

Memorial Stones in Karnataka – An Empirical View

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study **memorial stones** given the stress on commemorating the fame of the warriors, the setting up of hero stones, while it connected to the funerary practices already existing in the society, also agreed well with the worldview of the poetic corpus. The *Tolkappiyam* mentions the setting up of the hero stones as a poetic theme and also describes it as a ceremony which involved the search for the appropriate stone, fixing an auspicious time, the ceremonial bathing and setting up of the stone, the celebration and feasting on the occasion, and praise and worship of the stone. The poems repeatedly mention the 'writing' of the name of the warrior. While detailed epigraphs might not have existed in this period, the name of the hero might have been inscribed and perhaps some representation of the heroic episode in which he met his end. Cattle raids are mentioned in one instance as the incident leading to the death of the warrior, and this continued in the early medieval period as well to be of frequent occurrence. The continuity between the practices of the Megalithic period and that of the later historic period can be seen in the fact that many of the hero stones were in the form of dolmens with three upright stones and a capstone with the inscription and figure of the hero on the rear stone facing the entrance. In a sense, this was a shrine dedicated to the memory of the hero.

Key words: Kannada, Hero-stones, Hero-stones, Vedic literature, narrative , epic battle.

Introduction

The format varies dependent on the parameters of historical period, geographical region and the thematic material dealt with. They are usually made of granite, red sand stone, soap stone or crude stones again depending on the above parameters. Usually the language and the script are those that are in tune with Kannada prevalent during those times, of course with a generous mixture of Sanskrit. They are some times terse and to the point or elaborate and descriptive. More often than not they follow standard patterns which are handed over to them by the earlier writers and engravers. Hero stones in Karnataka have a long tradition starting from the tamaTakallu Inscription of 550 A.D. right up to kOnasAgara inscription of 1910 A.D. This honour is accorded to an individual who dies in harness while serving his king and master or in order to protect the honour of women who are being molested by enemies or while trying to protect the cattle wealth of a village or even those who die during a royal hunt. By and large, these heroes constitute individuals who are able to put society above the self. This was carried out of course within the context of an imperialistic or feudal set up. These were erected by the grateful king, community or the family. Some individuals will have taken an oath to sacrifice their lives in order to save their master's life as and when the occasion demands. These individuals and the practice were called 'garuDa's (lenka) and 'vELevALi' respectively. The structures of hero stones have changed from time to time. However the sculptural details are usually more prominent than the wordings. Some of them depict the hero in combat with the enemies predominantly and the details about him will be tucked in somewhere. BEgUr Hero stone is known for giving a detailed description of a battle. Gradually the pattern was whittled down to three stages. In the first stage the hero is shown in combat, the next stage depicts his ascent to heaven graphically and divine damsels carry him to heaven in an airborne chariot. In the concluding phase he is shown relaxing in heaven, either worshipping a god or sitting in a meditative posture.

Once in a while these stages are extended up to six or seven. The hero stones during the regime of Hoysala dynasty are carved beautifully and the words are found in the mid band of the stones. 'Athakur Inscription' documents a memorial of this kind being built for a dog named 'kALi'. 'Sati stones' or 'Mast stones' constitute a different category. Here the woman has to perform either a 'sahagamana' or 'anugamana' voluntarily which involves burning herself on the funeral pyre. She was given the status of a 'Maha Sati' (mAsti) after this event and a stone was erected in order to commemorate the event. These stones are very simple and they do not even mention the name of the woman. They portray a woman in isolation or in the company of her husband. One of her hands will be raised in benediction and she will be holding a lemon in the other. mAsti stones are found in abundance particularly during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Some memorials depict just the right hand and nothing else. 'dEkabbe's Inscription' is an instance. Once in a while these satis are deified and temples are built around their memorials. (mAstamma guDi).

