elephant God and his brother Kartikeya about racing around the world. This story and such thematic stories enrooted in Hindu Mythology widen the perspective drawing the difference between objective and the subjective truth.

- **The book “Ganesha” by Tamarapu Sampath Kumaran** gives a detailed note on Ganapathya worship, the sect and modes of worship particularly in Maharashtra. The book also gives emphasis to the bodily aspects, representation and meanings of Ganesha. The mythological stories identified with him included.
- **The book “Loving Ganesa; Hinduism’s endearing elephant faced God” by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** talks about the nature of Ganesa, letters from him, his five powers, of science and beyond, the forms of Ganesa and iconography, the sacred symbol and sacred festivals related to Ganesa.
- **The book “Contemporary Hinduism; Ritual, Culture and Practice” by Robin Rinehart** traces Hinduism since its evolution from historical background till the contemporary times. It explores the themes of Hindu scriptures, the oral and written tradition, the deity worship and regional variation for prominence of one particular deity. The book is a contemporary guide of insight to understand the ritual, culture and the practice of Hinduism.
- **The book “The art and architecture of India- Buddhist, Hindu, Jain” by Benjamin Rowland** expresses the art and architectural forms of Indian religion. The Indian originating religions and the common use of elements of animals, their representation such as elephant as vahanas or as an auspicious expression has been documented in this book.
- **The article “New Film Shows Brutalization of Temple Elephants in India” by Christina Russo for National Geographic** gives an account of the plight of temple elephants of Kerala. The documentary **“God in Shackles” by Sangita Iyer** is briefed up in words in this article. The article emphasizes the need for protection



of these temple elephants from the name of culture and religion.

- **The book “The rough guide to South India” by David Abram** gives a detailed account of Southern states of India and festivals such as Poomam of Kerala where elephants are showcased with grandeur. The cultural reverence of elephants is well ornamentally put forward in this work.
- **The article “Punnathoor Kotta: A centre for Captive Elephants”** highlighted in Kerala Tourism site highlights the rescued life of grandeur of elephants in temple at Punnathoor Kotta. This article is relevant in getting a perspective of the living conditions of temple elephants in Kerala.
- **The book “Indian Textiles Past and Present” by G.K Gosh and Shukla Gosh** gives a vivid description of the regional textiles such as Kanchipuram, Patola, Ikat, Batik, Naga and Meitei shawls and the recurring motifs of elephants.
- **The book “Hinduism and the Religious art” by Heather Elgood** is a lucrative read to understand the floor painting practices done in local households, commonly known as “rangoli” and the recurrent theme of elephant in the same.

## CHAPTER 1: CIVILIZATIONAL HERITAGE

### 1.1 Hinduism: literature and philosophy

Religion is a social validating institution. It structures the culture and its elements. Hinduism accounts for India as the oldest surviving religion. A polytheistic religion with numerous God's and demi-Gods, it substantiates itself in icons. These icons closely draw from nature that was fundamentally from whence religion flowered. Nature worship promulgated into a full fledged religion of the Indian subcontinent, India. In order to understand the gamut in themes of religion, culture stemming from history, the timeline perhaps can be drawn in parallel.

The caricature to any culture and its elementary expressions in its physical evidence such as art, architecture or its documented literature can be best understood with generic philosophical thought translated in the scriptures and its altruistic themes or icons. The most recurrent thought associated with religion in consensus with elephant and with much evidence to physical and philosophical school of thought in Hinduism.

To begin with one can expound this by tracing from the ends of prominence during Rig-Vedic times. Animals revered before this time were ideally done either borne out of fear or those that subdued under their strength and might or were seen as a symbol of royalty like tiger, lion or elephant. Other animals to be revered were the ones that fed the life force in some form, nurturing cows and ploughing oxen's or bulls. This legacy continued in Hinduism in other forms.

The oldest mention of elephant in written records of religious importance is the Rig Veda. Perhaps, Indra the most praised God of the Rig Vedic time with almost 250 shlokas dedicated to him. Indra is historically associated to be worshipped in the Battle of ten kings. His ride is an elephant named Airavarta. There are many legends related to this elephant. According to Kurma Purana it is believed to have been emerged from the churning of the oceans;

Samudramanathan. Airavat/Irvat is a white albino breed elephant with six trunks and six pairs of tusks, whose name signifies the one produced from the water. According to the Vishnu Purana, elephant is said to be the mount of each one who presides over the eight points of compass and Indra presides over the east. Prathu, the king made Airavata the king of all elephants. Indra when seated on Airavata sends rains on the earth. It is upon the head of Airavata, pearl is believed to grow. (Devdutt, 2012)

A medieval text Matangalila describes the birth of Airavata a bit differently. It's mentioned that while Brahma broke open the egg of the cosmos, and so from the shell came a set of elephants. More particularly so, eight bull elephants led by Airavata emerge from the right end half of shell and from its counter half; the left side cow-elephants, eight in number to be led by Abharamu flower. In pairs these elephants take over the four cardinal point and four ordinal point to be known as Dig-gajas which means elephant guardians of eight directions.

