

AN ELEPHANT: A RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE TO PEACE PROCESS

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Abstract

This article provides a survey of the Buddhist vision of peace in the light of an elephant as the symbolic religious language with the purpose of contributing to peace-building and peacekeeping in the world. Elephant's forms are an important part of Hindu Buddhist and other myths. Basically, the earliest available teachings of the Buddha are to be found in Pali literature and belong to the school of Theravada Buddhism. We can define the term 'elephant' in Pali such as "Hatthi-a male elephant, Hatthini-a female elephant" respectively". In Buddhism, a white elephant is considered particularly auspicious and is associated with the birth of the Buddha. From the Pali texts, the group of elephants can divide into two main groups namely: first group:-at the instance of the symbolic conflict such as Girimekhala, Nalagiri, Mahilamukha etc., second group:-at the instance of the symbolic peace such as Paccaya, A white elephant, Parileyyaka, Bhaddavati and Eravan etc. The main characteristics of the elephant are strength and steadfastness. Therefore, elephant becomes a symbol of physical and mental strength, as well as responsibility and earthiness. Buddhism emphasizes on human effort, and has no faith in the divine power that is why; it is called a non-theistic religion which believes in the ability of the human beings. The communication is a human need. In particular, the relationship between the person in the society and social, all details about the

profound to the religion and philosophy as well. The elephant as a religious symbolic language to peace-building namely: the symbol of physical and mental strength; having a good friend; training; the fulfillment of the perfection of charity; gratefulness; establishing oneself in heedfulness; excellent Omen; treasure and Four Noble Truths.

Keywords: Elephant; Symbol; Religion; Language; Peace

Introduction

In Asian culture, there is a symbol such a wide gap between spiritual and material things as there seems to exist in the western civilization of today. Therefore, religious symbols are a living part of all aspects of Asian culture. This article will discuss an elephant, which as the auspicious animal and good omen in every society; and will present the stories of elephants as mentioned in the various Pali Canon. The group of elephants will divide into two main groups namely: first group for doing the conflict, the second group for doing the peace. The main characteristics of the elephant are his strength and steadfastness. Therefore it becomes a symbol of physical and mental strength, as well as responsibility and earthiness.

The article concludes the Buddhist worldviews is surprisingly in accordance with the insights of peace studies in its process-oriented paradigm, its insistence on peace by peaceful means, and its holistic framework of peace, which would play an essential role in the efforts of bringing the culture of peace into existence around the world. Consequently, this article has been made to examine the elephant play a vital role and significant part, which as the symbol of peace as depicted in the Buddhist Canonical Texts, throughout the story of the Buddha.

On this article, we can achieve the great benefit by approach to the process of peace-keeping, through the symbolic religious such as elephant, which as auspicious animals in the path's life of humankind.

An Elephant in General Meaning

An elephant is huge quadruped of the Pachydermate order, having long curving ivory tusks and a presenting proboscis (Preble, 1962). An elephant is the suborder Elephantoidae; order Proboscidea, Characterized by massive size, great strength; a disproportionately large head; long, grasping trunk or proboscis; short neck; and thick, loose, nearly hairless skin. The name pachyderm, referring to the thick skin, is a holdover from an earlier which such unlikely animals as walruses, tapirs, rhinoceroses and hippopotamuses under the term Pachydermata. Elephant, the only surviving proboscideans, belong to two genera, *Elephas*, the Asiatic elephant, and *Loxodonta*, the African. Although certain superficial features distinguish them, these two forms are very much alike in basic structure, habits, and behavior (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1966).

The Elephant as Depicted in Pali Buddhist texts

Basically, the earliest available teachings of the Buddha are to be found in Pali literature and belong to the school of *Theravada* Buddhism. We can define the term 'elephant' in Pali such as "*Hatthi*-a male elephant, *Hatthini*-a female elephant" For Sanskrit such as "*Hastin* and *Hastini* respectively". (H.R.H. Prince Chandaurnarunath, 1994)

In Buddhist scripture, the elephant is quadruped and mammal, this womb-creature, abiding in the realm of the creature creation. It can be categorized into 10 species. Each kind of which has a bodily particular specification.

