

SACRED AND SYMBOLIC
Animals of Nepal

[Animals in the Art, Culture, Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists]

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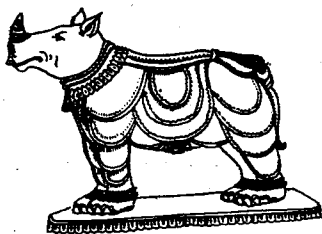
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RHINOCEROS

These animals are also modelled and carved out with great accuracy in the wood-works and sculptures. Ancient Hindus treated them as highly sacred. Some books describe that these animals have no significance. But this view is completely wrong.

Unicorn Rhinoceros has been frequently depicted on the seals of the Indus Valley Civilization. In some paintings, mangers



Rhinoceros unicornis (eye copy from the temple of Batsala Devi in Bhaktapur)

have been shown before them, which suggests that rhinoceroses were also among the domesticated animals of the Indus basin. Although it is a wild animal, it can be nicely tamed in the surroundings of human population. In some seals, folds of skin padded to simulate horny bosses have been shown.

Horns of rhinos are of great medicinal value. The cups made from the horns of Rhinoceros have the capacity of revealing the presence of poison, mixed in a drink or food.

Unicorn rhinoceroses were common during the protohistoric period in the Oriental region. Therefore, it exerted a great impact on the artisan's mind. On the stepped flanks of the gate of a Bhaktapur temple, Rhinoceroses are beautifully represented by the mansions. In some places they are used for decoration purposes but any specific significance is not attached to them by the Hindus and the Buddhists. It is not the vehicle of any god or goddess in either of these religion.

Some authors describe that *Ekashringa Varah*, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was actually the rhino and not the boar. The

habits and habitats of Rhino and boar are almost similar. Rhinos wallow in the mud and dig earth like a boar. However, it is a controversial point so far.

BUFFALO

Water-buffaloes have been depicted in the wood-works of Nepal in somewhat cursory poses. However, it is not so crude an attempt. Proportions of this animal, modelling of its skull, bovine, soft-muzzle, flat horns are all accurate and well detailed. Abstract-designs engraved over the body serve to accentuate the form. The art of depicting these animals is of great perfection.

This animal is shown in the wood-work only on the impact that for millennium this animal has been of prime importance in the economy of the country. The faunestic studies point out that this animal was also common in the central and south China. In some art work of China, these water-buffaloes and a few calves are shown in the widest variety of activities, i.e., standing, grazing, and swimming in a stream and lying down. A few calves are also shown scratching their sides and others drawing a plough. Cowherds either ride or amuse.

The religious impact of these animals is not clearly known to us. However, it seems that artists were influenced by the environment of the countryside. It is also definite that these animals were once found in the Terai of Nepal and the animal-paintings and sculptures were not derived from hearsay tradition or memory alone but were based on the keen analytical observations of the artists.

The *Padma Purana* says that after death, the sinner sees Yama, the lord of death, as very dreadful, riding fearful Ugra) on a buffalo. His hands are like claws.

The *Markandeya Purana* describes a buffalo-demon known as Mahisasura. He harassed the saints several times. Durga-