These elephants, all white symbolize their celestial nature, embody in churning an ocean full in rich milk welcoming Lakshmi; known as the goddess of wealth, raising their trunk, showering her with rich contents of the ocean, this came to be known as Abhishekha ritual. This pouring of water indicates rain and thus fertility. Goddess Lakshmi is said to ride it and bless the kings of the earth. Elephant is found synonymous to wealth, fertility, and power, not necessarily in same order.

A major deity that found its reverence, logging itself even to present day is Ganesha. "Ganesha" in its lexicon is of Sanskrit origin, from the compounded word gana which means "the hosts" or "multitudes" of the demi-Gods. Thus the word gana is synonymous with Ganapati which translates to "master of the hosts". The essential scriptures dedicated to Ganesha in Hinduism are the Ganesha Purana, Mudgala Purana and Ganapathi Atharvarshira, Brahma Purana and Brahmanda Purana. However, Ganesha finds a mention even in Buddhist Tantra scriptures.(V. Ganapathi, 2006)

The earliest mention of Ganesha as a word is found in the hymn 2.23.2 of Rigveda. Having said so, the word Ganesha confines itself only to the title of the hymn with the praises dedicated to Brahmanaspati. However in the later period it was adopted for the worship of modern day Ganesha. According to Ludo Rocher he comments as "(This) clearly refers to Brahaspati who is the deity of the hymn & Brhaspati only". In equity, the second epithet (Rig Veda.112.9) is devoted to Indra, the evident epithet 'ganapati', translated "Lord of the companies (of the *Maruts*). Rocher adds that the recent origin of Ganapatya literature yet it seems to draw from these Rig Vedic verses to attribute them to modern Ganesha.

A 14<sup>th</sup> century commentator Sayana establishes by the two verses in Black Yajurveda; Maitrayaniya Samhita verse 2.9.1 and Taittiriya Aranyaka verse 10.1 with Ganesha. The verses list the deity as Dantih (one with the tusk), Hastimukha (having an elephant face) and Vakratunda (adorning a trunk, in curve). All of which are intuitive and synonymous to Ganesha. In description Dantih matches to Vakratunda which holds a corn-sheaf, sugarcane and a club and links the same to Puranic Ganapati. To which Heras also agrees saying "we cannot resist accepting his full identification with this Vedic Dantin". In differential view another set of commentators like Krishnan and Thapar consider these as inters parsed additions of the post-Vedic period.

Mudgala Purana states the story of eight incarnations of Ganesha; that win over prevailing human errs. Ekadanta, Dhumravarna, Vakratunda, Mahodara, Gajanana, Lambodara, Vikata, Vighnaraja. The most common name for Ganesha appearing in the Puranas & Buddhist Tantras is Vinayaka. Particularly the famous Ganesha temples known as Ashatavinayak present in Maharashtra, rests on this name.

However in the primary attributed function of Ganesha he is better known by the names Vighnesha and Vighneshvara (Lord of obstacles) for he is believed to remove obstacles. Popular mythical stories revolve around the same.

Ganesha's name is taken before commencing a new chore. The legend has it that Shiva asks of his son Ganesha and Kartikeya to circle around the world and return. To which Kartikeya hurries over his peacock while Ganesha circles around his parents Shiva and Parvati. Devdutt Patnaik in his book *My Gita* comments that while Kartikeya circles around the world, Ganesha circles around his world, thus underlining the difference between the concepts of "world" and "my world".

In an interesting ploy, Ganesha is considered to be the scribe of the Mahabharata, with the author Vyasa who on the advice of Bramha recites the episodic poem of Mahabharata in all complexity of verses in order for Ganesha to contemplate and to buy himself the time meanwhile. Philosophically, this also meant that Mahabharata need be read not hurriedly but patiently, with proper understanding.

The portrayal of Ganesha with human and animal features consists of philosophical concepts that are of spiritual significance. The elephant head with large ears and wide mouth are suggestive of wisdom, understanding and intellect necessary for one in order to attain perfection in life. The big ears are to be a curious listener and a wide mouth, a sign of desire to enjoy pleasures of life. The trunk and the two tusks with the one on the left been broken also have a meaning. As for the trunk to be of strength to uproot yet subtle to pluck a grass so should be the human mind, conducive. As for the tusks they denote two sides of human personality, the one on the right signifies wisdom and one on the left emotion. The broken left tusk thus means the need to conquer emotions with wisdom. According to Sen "the worship of Ganesha was originally a practice of worshipping the elephant, which probably arose in regions populated with many wild elephants. But when due to deforestation, climatic changes and other factors, such danger was no more; devotees had to attribute other qualities to the deity for retention in their pantheon."