An elephant has the relationship with the Buddha in the various state of his life. On this connection, the Buddha was born as elephant in some of his previous lives, totally 7 times namely:- (1) Silavanaga Jataka no.72, (2) Dummedha Jataka no.122, (3) Kasava Jataka no.221, (4) Suvannakakkata Jataka no.389, (5) Latukika Jataka no.357, (6) Matuposaka Jataka no.455, (7) Chaddanta Jataka no.514.

In the Buddhist scriptures, great elephants have the history and origin as depicted in Tipitaka, Jataka, as well as its commentaries. It has mentioned many elephants which related to the Gotama Buddha. On this point, we can divide elephants into two main groups, namely: - (1) an elephant as the symbol of conflict; and (2) an elephant as the symbol of peace. The brief of their lives are as follows:-

Group I: An elephants as the symbolic conflict are:-

(1). Girimekhala:- Mara's elephant. He was one hundred and fifty leagues in height. When Mara urged him to advance against the Buddha at the foot of the Bodhi-tree, he went forward and fell on his knees.

(2). Nalagiri :- An elephant of the Royal stalls at Rajagaha. Devadatta, after several vain attempts to kill the Buddha, obtained Ajatasattu's consents to use Nalagiri as a means of encompassing the Buddha' death. (G.P. Malalasekara, 2002)

(3). Mahilamukha- The state elephant of Brahmadatta, king of Benares. Brahmadatta, king of Benares, owned a state elephant, called Mahilamukha, who was gentle and good. One day thieves sat down outside his stable and started talking about their plans for robbery, and murder. Several days in succession this happened, until at last, by dint of listening to them, Mahilamukkha became cruel and began to kill his keepers. The king sent his ministers, the Bodhisatta, to investigate the matter. He discovered

what had happened and made a good man sit outside the stables who talked of various virtues. The elephant regained his former goodness and gentleness.

Group II: An elephants as the symbolic peace are:-

(1). Paccaya: This elephant was the state elephant of *Vesantara*, brought to the stall by a female flying elephant, on the day of his birth, and deposited there. He was white in colour and was called Paccaya. Because of he supplied a need of Vessantara (G.P. Malalasekara, 2002)

(2). A white elephant: During the night of the full moon of the eight months, Siri Mahamaya, the Queen consort of King *Suddhodana*, dream that a white elephant with lotus in his trunk circumnuted here chamber three times and then entered her womb through her right side, as it were. The dream was reported to a Brahmin astrologer who foretold that there would be born into the royal family an extraordinary child (Bidari, 2003). Thus, in Buddhism, a white elephant is considered particularly auspicious and is associated with the birth of the Buddha (Dalal, 2006).

(3). Parileyyaka- There a certain elephant who, finding communal life distasteful, had left his herd, waited on the Buddha, ministering to all his needs. The Commentaries say that the elephant's name was Parileyya, and described in vivid detail the perfect manner in which he looked after the Buddha, omitting nothing, even to the extent of finding hot water for his both. Soon after, the monkey fell on a tree-stump and died and was born in Tavatimsa (Dalal, 2006).

(4). Bhaddavati- A female elephant belonging to King Udena. She has belonged originally to *Candappajjota*. She could travel fifteen leagues in a day. Udena made use of her in his elopement with Vasuladatta. At the first the king paid her great honor, declaring that his wife, queen, and

kingdom were all due to her; her stall was smeared with perfumed earth and hung with colored hangings, a lamp burned perfumed oil and a dish of incense was set on one side. She stood on a colored carpet and ate the royal food of many flavors. But when she grew old she was neglected and became destitute. One day she saw the Buddha entering the city for alms, fell at his feet, and complained of the king's neglect. The Buddha reported the matter to the notice of the king's neglect. The Buddha reported the matter to the notice of Udena, and all former honors were restored to Bhaddhavati (Dalal, 2006).

(5). **Eravana**-Sakka's elephant. He was one the elephant of King Magadha, who gave him to Magha and his companions to help them in their good works on earth. As a result, when Magha and the others were reborn in *Tavatimsa*, Eravana was born there himself and became their companion (Malalasekara, 2002).