Over time, we find the memorial inscriptions growing more and more elaborate and lengthy, with the pontifical chain given, with eulogies of each major monk, whereas before only the monk or nun being commemorated was mentioned. Either their monastic or lay disciples usually set up the stone in their memory. This trend may be compared to the elaboration of other memorial stones over time. For instance, the manner in which the Bachahalli records commemorate more and more individuals dying with the king and also becomes more ornate both physically and textually. Literary works in Kannada from the tenth century onwards clearly express the obligations of the servant (*bhritya*) to the lord who nourished him. 'Abhritya should sacrifice his wealth and life for his master and fight without accepting aid and without fear. If he can, he should fight to win; if not, he should put in his best effort and die fighting. Such is the duty of the servant. If he should slip away from the field without doing either, his honour would be tarnished.' Thus Ranna's Duryodhana defines the duties of the subordinate to his lord.

Objective:

This paper intends to memorial stones erected during ancient times in memory of a hero who martyred his life for a noble cause are called Hero Stones (Viragal in Kannada). Also the practice of erecting memorial stones based on historical perspectives for the deceased hero and connected rituals in the Kannada literature.

Memorial stones Karnataka

These memorial stones are classified accordingly to the content of their text and sculpture found on them. They are found with or without inscriptions. Explanation of different varieties of Memorial Stones (in Kannada). You can find detailed description of two of the most unique memorial stones found in Karnataka, that of Dekabbe and Begur Veeragallu in this document: Memorial Stones – Dekabbe and Begur Veeragallu Explained (in Kannada). There are no memorial stones in whole of India that can be compared to these two with respect to wonderful depiction of events with detailed description inscribed on them.

ಗೋಗ್ರಹಣ, ತುರುಗೋಳ – Go Grahana, Turugol – Defending Cattle

These hero stones were erected for people who died while defending cattle theft or siege of cattle by neighboring villages. In ancient and medieval period, cattle was considered as wealth. The capture of cattle in the enemy territory was considered

as an act of pride. We find such references to it even in Mahabharatha; the Virataparva ends with gograhana i.e capture of cows at Viratanagari. Such attack was considered as a matter of insult to a village and they usually staged an attack to recapture the lost cattle. Hero stones were laid for village fellow men who tried to bring back their lost cattle, those people were remembered as heroes of the village.

ಪೆಂಡಿರುದಡೆಯುರ್ಚು, ಪೆಣ್ಣುಯ್ಯಲ್ – Pendirudeyurchu, Penbuyyall

Death while protecting modesty of women in distress being assaulted by enemies.

ಬೇಟೆ – Bete – Hunting Wild Animals

Death while killing a wild beast. Since there are various varieties in this category, they have been classified based on the type of the wild beast which caused the death.

Hunting was a very popular recreational game in Karnataka and in Indian at large. We have epigraphs and also literary works describing in detail the hunting expeditions in ancient days. Hunting is one of the chapters in 18 varnanas (Ashtadasa). According to epigraphical evidences, boar hunting was very popular. Epigraphical sculptures narrate different types of Boar hunting using trained dogs. Sculptures on the epigraphs depicts, hunting with one or two dogs attacking or cornering the boar. These sources tell us the importance of dogs in hunting. Atakur inscription (dated 949.A.D) is an inscribed memorial stone erected by a grief-stricken owner in honor of his brave dog, which died while killing a wild boar; this stone erected in memory of an animal is considered a unique one. Melagani located in Mulbagal taluk, Kolar, has two memorial stones of 10th century erected for heroic endeavor of two hounds namely Loga and Dhalaga. Loga had attacked and killed 70 boars in its life time and Dhalaga also had attacked and killed 50 boars in its life time.