An uproar that emancipated by divulging and solidating itself was Buddhism; in its contemporary was also Jainism. Both the religions, no matter how far they took to exclude, eventually did somewhere conjunct in both physical &

metaphysical aspects. The elephant in this trajectory got so well put together with Buddhism, that Hinduism paraphrased its virtue as a lion. The dream of an elephant by Maya Devi later took an episode of Buddha's birth, an auspicious sign indeed that found virility in Buddhist architecture and numismatics, apart from the metaphysical philosophy.

## **1.2 Physical evidence: Architecture**

The tangible aspect of Indian culture forms the outer shell to elaborate the finesse representation of elephants in India. It is essential to assort examples from humungous range of architecture that spans around India. Importantly beginning with roots that consolidate religion, in this likeness caves essentially form the earliest times of expression, and to take up this example we study Bhimabetaka caves, that resonate the pre-historic times. Other examples to take further a leap in time, is the Ajanta & Ellora caves, the Elephanta caves, the Orissa's mammothic blend of elephant in architecture, Hathi stable in Karnataka that explains elephants as a royal ride. Each of these sited examples resembles reason for architectural structures that adorn elephants. Thus, these are just one set of examples taken in belief that the rest of architecture are built in similar artistic faith.

The earliest evidence of elephant depiction can be dated to pre-historic times in the Bhimabetaka caves located in Madhya Pradesh which not until 1957 drove attention. The discovery was made by Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar. The Archeological Survey of India was instrumental in helping put Bhimabetka caves in UNESCO World Heritage list in 2003. The contemporary sandstone formation is a due to the natural process of erosion and weathering and so due to the passage of time perhaps led to the unique array of caves that we know of today as Bhimabetka. The name, however rests on the mythological character from Mahabharata; Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers. The etymology of the same in translation Bhimabetka means "sitting place of Bhima". (Benjamin Rowland, 1954) Bhima was believed either a hero or a deity to the tribes inhabiting the hills and forests in the surrounding area. The site is a huge repository of rock paintings housed in natural rock

shelters containing archaeological evidences of habitation in relation to lithic form, ranging from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods towards the Chalcolithic and the medieval period, of 700 shelters. It houses antiquity array of paintings which are made using three techniques; the transparent technique: the proportion of water to the color makes the pigment thin, the opaque technique: a generous mix of variety of color with water, and the crayon technique: the pigment is directly applied on the wall. The images comprises of humans and of animals that include both wild and domestic ones. The images of men account for 2076 whereas the animals are of 1377, among these are found 61 images of elephant, 36 images with riders and only 11 images account to be of prehistoric origin, rest come across to be of later periods. These images essentially record the economic and social facet of human life. Also, the most spectacular mythical animal known to these caves has combination characteristics of a boar, ox and an elephant. The Pictorial narratives of events such as large processions of men on elephants, battle scenes depicting spears, bows, arrows, shields and swords highlight the “Historical period”. There are mythical scenes depicting few of the Puranic Hindu gods like Ganesh and Shiva and symbols like swastikas, Nandi (the sacred bull) and tridents.

To continue with the Ajanta & Ellora caves located in Aurangabad have been built from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE towards its end in 9<sup>th</sup> century witnesses a structural evolution change that is noticeable. Buddhist caves allure the architecture of Ajanta caves dating from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to 480 or 650 BCE. The Ellora caves come in continuation, housing the three faiths Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The notability of these structures in relation with elephants is in respect to the distinctive feature of cave’s exterior, in Ajanta where a giant elephant adorn the gateway.(David Raezer, 2013) Presently, among the few evidences left in remains is seen in Cave 16, even so such an arrangement was likely pervasive at Ajanta, this is the only cave where the elephant remains intact. The elephant is noticeably seen to become closely associated with Buddhism in its ubiquitous Ajanta’s décor that Hinduism later

uses a lion, in attempt to keep it an exclusive icon. The lion standing over an elephant is succinctly used to denote its success in eradicating Buddhism from the subcontinent. This frequent duo stature is observed in the elaboratively furnished Kailasa Hindu caves, dedicated to Lord Shiva (Cave 16).

Dating back to the times of Mahabharata is the marked presence on the landscape of the plains stretching around river Ganga, a site named as Hastinapur; the name translates to Hastin meaning elephant and the suffix pur; the land. Though, according to the legend, it's believed to be named after the king Hastin. However, scholars also contemplate of its celestial connection with Airavarta & other guardian elephants. The current expanse of Hastinapur is Meerut in Uttar Pradesh.