The Path of Peace-building in Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity, and equality (P.V. Bapat, 1997). As a well-known religion, Buddhism emphasizes on human effort, and has no faith in the divine power that is why; it is called a non-theistic religion which beliefs in the ability of the human beings. It gives stress on the human effort in stopping the cycle of birth and death. Every human being has the seed of awakening and insight into his or her own mind. They know how to find peace in their mind, they are able to overcome mental defilements and remove frustration and confusion resulting from them; they can make their mind calm, taste happiness that emerges from the calmed mind, they can are not easily infatuated with material possession, status, or fame. Buddhism believes in man's potential to train to better himself. A true Buddhist considers it "his responsibility to better himself. If

human beings succeed in fully bettering himself then he becomes the most excellent and noble of all beings.” (P.A.Payutto, 1993) As the Buddha says in the Dhammapada that:-“*(They) lead the tamed (elephant into) as assembly, the king mounts a tames one. Best among men is the tamed one who endures abuse.*” (Dhp. Verse. No.321) Everyone, in this regard, could distribute love and compassion and make efforts to establish an equitable society.

A society in which every person can contribute his best to overall human development. The Buddhist human developmental system stands for every human being to acquire the positive values and for complete literacy to create a better world environment. Where no one is prevented rather he is encouraged. Such trained persons in the Buddhist teaching would be in a better position of happiness and emancipation. The main purpose of Buddhist training emphasized on refinement of moral behavior. It is also called a state of living in spiritual calm. All training should necessarily contribute to this goal. In order to reach the goal of the Buddhist teaching, one has to train himself in self-control. It is stressed that knowing oneself and controlling one's own senses are basic to both material and spiritual progress. Human beings are special, unlike any other kind of animal. What makes them special is Sikkha, or education, namely learning, training and development. Human beings, who have been trained, educated or developed, are called “noble beings”. They know how to conduct a good life for themselves and also help their society fare securely in peace and happiness (Phra Brahmagunabhorn P.A.Payutto, 2012).

Therefore, in order to attain the highest destination, the Buddha has drawn a systematic path and suggested his disciples go along the path, which completely educates and help them in reaching their ultimate goal.

The course of Buddhist training is *Ti-sikkha* (threefold training). They are as follows;

[1]. *Adhisilasikkha*: Training in the Higher Morality

The meaning of *Adhisilasikkha* is ‘learning’ and put into practice the three constituents *Silakkhandha* of the *Ariyamagga*: right speech, right action, and right livelihood. *Adhisilasikkha* is none other than the *Patimokkhasamvarasila* which has been taught by the Buddha only. Other virtues could be found scattered in the daily life of the people and various recluses of the days.

[2]. *Adhicittasikkha*: Training in the Higher Mentality

The meaning of *Adhicittasikkha* is the training of *Citta* (Mind) in way of *Samadhi* (Concentration) which is the foundation of *Vipassana* for a higher level of the state of eight *Jhanas*. The constituents in *Ariyamagga* that promote higher meditation are a Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This training depends mainly on the *Adhisila sikkha* which brings out the higher state of mind for a successful mental training. *Adhicitta sikkha* is the essence of learning and gaining from the proper practice of higher quality of mind which is ready for further development of wisdom.

[3]. *Adhipann sikkha*: Training in the Higher Wisdom

The purpose of practicing the path of *Ariyamagga* is nothing but gaining *Panya* (wisdom). If one properly applied wisdom, one can attain deliverance from all sufferings; which is the ultimate goal of the Buddha’s Teaching. *Adhipanya sikkha* is the knowledge in the Four Noble Truths, the insight wisdom that really sees the three characteristics as they are. The constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path in the Group of wisdom: *Sammaditthi* (Right Understanding) and *Sammasankappa* (Right Thought) maintaining the extinction of all *Dukkha* (Suffering) as the objects.