Kilgunte denotes live burial, plunging into pyre, falling from height and allowing oneself to be slammed, a person sacrifices his life with demise of his master or king. We have inscriptions along with text giving details of Kilgunte practice, but associated sculpture is rarely found. Doddahundi memorial stone (840 or 869 A.D) has a unique depiction in frieze of the ritual death of the Western Ganga king Ereganga Nitimarga I. The memorial stone has its frieze set inside a square panel whose borders are etched to create the impression of flames that further accentuate the grave event. The dying king, who exudes a calm countenance, is lying on a couch with his head on a double pillow and is attended to by his personal guard Agarayya. An agitated Prince Satyavakya stands behind the king with a dagger and sword. The inscription below the frieze reads “bee at the pair of lotus feet of Arhat Bhattaraka”. This is typical example of Kilgunte memorial stone of type velevali ವೇಲೆವಾಳಿ . Some individuals will have taken an oath to sacrifice their lives in order to save their master’s life as bodyguards and when the occasion demands such as death of their masters due to war, illness, etc., they follow their master in death. These individuals and the practice were called ‘garuda’s (lenka) ಗರೂಡ (ಲೆಂಕ) and ‘velevali’ ವೇಲೆವಾಳಿ respectively. Doddahundi and Hemavati are fine examples of Kilgunte inscription.

ಸಿಡಿ ತಲೆ – Sidithale

Sidi – ‘blast’, thale – ‘head’. These are memorial stones which depict self scarifies by be-heading and cutting of throat. The person is hanged to a bamboo pole which is bent. His throat is cut by knife and his head would blast off from the body as the pole gets straightened. This would tear apart his head from the body, and the head is swung away. These have been classified based on the whether the person sacrificed his life for his family’s welfare or for the welfare of the king.

ತನಗಾಗಿ ಆತ್ಮಬಲಿ – Athmahuthi – Self Sacrifice

Memorials of the persons who invite death by cutting their throat for the welfare of his family.

ರಾಜನಿಗಾಗಿ ಆತ್ಮಬಲಿ – Sacrifice for the welfare of the king

Memorials of the royal servants who invite death by cutting their throat for the welfare of his family of their masters.

ಧಾರ್ಮಿಕ – Dharmika – Religious

There are memorials stones found in Karnataka of the persons who invited death in a religious way to attain Moksha – freedom from the cycle of birth and death. They have been classified as follows.

ನಿಸಿದಿ – Nisidi

There are memorials stone of the religious persons of Jaina sect to who invited the death in a religious way called Sallekana.

Dharmika Karya – Religious Ritual

Inviting death on an auspicious day in a holy place. Hindus believe that a person attains Moksha, if death occurs in a holy place or on a auspicious day.

ಉರಿ ಉಯ್ಯಾಲೆ – Uri Uyyale – Swing on a fire

This is a ritual where in, on the day of solar eclipse, one sacrifices his life swinging over a religious fire.

ಗೂಟಗಳ ಮೇಲೆ ಬೀಳುವುದು – Falling on a sharp piercing arrow

This is a ritual where in, on a precious day, one sacrifices his life falling on a sharp iron rod/arrow.

ಶೂಲ – Shoola – Sitting on sharp objects

This is a ritual where in, on a precious day, one sacrifices his life sitting on a sharp object which pierces his body.

ಜಾತಕ – Jathaka

There are memorials stone of the religious persons of Boudhha (Buddhism) sect, usually depicted as part of ‘Jataka’ tales. Such memorial stones belonging to Ashoka period are found in northern Karnataka.

ವೀರಗಲ್ಲು Veeragallu – Hero Stone

Hero stones are memorial stones erected in memory of heroes who died in a battle field while defending kings, or defending the cattle or women in distress.

Hero stone are found all over Karnataka, about half of the hero stones found have no inscriptions on them, the concentration of hero stones can be found in these districts : Kolar, Shimoga, Tumkur, Bangalore and Haveri .

Hero stone is a unique feature of Karnataka inscriptions, other than Karnataka we can find hero stones in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, because of the proximity , we can find Hero stones even these regions. War memorial Hero stones are found all over Karnataka.

Hero Stones can be further divided into these criteria:

ಯುದ್ಧ, ಕೋಟಿಕಾಳಗ – Hero stones on Attack of Forts

There are many beautiful hero stones in Karnataka which depict war scenes with soldiers riding on horses and elephants. Some of them also have a fort wall etched in them. The most notable and one of a kind in whole of India is the Begur Veeragallu which is now housed in Bangalore Museum. In pitched battles, expert skilled soldiers used to stage ahead to capture the fort gate. For soldiers who got killed during the attach of the fort, their master / King honored them by erecting memorial stones. These stones are usually ornately sculpted, and depict the soldier in the battle field and might not contain inscriptions. To sight one such Hero stone, the one in Lakshmeshwar, Gadag district, depicts a soldier who was killed while removing the stones of the forts, there by causing great damage to the security of the fort. Hero Stones at Abblur, Mavali, Hamsabhavi, depict the attack on forts.