Another notable island that itself goes by the name of an elephant is the Elephanta Island, these rock cut caves are believed to be dated 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, built by Shilhara kings. A huge shrine is dedicated to Lord Shiva built by Chalukyan prince Pulkesin II, celebrating his victory. Though some of the historians differ in theory and state that these caves were constructed by King Krishnaraja of Kalchuri dynasty in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. Regionally in ancient times this was better known as Gharapuri which translates to “places of caves”. The name Elephanta Island or ilha do Elefante is of much recent origin, given by Portuguese explorers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. An enormous monolithic basalt sculpture of elephant was found at the entrance which they sought to take back but couldn't since the chains weren't strong enough to keep it intact and dropped in into the sea. This sculpture in later times moved to Victoria and Albert Museum which is now known as Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, in Mumbai by the British.

Further down the southern eastern end of India we find in Orissa deep embeddings of elephant in its architectural culture. The earliest one is a half hewn motif taken from a huge stone, dating 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C in Dhauli, Bhubaneswar; the site of Kalinga war. This sculpture is placed in its benefactor near the fourteenth rock edict of Ashoka. The caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri dated 1<sup>st</sup> century BC excavated during the reign of Emperor Kharavela are known for Hatigumpha cave that resonates its expressive name



with elephant. Another cave in this array of Udayagiri caves is exclusively dedicated to Ganesha is named Ganesh Gumphā, guarded with two elephants in the front façade. The Sun Temple at Konark which dates to 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D houses a free standing elephant in its northern courtyard. Images of sexual union of elephants and depiction of elephant being captured, seems to adorn the walls of Sun temple as well. Daksha Prajapati temple is another site located in Banapur, Orissa which was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD that depict scenes of warriors on elephants. Culturally elephants have been associated with royalty and commonly denote royal processions especially as seen in the Lingaraj temple dating to 1000 AD. The 12<sup>th</sup> century AD construction that ploys Orissa's culture is the Jagannath temple, closely following the decoration of Lingaraj temple that adorn elephant motifs, it is drawn in similarity. Elephant processions are common to both, whereas Hathi Darwaza or Elephant gate inside the Jagannath temple is alias to this temple alone. Many of the temples around India are known to be either adorned with elephant at the entrance or known in synonym to elephant. The Jagannath cult in addition witnesses the tradition where the presiding deity is bedecked with a mask of an elephant in hope that it would serve as a talisman & bring in monsoons sooner.

The adjoining state to Orissa, the present day Karnataka has been the royal abode for the Vijayanagara Empire. The impressive Elephant stable at Hampi provided for the shelter of royal elephants, constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Elephants had a stature to be associated with the royal families alone and this elephant stable is strategically located outside the Zenana enclosure, a space confined to the royal ladies. Even so Mughal's attacked Hampi during 1564 AD which resulted in the downfall of the Vijayanagara Empire; the stable didn't suffer any fatal damage. This structure is built in an amalgamated blend of Indo-Islamic style of architecture, in contrast to the majority of structures of the empire to have been built solely in Indian style.

The chambers of the building are enclosed with a row of eleven domes that opens in arched façade have enough space to accommodate two elephants in a single chamber. The southern state of Kerala was the royal abode for the ruling Travancore kings that lavishly lived in the Padmanabapuram Palace, many a stance of pair of elephants adorn the entrance, giving it a regal welcoming sight. The Swami Vivekananda rock in Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu has similar resonance attached to it, a valor of beauty amidst the Indian ocean.

### **1.3 Numismatics**

Whilst in history the currency was issued in coins, the bearings help in studying the prospective elements of nomenclature correlating with society. The engravings also hold true for the empire and its extent. Elephants in coinage of dynasties give us relevant amount of information about Hindu practices and animal relevance. This is well known after the decline of Mauryan Empire which itself had punch marked coins that had engravings of Elephant and wheel; various dynasties came up, Satvahana Dynasty ruling from 1st- century BC- 3rd century AD emerged as the longest threshold over South India. The coins of this dynasty link Hinduism and elephant that can be studied. According to Mintage World Magazine; *“Representation of elephant, bull, lion and horse is commonly found on Satvahana coins. The occurrences of these animals have different significance, either region wise or religion wise. These animals sometimes have relevance in accordance with particular region. E.g. the elephant, which are found on majority of the Satvahana coins, is a popular animal of South India, the region the Satvahana’s belonged to the sculptures elephants are also found at the many caves such as Karle, Bedse, Sanchi, Bhрут, Amravati etc. which belong to the Satvahana period.”* As mentioned earlier about the Vedic tradition of animals being recognized as Vahanas/ vehicles like for example; Elephant of Indra, Bull of Shiva, Lion of Durga. The horse which appears on the coins of later Satvahana is contended to be connected to either Mother Earth or as a vehicle of The Sun.