Therefore, the process, which is called *Ti-sikkha*, would train everybody complete in both *Vijja* (Knowledge) and *Carana* (conduct). *Sila* and *Samadhi* constitute *Carana*, while *Panna* constitutes *Vijja*. Thus, *Vijja* and *Carana* (knowledge-conduct) constituted *Vijja* resembles the eyes of a human being, which *Carana* resembles the limb. A person, who is endowed with morality and concentration, but lacks wisdom, is like one endowed with *Vijja* (knowledge), but lack *Carana* (Conduct), is like one who has good eyesight but is defective in his limbs. A person who is endowed with both *Vijja* and *Carana*, is like a normally whole person possessing both good eyesight and healthy limbs. A person who lacks both *Vijja* and *Carana*, is like one defective in eyes and limbs, and is not one worthy of being called a living being (Mahathera Ledi Sayadaw, 1978). When a persons have practiced and developed themselves following the *Ti-Sikkha*'s procedure, they receive the three qualities of a trainee:- (1) good knowledge and good quality and good thinking to solve many problems; (2) good manners and social behaviors; (3) happiness and peace for whole life, which are essential for humanity. The real purpose of education is to serve the people in society and this is possible only when the trainee has all of such qualities.

The Elephant as a Symbolic Religious Language to Peace-building

In the method of religion, there is a wide gap between spiritual and material things. And all religions used language for explaining the principle of their own teachings. According to the Buddhism, the elephant is the symbol of many meanings. In the Pali Canons, they have mentioned the elephant in deference views, such as the *Nagavagga* in chapter XXIII of the *Dhammapada*, which talk about the manner of it. And some of the

instruction has mentioned in the various texts. On this point, for the details of each meaning, they are as follows:-

1. An Elephant as the Symbol of Physical and Mental Strength

According to the *Patimokkha*, which was the first mentioned in the *MahapadanaSutta* and then in the commentary of *Dhammapada*, had mentioned that “*Patient endurance is the extreme austerity.*” The main characteristics of the elephant are his strength and steadfastness. Therefore it becomes a symbol of physical and mental strength, as well as responsibility and earthiness. The Buddha has taught his disciples that:- “*As an elephant in battlefield withstand the arrow shot from a bow, so shall I endure abuse. Indeed, many people are without morality.*” (Daw Mya Tin, 1990)

According to the *Naga Sutta* mentioned the qualities of elephant that An elephant, to be fit for the royal stalls, should have four qualities, (1) he should be a good listener (*sota*), (2) a good slayer (*hanta*), (3) full of patience (*khanta*), and a good goer (*ganta*). And the Buddha instructed to the monks that a monk should have the corresponding qualities in order to be fit for the respect and gifts of the world (Malalasekara, 2002).

Thus, in Buddhism, the elephant is a symbol of mental strength. At the begging of one’s practice, the uncontrolled mind is symbolized by a gray elephant who can run wild any moment and destroy everything on his way. After practicing Dhamma and taming one’s mind, the mind which is now brought under control is symbolized by a white elephant strong and powerful, who can be directed wherever one wishes and destroy all the obstacles on this way. (Ven. Jampa Choskyi, 2016)

2. An Elephant as the symbol of having a good friend

According to the Buddhism, a friend has to play an important role in the life of a human. Friendship exerts a very great influence upon human life in society; it can cause a man to experience either failure or success in life.

On this connection, the Buddha replies in the *Mangala Sutta*, to the god's question, that "*not to associated with foolish (Bala) and to associated with wise (Pandita) and honor those who are worthy of honor, this is the Supreme Blessing*" (Kh.3; Sn.259-268). For associate with the good friend or people, the Buddha says that:- "*It is better to live alone; there is no fellowship with a fool. So one should live alone, do no evil, and be carefree like the elephant Matanga roaming alone in the forest.*"

Thus, it is especially learned and develops communication and relations with fellow human beings through goodwill, to have faith to follow good examples, and to know to utilize external resources, by the people, books, or other communications media, for seeking knowledge and virtue for one's life development, problem-solving and constructive action.

3. An Elephant as the Symbol of Training.

Human beings are special, unlike any other kind of animal. What makes them special is *Sikkha*, or education, namely learning, training and development. Human beings, who have been trained, educated or developed, are called "*noble beings*". They know how to conduct a good life for themselves and also help their society fare securely in peace and happiness.

On this point, as the Buddha has said in the *Dhammapada* that:- "*(They) lead the tamed (elephant into) as assembly, the king mounts a tamed one. Best among men is the tamed one who endures abuse*" (Daw Mya Tin, 1990)." Everyone, in this regard, could distribute love and compassion and make efforts to establish an equitable society.