ಊರಳಿವು – Ooralivu – Defending Village

These hero stones were erected for the persons who died while fighting to save their village against enemy attack to capture the village. Inscriptions on some of the stones describe the scene as to, how adventurous youngsters mobilized with arms, faced such attacks and died safeguarding the village.

ಗಡಿಕಾಳಗ – Gadi Kalaga – Defending Border

These hero stones were laid for persons who died while defending their village territory. Minor wars used to take place between the neighboring villages, when one village tried encroaching upon the land belonging to the neighboring village. Such border disputes was very common in olden days.

Begur Hero Stone Inscription: The best hero stone available in whole of India, now preserved in Bangalore Museum.

Kappe Arabhatta Inscription

Kappe Arabhatta was a Chalukya fighter, of the 8th century who is known from a Kannada verse inscription, dated to c. 700 CE, and carved on a cliff overlooking the northeast end of the artificial lake in Badami. The inscription consists of five stanzas written out in ten lines in Kannada script. It consists of a Sanskrit shloka. Of the remaining stanzas, all except the first are in the tripadi, a Kannada verse metre. This shoka mentions mind of the heroes who fought in the war.

varantEjasvinO mrutyu na tu mAnAvakhandanam mruttyustatkaNikO dukham mAnabhngan dinEdinE

Another 10th Century memorial stone inscription has the following shloka:

JetEna lbhyate lakshmi mrutenaapi suraaMganaa kShaNavisvaMsini kaayE kA chintaa maraNEraNE

Meaning: When a warrior wins in war, he gets wealth. But if he dies in the battle field, he gets association of heavenly women. The body would decompose in seconds and there is no reason to go back to take the dead from the battle field.

Another shloka mentions about the courage and heroism of a warrior. As per mythology, only two persons can attain to reach the corona of the Sun. a Yogi, another is the warrior who sacrificed his life fighting in the battle field. This is how heroism was cherished and glorified through inscriptions. Because of these, warrior Emperors like Chalukayan Pulikeshin -II had titles such as 'King of Three Maharashtras'.

Rashtrakuta King Krishna – III staged an expedition and took his forces up to river Ganga. Evidence to this expedition can be found in Jura, a small village in Satna district, Madhya Pradesh. The inscription here mentions that, Krishna–III, during his campaign, treated women with most respect like he would treat his mother and sister and never indulged with any women. Inscription also mentions that he was adorned with the title 'Paranari Sahodara' (Meaning brother to all women). Rashtrakuta queens actively participated in wars and even gave birth on the battle ground. To sight one such example, Rashtrakuta Nrupatunga Amogavarsha was born on a river bank in a battle field. Later, in 10th century A.D., Chalukya Vikramaditya VI, who waged a war against Malvas, stationed his army on the banks of river Narmada, and in this camp, his wives also stayed with him. Most of the rules of war changed with the advent of Muslims to Deccan (13th Century A.D onwards). Women stopped participating or joining their husband in war in the later era.

Conclusion

Memorial Stones are those stones dedicated to a person who sacrificed his life for the cause of king or public in war, battlefield; cattle raids and safeguard life and dignity of women from miscreants. Such men, who selflessly pledged their life for the protection of his village men and property, were raised to the status of demigod and became the hero of the village. In their commemoration the village men or his relatives erected a stone in front of the temple or in village forum. A Hero stone is divided into three sections, the lower portion gives details of the hero and his act of sacrifice.

The sculpture will have, hero fighting the enemy with a sword or a bow, the army, cattle, women in distress. This section generally depicts the reason for his /her death. The middle portion depicts the hero who sacrificed his life being carried away to heaven (swarga) by angels. The third portion depicts him sitting in front of a God.

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