In similar lines the Pandaya Kingdom during the Sangam age had symbols on

their coinage seem to be in accordance of Hinduism and Buddhism. Upholding the trident in the façade of the elephant, proportionally placed directly above is a crescent moon, owing its base in Shaivite tradition, the railing tree & wheel howsoever are a blend of Buddhist tradition. The coinage also presents itself as concrete evidence that the Sangam age was an age of religious toleration. The Indian dynasties have seen elephants are much prominence almost owing to royal symbol of prestige or identity. The South Indian dynasties in transition from punch marked coins to die-inade coins are linked with Buddhism. Methodologically, the struck dyed coins came with Buddhism. The "dye-struck" Buddhist copper coins are cut as a rectangle carrying imprints of trisul (the trident) in its obverse and the known "Buddhist shaccram (a chequered pattern, of waved lines at the bottom)" on the reverse. The coins found at the Krishna and Godavari districts of Andhra dynasty are generally round yet some coins in square are also found carry elephant, horse, lion and other animals on its obverse. These weigh in variation of 35 to 560 grains. The elephant is roughly depicted with or without legs usually facing the right end, its trunk raised in a gesture mimicking a salute. (Robert Jackson, 1913)

The Chera dynasty was recognized by a bow. The eastern left off territory was named as Kongu-desa. First begetter of the throne was Kongani and thus this territory came to be better known as the Kongani dynasty (sometimes called the Ganga dynasty). Their recognizing bearing was an elephant that supplemented the Chera bow. The elephant was meant to be noble animal found in the hills and forests of Kongudesu. The 9th century saw the split among capitals namely; Talkad and Skandapura; Talkad beckoned as Cholas territory. The remnant Chera- Kongus fleeing in refuge to Orissa, established the "Gajapati "(*i.e.*, elephant lords) lineage of kings. This is the origin of the Gajapati dynasty.

The Maisur dynasty inherited elephant bearing of symbol from the Kongus and Cheras. The coins found in this province stand witness to this in great variety. The elephant, in Southern India has withstood time as an emblem of

royalty, is still found in his wild state in the forests of Coorg and Maisur, and is seen as "an animal of prudence and foresight, and a remover of difficulties." Maisur dynasty, in its reign by Tipu Sultan continued the bearings of the elephant over his copper coins, although his empire's was the proud tiger.

## **CHAPTER 2: Cultural Synthesis**

### **2.1 Arts and Aesthetics**

Elephants transcends into India like a mainstream walk, touching all platters and adding extravagance, giving it a larger than life experience. This crudeness is supported historically and is translated into culture through arts, aesthetics and practices. In minute detailing, the cultural translation of elephant as its adoptive prodigy, owes itself to religion. Of course, this is more true to nature worship that precedes religion. In flexible narrative, the nature worship transformed itself to profound religion which then was expressed in schools of art such as Madhubani or Mithila art. This art form originated in Bihar, an art that was initially an exclusive one for women to decorate homes soon found itself a way over canvas. The paintings are an espresso of certain motifs that have specific meanings to convey, in which elephant are for good luck while fish, parrots symbolize fertility & love respectively. The art forms did draw the narratives from myths & legend. Madhubani art draws from the legend of King Janak, who authorized artists to produce paintings, as he gives his daughter Sita to be lawfully wed to Lord Rama. The Madhubani art isn't confined to this legend itself, scribing the same is Tulsidas in his work Ramcharitamanas, this regional art stemming from Bihar beautifully stands true to its name which translates as "honey in the forest".

In the geographical expanse of India, moving north from Bihar, in respect to art form, the Pahari art form is envisaged in the canvas of Himachal Pradesh. Environment on the whole had an impact not necessarily as a subject matter but more in stylized form of background, as the Himalayan hills did inspire the artists. Thus animals are depicted as part of the story in the Pahari miniature painting. These mainly form the backdrop of composition or the favoritism of a particular animal would transcend the animal as the main subject. Pahari paintings showcased animals of domestication like cows, calves, horses, elephants and dogs. The amalgamation of cultural art is best seen with Pahari art fusing as it meets the plateau region of Punjab in Hoshiyarpur. This region is an incredible storehouse of traditional wood inlay