Therefore, in order to attain the highest destination, the Buddha has drawn a systematic path and suggested his disciplines to go along the path, which completely educates and help them in reaching their ultimate goal. The course of Buddhist training is *Ti-sikkha* (threefold Training).

4. An Elephant as the Symbol of the Fulfillment of the Perfection of Charity

Being kind, generous, sacrificing, sharing, helping and providing assistance in terms of the four necessities, money or materials possessions including the imparting of knowledge or understanding and learning.

On this connection, in the Buddhist texts, an elephant was concerned direct and indirect to the charity. For direct, charity is donated by himself such as the previous life of Ampapindiya Thera and Padumakesiya Thera. For indirect, charity is donated by donors, such as Bodhisattava, King, *Bhikkhus*, *Bhikkhunis*. The benefits of all charities almost are elephants as the vehicles. The person, who going to birth as Deva or human being, or even the announcement to attained *Arahanta*. *Theras* and *Theri* were compared the miraculous things, which they have attained, with the elephant, such similar to an elephant free from the binder, used to live independently.

For a good example, an elephant as the symbolic charity is Vessantara Jataka (No.547). In this Jataka, the Buddha was the son of Sanjaya, kings of Sīvī and queen *Phusati*. At the time there was a great drought in Kalinga, and eight Brahmins came from there to *Vessantara* to be his white elephant, which has the power of making rain to fall. He granted their request and gave the elephant together with its priceless trapping. The citizens of *Jetuttara* were greatly upset that their elephant should be banished to *Vankagiri* (Malalasekara, 2002). So, from this event, the *Bodhisattava* can fulfill the perfection of charity in the one step.

Consequently, at the first state, the person should fulfill the perfection of charity, giving away his own properties, both animate and inanimate to others. By the fulfillment of the perfection of charity, the person did not aspire to receive worldly pleasures but to achieve the Super Enlightenment.

5. An Elephant as the Symbol of Gratefulness

The Buddha refers to parents in such respectful terms as ‘the Brahmas’, ‘the foremost divinities’, ‘the foremost teacher’, those worthy of offering from their children (A.II.68: GS.II.). It is not surprising that Buddhism strongly emphasize the need to give the most important and highest honor and respect to parents. According to the *Sigalovada Sutta*, gives five ways in which a son should be grateful to his parents who are compared to the eastern direction or forward direction by performing certain duties towards them according to the noble discipline, i.e. “*Having been supported by them I will support them in return.*” (D.I.189.)

For the connected to an elephant in the thankfulness, the Buddha says that “*The elephant called Dhanapala, in severe must and uncontrollable, being in capacity, eats not a morsel, yearning for his native forest.* (Daw Mya Tin, 1990)”

Thus, we find that the Buddha laid special emphasis on the virtue of acknowledging the good that has been done and showing gratefulness for it (*Katannukatavedhita*), as one of the qualities ascribed to an ideal man (Sappurisa). (A.I.61; J.V.240F.)

6. An Elephant as the Symbol of establishing oneself in heedfulness

This is to be aware of impermanence, to realize the instability, unendurability, and insubstantiality of life and all things around one, which is constantly changing according to life and all things around one, which is constantly changing according to causes and conditions, both internal and external (Phra Brahmagunabhorn P.A.Payutto, 2012).

On this connection, or taking delight in mindfulness, the Buddha had said by used the elephant to be the teaching method. As the mentioned in the *Dhammapada* Verses No.327 in the story of the elephant called Paveyyaka

that: “*Take delight in mindfulness, guard your mind well. As an elephant stuck in mire pulls itself out, so also, pull yourself out of the mire of moral defilements.*” (Dhp.Verse No.327. Daw Mya Tin, 1990)

Thus, one sees that one cannot afford to be complacent. One sees the preciousness of time and strives to learn about, prevent and rectify the causes of decline and bring about the causes of growth and prosperity, using all one’s time, night and day, to the greatest benefit. (Phra Brahmagunabhorn P.A.Payutto, 2012).

7. An Elephant as the Symbol of Excellent Omen

According to the Buddhist canon, at the birth of our great master, when the conception takes place on the full moon day of Asalha, with the moon in *Uttarasalha*, and Maya has no relations with her husband. She has a marvelous dream in which the *Bodhisatta*, as a white elephant, enters her womb through her side. When the dream is mentioned to the Brahmins, they foretell the birth of a son who will be either a universal monarch or a Buddha. (Malalasekara, 2002)

Thus, from this story, we can make clear that an elephant as the symbol and omen of fortunateness, and as the symbol of peace-building too.

8. An Elephant as the Symbol of Treasure

According to *Mahasudassana Sutta*, Mahasudassana possessed the seven treasures of *Cakkavatti*: they are (1) the *cakka-ratana*, (2) *hatthi-ratana*(name Uposatha), (3) *the assa-ratana* (named Valahaka), (4) the *mani-ratana*, (5) *itthi-ratana* (pearl among women), (6) the *gahapati-ratana* and (7) the *parinayaka-ratana*.

From this point, we can understand that elephant is one of the treasures of the emperor. The great emperors have the white elephant as the vehicle, and the white elephant is considered very special and with the power

to produce rain. In Indian society, elephants were considered to bring good luck and prosperity. They were owned by the kings and used in wars.

9. An Elephant as the Symbol of Four Noble Truths

The four Noble Truths comprise the more advanced teaching of the Buddha, intended for those who have prepared themselves by previous moral and spiritual development. State briefly in the Buddha's first sermon, they form the structural framework for all higher teachings.

According to *Mahahathipadopama Sutta*, Ven.Sariputta, the great disciple of the Gotama Buddha, addressed the monks at the Jetavana and tells them that "*Just as the foot of every creature will fit in the elephant's footprint, even so, are all right state of mind comprise with the Four Noble Truths.*" He then goes on to explain the *Dukkha* consists of the five *Upadanakkhandhas*-visible shapes, feelings, perception, *Sankharas* and consciousness.

Therefore, from the earlier discussion, it could be said that an elephant is not just animals, but as a religious language for educating the *Dhamma*. The Buddha has been chosen an elephant as the symbolic mode for instructed his disciple to gain the benefit of his teachings. Obviously, an elephant as in the sense that it is the Truth and a symbol of the development of human potential by way of Buddhism; which has been long celebrated as a religion of peace and non-violence. This process is the proficient peace-building.

Conclusion

Thus, from above discussion, which is a humble attempt to highlight the important role of the elephant as described in Pali Buddhist Texts. It should come to conclude. Elephants form an important part of Hindu Buddhist and other myths. Basically, the earliest available teachings of the

Buddha are to be found in Pali literature and belong to the school of *Theravada* Buddhism. We can define the term ‘elephant’ in Pali such as “*Hatthi*-a male elephant, *Hatthini*-a female elephant” For Sanskrit such as “*Hastin* and *Hastini* respectively”. In Buddhism, a white elephant is considered particularly auspicious and is associated with the birth of the Buddha. The group of elephants can divide into two main groups namely: first group: at the instance of the symbolic conflict such as Girimekhala, Nalagiri, Mahilamukha etc., the second group at the instance of the symbolic peace such as Paccaya, A white elephant, Parileyyaka, Bhaddavati and Eravan, etc. The main characteristics of the elephant are his strength and steadfastness. Therefore it becomes a symbol of physical and mental strength, as well as responsibility and earthiness. Buddhism emphasizes on human effort, and has no faith in the divine power that is why; it is called a non-theistic religion which beliefs in the ability of the human beings. The communication is a human need. In particular, the relationship between the person in the society and social, all details about the profound to the religion and philosophy as well. The elephant as a religious symbolic language to peace-building namely: the symbol of physical and mental strength; having a good friend; training; the fulfillment of the perfection of charity; gratefulness; establishing oneself in heedfulness; excellent Omen; treasure and Four Noble Truths.

Therefore, Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity, and equality. As a well-known religion, and emphasizes on human effort, and has no faith in the divine power that is why; it is called a non-theistic religion which believes in the ability of the human beings. The final path of the Buddhism is *Nibbana*, which is the higher peace, as the Buddha said in the *Dhammapada* that “***There is no happiness higher than peace.***”

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