craft, sculpting images of animal motifs along with furnishings for home décor made from superior quality shisham, teak and rosewood. The narrow lanes of 'Dabbi Bazar' houses this olden craft that originated with farmers who due to off seasons in farming took to this art and produced various products that overtime got recognition from kings. This wooden art inlay (Bharai, in Hindi) is passed down from one generation to another without any written record, thus its waning away slowly. In similar lines, perhaps the regional synthesis can also be seen as an exchange between Punjab and Kashmir, leave alone Himachal Pradesh. The handicraft industry of Jammu & Kashmir is a plethora of beauty for intricate details. Kashmir isn't only known for its traditional carpets but also for wooden craftsmanship that too depict elephant. The wood used is of high quality walnut or that of chinar and each of these are hand painted. Elephants are also crafted out of paper mache, a Kashmiri craft form made from pulp of paper & adhesive. Elephants are strongly held in this paper art and hand painted with floral motifs. Present mainstream religion majority is that of Islam but the region is a witness to Hinduism as of olden times, an episodic splur of migrating Kashmiri Pandits is of no new time. Having said so, this region in aesthetic sense drew from Hindu culture among others.

Culturally matrimony plays an important event in the Indian tradition, the beauty of the slender bangles is brought about in beautiful pieces of ivory that comes from Elephant, costing a fortune these began to be replaced by substitutes. The "Shakha" bangles of Bengal originally adorned by affluent families came from elephant teeth, soon to be replicated by poor families made of conch shells that came to be known as poor man's ivory. In states of Rajasthan & Gujrat the importance of ivory bangles holds true to "saptapati" ritual' the seven vows around sacred fire. These ivory bridal bangles are also found in Orissa's culture. Nowadays, the ivory finesse articles are illegal, hence new substitute's surface around in markets.

Amongst the cultural handover; a skill passed from a mother to the daughter is the art of adorning the walls and the floors, the designs are exclusive to them.

Culturally before the modern advances the houses were replastered during times such as the onset of summer/ winter, sowing/ harvest that did coincide with festivals on the calendar such as Holi, Shivratri, Diwali & Dusshera. This legacy continues to this day when rangoli (floor art) is made during auspicious occasions. Traditionally a mother taught her daughter this art at the age of 6, to which she perfected by the age of 12. This floor art is known by different names around the country Aripan in Bihar, Alpona in Bengal, Sona Rakhna in Uttar Pradesh, Mehndi Madana in Rajasthan, Satheya in Gujrat, Rangoli in Maharashtra, Chitta in Orissa, Kolam in Tamil Nadu. The pigments used to fill in the design are either organic powdered colors or that of flower petals. Of the various designs that are laid down on the floor is the elephant that is vibrantly depicted with beautiful colors. (Heather Elgood, 1999)

## **2.2 Textiles and Handlooms**

The human's essential need of clothing is no far from the glitches of elephant details. A 12<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit text named "Manasollasa" gives details of textiles designed with geometrical designs, flora & fauna and religious popular beliefs. The Kanchipuram sarees of Chennai, made of lustrous silk yarn are well known for its intricate gold detailing of human, geometric & animal motifs. Elephants suffice these in subtle regalness. These sarees are known for complicated joint at the anchal (the end of saree) which is known as "pelni"; a continued legacy of the Pallava and the Chola dynasty. No sphere has been untouched in the means of fabrics and textiles in India where elephant motifs aren't found. Among the others are the Patola silk which is dyed in the regions of Pattan, Mehsana and Rajkot of Gujrat. There are famous for motifs like elephants, parrots, dancing girl and use vibrant palette such as red, yellow, green & blue. Patolas are dyed in Ikat style which is indigenously used in other regions as well such as Odisha, which is inspired by temple motifs and nature; both holding elephant in reverence. The Ikat style uses yarn once dyed to be woven into design, amongst various design; Papat Kunjar Bhat is known for parrot & elephant motifs. The Batik prints from Madhya Pradesh are subtly earthy and Indianized in narration owing to Hindu philosophy often been depicted. The Batik is a wax printing technique

adding a three dimensional effect done with proportional seeping in of wax and dye into the fabric giving it intense texture & depth. Batik is conceptualized in two forms one that of geometrical patterns and other free flow patterns. The free flow patterns give enough aesthetic freedom of translated depictions of which elephant motifs too hold value.

Much obvious to the textiles translating the animals into the clothing drapes are the hilly regions of the North-East India, for as the ancestry goes by, the tribal importance of devotion owing itself to nature or that of benefactory hunting. Cloth painting in Nagaland is practiced among few of its tribes like Ao's, Lotha's and Rengma's. The Ao are known to paint the band of their warrior shawl in white, a drape adorned only by head hunters won in battle or the one's haven performed meritorious feasts. On these white median band motifs of elephant, doe, spear and human heads are painted in black. The color for these shawls is obtained naturally from the sap of tree and by mixing it with compound of rice beer & ashes of leaves. Naga tribes also create ornamental bangles from elephant tusks. Similarly, the state of Manipur which was called by Jawaharlal Nehru as the "Jewel of India" owing to its melting pot culture is known for Shaphee Lanphee; a fabric woven into a shawl of black color with red border and embroidered with motifs made with cotton threads by the Meitei women of the state. This shawl is given in honory achievement and it carries motifs of several designs that include elephant regionally known as "shamu". The tribal community of Rabha in Assam is devoted to protect the ecology and have vast traditional knowledge of elephant training, catching and ethno-medicine.

### **2.3 Festivities and Celebrations**

The state themselves uphold its culture to apex that fosters tourism and give an impetus to traditional practices. The festivities across states root themselves drawing its validity from Hinduism which holds animals in high esteem. The legends of various Gods of Hinduism and associated animals thus are dearly celebrated. The state of Kerala upholds the harvest festival Onam during the month of "Chingam" that coincides with the month of August or



September of the English calendar marking the local New Year. Legend attached to this is that of Mahabali who being an “asura” (demon) was benevolent and generous yet was of condescending nature, this flaw though overlooked by people was a matter of envy among Gods who took this as an advantage to bring the wrath of Lord Vishnu. Eventually, Mahabali humbled himself allowing Lord Vishnu to trample upon his head as he throttles down underneath the earth, gaining himself the boon to visit his people once a year, which is now celebrated as Onam. The people of the state welcome in all splendor the homecoming of Mahabali, in these rites elephants are elaboratively decorated for processions in load some gold and silks. The temples of Kerala also house elephants for religious practices as seen in Puddukottai. One noticeable fact true to most temples is elephants either sculpted at the entrance or a door named after so, or that of housing of live elephants, the importance of these mammothic giants is speculative. Elephants have been a royal statement since time anew, its ride was that of kings, draped in silks and velvets adorned with gold’s and precious stones, these elephants held highest place in royal courts. Most of the temples presumably were constructed by these rulers, thus this too itself attached the elephant motifs as a symbol of royal and important place to the temples, of course drawing the roots from religion of its auspiciousness. The motifs itself add to beauty giving the place an aesthetic sense. The elephant statues are associated with good luck, fertility and fortune. An elephant with its trunk rolled upward is generally considered to shower prosperity, perhaps the shower episode associated with Goddess Lakshmi. Elephant is considered as a good omen, its sight is considered to remove any obstacle, given its association with Lord Ganesha.

Lord Ganesha, the elephant headed God is most celebrated during Ganesha Chathruti especially in the state of Maharashtra where historically the deity and its celebrations were state funded with miraculous healing of ailing Shivaji, the decline after the Peshwa era was brought to revival by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who in spirit to promote unity among people proposed celebrating “Sarvajanik Ganesh Utsava” in response to the British tussle

during independence. The cluster of Ashtavinayak temples across the region of Maharashtra deems the deity Ganesha held in prominence.

Moving towards the western half of the country, Rajasthan hosts the elephant festival in the pink city of Jaipur. Owing to huge number of visitors, the venue of the festival was shifted from Chaugan stadium to Jaipur polo ground and is organized by Rajasthan Tourism. The most colorful festival of India that's even lucrative for India's tourism to this state is Holi. The female elephants are painted royally with floral motifs over their big ears and plump legs, trinkets of golden and silver color give it a sparkly shine. Their mount covered in velvets and brocades participate in races, polo and tug of war. The chosen female elephant is a traditional way of feminism, perhaps since this majestic beast is linked with fertility. The festival in its grandeur is accompanied with the beats of nagada and blows of bankiya.

## CONCLUSION

India is a mythical land, of legends with each generation passing its history to another in narratives. The Indian subcontinent is an example of natural geographic wonder crowned with the Himalayas, the ocean sweeping its feet, in one of its hand the sun rises at its zenith and sets into the sparkling grains of dessert. Here is the home of the majestic beauty; Elephant which sets itself in tradition much before the consolidation of Hinduism, the nature & animalistic practices. Humans bowed to their strength in fear or the purposefulness in daily vitality. This gradually transcended to Hinduism, the oldest religion originating in the subcontinent. Elephants in temples came into prominence as much as in royal palaces. In temples they drew from mythology, its placement & the bend of its trunk gave it an auspicious meaning. In royal palaces it was the ride of the kings and its statues gave it a regal position. The architectural heritage of India is full of such examples. All the more Elephants found a diverse meaning overseas with Buddhism as well, apart from the spread of the Hindu culture.

Culturally, elephants transformed into an element of beauty or idols of worship. Ganapati gave it a more prosperous icon; festivals like Onam gave it a celebrative identity. The motifs in textiles further added to the more earthy vibrancy in forms of Kanchipuram silks, Ikat, Patola and Batik. Aesthetically ivory a prized possession had matrimonial value apart from the well known miniature paintings & crafts around the country that gave elephant a beloved stature. (Heather Elgood, 1999)

Even so we find elephants indigenous to heritage and culture less has been done to preserve the art form, even lesser has been done to promote it. Physically, live elephants face exploits in the name of cultural festivals, shackled, and under fed, given loadsome works also a species that need environmental protection given its reducing numbers. Elephant, a shared state animal of Jharkhand, Karnataka and Kerala needs to be protected and the culturally vibrancy needs to be documented. A rich history like that of India

has withstood plunders and the riddle of inattention it gets is bewildering. For the throes of sustainable development includes both the environmental and cultural, the persistent longingness as to discover our identity is sufficed with history as a mentor.

Elephants surreal and real are on a verge of vanish. The sustained harm done to history as well as the environment has kicked them to a wrecking point. Live elephants as to where the civilization itself should look onto has rolled down tremendously, housing nearly 60% of Asia's wild elephants and about 20% of domesticated ones, its survival is on bleak, categorically placed these elephants in major lie in southern and the northern west part of the country. (R Sukumar, 2006) The past centuries have been testimonial whence during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir there were nearly 113,000 captive elephants in his expanse of empire, as to now when human's selfish motives and conflicting interest has cleared the chunks of forest their residing abode. Even so the government measures have been backed by "Project Elephant" yet the illegal poaching poses a great threat to which its response of MIKE (Monitoring of illegal killing of elephants) has been good to a mark. The distorted ratio of male and female elephants is of crude importance. Apart from wildlife, the focus of domesticated elephants is by far the less where India having held history associated with them ironically treats it with no due respect. According to the survey by Project Elephant (2000) a total of 3,400 elephants have been domesticated by private owners assuming the largest number of 2,540, temples owning 190, forest departments holding 480, zoos and circuses 80 and 110 respectively. The life of temple elephants go in shackles, glamorously adorned and showcased during festive rites, their condition is pitiable. The ceremonial and matrimonial uses go for-loom as to when the wedding seasons dry out, even so during the wedding seasons they ought to bear the scorched heat, loud sounds and irritable colors. Other elephants 'are forced to beg by mahouts, who use them to serve them for a living. The 'touristy' elephants fend for the same, susceptible to same torturous conditions. A culture as rich as India attributing and drawing much from the religious jibe, it needs to restore its prominence eluding it of its

deserved status. The theme of examining and scrutinizing elephants in relation with India's own Hinduism and its translation to rich heritage and cultural synthesis is a take onto call for understanding identity, compiling, promoting and preserving. The socio-culture and religion would be thus expounded in terms of elephant as an icon of synthesis and harmonizing the ecology.

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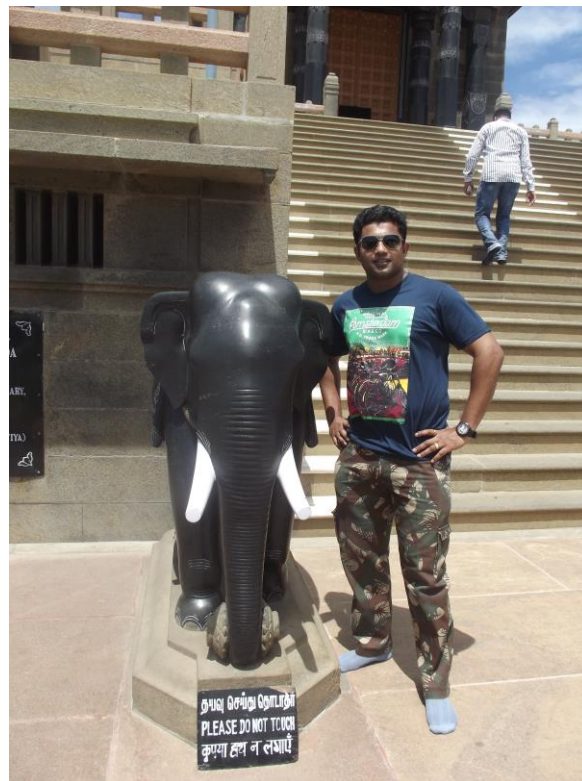
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# APPENDIX

## PHOTOGRAPHS



Elephant at Swami Vivekananda Rock, Tamil Nadu



Elephant at another entrance of Vivekananda Rock, Tamil Nadu



Elephant at the entrance of Padmanabapuram Palace, Kerala



Elephant with trunk rolled up inside the bedchamber of Padmanabapuram Palace, Kerala

