

# SYNOPSIS

## Introduction

Memorial stones are considered as symbolic representations of the deceased individual(s), whose erection may or may not have formed a part of funerary rituals. They constitute the 'tangible representations' of a significant cultural ethos that stressed upon the glorification of death and commemoration of the dead. Since such components form a significant element of the cultural repertoire of most societies, the current research presents a novel approach of how such intangible components and their tangible reflections in a restricted geographical and temporal area are better understood through multi-disciplinary approaches. Further enunciating their 'identities' from time to time offers lot of academic challenges and therefore the same is attempted here with great caution.

Patil (1982) and Rajan (2000) opined that the memorial stones in the Indian sub-continent can be characterised as 'cultural survivors' of the preceding Megalithic tradition into historical times. Previous studies on these traditions have primarily been descriptive, focussing upon their typologies; inscriptions; sculptural art; geographical and temporal distribution and their variance (Settar 1982, 1986, 1990; Reddy 1994; Rajan 2000; Sesha Sastry 2004; Thakuria 2011). These studies, governed by 'time-bound research priorities', although successful to a large degree in reconstructing the local socio-political histories, have seldom addressed the larger question with regards to the 'identity' of the memorial stones. Besides, these studies are characterised by certain lacunae viz., (a) most studies on the memorial stones are carried out in isolation without recognising the universality of such traditions. In such instances the memorial stones are approached from a regionalist perspective that glorifies regionalist ideals, which emphasise upon a region's exaltation and the marital qualities of its people. However, a closer examination of the memorial stone record across the Indian sub-continent reveals it to be a

universal tradition; (b) there exists a lack of adherence to a uniform nomenclature; typology and understanding regarding the purpose of their erections within the same spatial and temporal region (for instance, Reddy 1994; Rajan 2000) (c) There exist a generalisation of their types and forms without taking into account their geographical and temporal variations (for instance, Thapar 1981). The forms, nature and purpose of erection of memorial stones vary greatly within the Indian-subcontinent, with each type erected to commemorate specific instances or mode of death. Moreover, the researchers have primarily stressed upon inscribed memorial stones, whereby a large number of non-inscribed stones were ignored. Furthermore, the memorial stones are found in multiple cultural contexts. These variations and a preferential neglect of the non-inscribed memorial stones have greatly limited our understanding of the memorial stone traditions and the reconstruction of their 'identities'.

The main scope of this work lies in addressing the aforementioned lacunae and providing a synchronistic framework for the better understanding of the memorial stone traditions and their 'identities'. This necessitated a comprehensive examination of their various facets viz. temporal and geographical distribution; sculptural art; inscriptions and associated intangible practices. To achieve these objectives it was thus necessary to undertake primary surveys to document the memorial stone heritage and their various components such as epigraphic data, sculptural art traditions and ethnographic practices in relation with the physiographic area and its surrounding landscape. Hassan District, Karnataka was chosen for the current research due to its historical and geographical potentials and as earlier investigations here on these traditions have attested it to be a rich memorial stone yielding area (Settar 1982, 1986, 1990; Rajan 2000).

Hassan District is one of the 30 districts of Karnataka state. The district is situated between 12° 13' and 13° 33' North latitudes and 75° 33' and 76° 38' East

longitudes and roughly occupies the South western part of the state. It has a total area of 6826.15 sq. km and comprises of 8 *talukas*- Alur, Arkalgud, Belur, Channarayapatna, Hassan, Holenarsipur, Arsikere and Manjarabad; 38 *hoblies* and 2369 villages. Taking into consideration of the geology, precipitation, vegetation, climate, drainage systems and fauna the district can be divided into three physiographic regions, i.e. 1. Southern *malnad*, 2. Semi-*malnad* and 3. Southern *maidan*. Besides highlighting the memorial stone heritage in the region, the current study also aims at devising a methodology for integrating and incorporating evidence acquired from diverse approaches.

### **Major objectives of the current research**

1. To reconstruct the spatial and temporal distribution of the memorial stones in line with the three physiographic divisions of the study area. Such an undertaking would facilitate in identifying if the physiographic regions determined the nature/form of the memorial.
2. To examine the nature and the form of the memorial stones and their evolutions over time. This would lead to an understanding of the evolution of the form of the memorial; sculptural art and their symbolic representations; and the choice of raw material used in their making.
3. To examine if the spatial and temporal distribution of the memorial stones and their types can be linked with the changing pattern of polity. An examination of this facet of the memorial stone tradition facilitates an understanding of the prevailing influences of various ruling powers in the region over time and the everyday social concerns in the region.
4. To examine the sculptural art-traditions of the memorial stones in the region in lieu with sculptural treatises and how the principles enumerated in the texts were used to portray an 'ideal'. This exercise was undertaken to examine if the

sculpted figures on the memorial stones exhibit emotions through their postures and expressions, resulting in the portrayal of 'ideal'.

5. To examine the nature of memorial stone inscriptions and how they vary from other classes of inscriptions within the region. An understanding of this facet would highlight the character of the memorial stone inscriptions.
6. To reconstruct the belief systems and social practices, which involve a complex network of subsystems such as religion and morals that emphasise on chivalry, honour, valour and loyalty. The memorial stones were erected to meet the social aspirations of the society responsible in their erections. An in depth analyses of the various facets of the memorial stone traditions here would throw significant clues on the beliefs of past societies.
7. To examine how the memorial stones govern the socio-cultural lives of the local populace who live within the vicinity of the memorial stones in contemporary times. The manner in which these are perceived in contemporary times may offer insights on their perceptions by past societies.
8. Through these aforementioned objectives, the thesis aims to elucidate the position of the memorial stones in Hassan District, Karnataka and develop an objective framework to integrate data acquired from diverse methodological approaches.

## **Outline of thesis**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter includes a description of the scope of the present work, along with the previous research carried out in this branch of knowledge. It also highlights the necessity for a more systematic data collection, compilation of available data, the need for integrating data acquired from multiple approaches in a synchronistic

manner and organized presentation of this work for fruitful enquiry into the cultural vestiges of these traditions. This chapter would also include an overview of the objectives of the present work.

## **Chapter 2: Methods of Study**

This chapter discusses the methods employed in the collection of data and their shortcomings. It also deals with the classification of the data acquired and the methods employed during the analysis of data acquired from multiple approaches

## **Chapter 3: Environmental Setting and Cultural History of Hassan District, Karnataka**

This chapter includes an introduction to the physiography of the region followed by the cultural history of the region. The objective of this chapter is to provide an outline that will help situating the memorial stones documented in this research within the broader physiographic and cultural background of the region.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter presents the results of the current research. The data presented include the results from field surveys undertaken; typological classification and sub-classification of memorial stones; patterns of geographical and temporal distribution of memorial stones; analysis of their sculptural art and inscriptions; and ethnographic surveys.

## **Chapter 5: The Meaning and Relevance of Memorial Stones in Hassan District: an Assessment**

This chapter discusses the results of the data presented in the previous chapter with an aim to fulfil the objectives that are enumerated in the introductory chapter. The various aspects discussed include the nature and form of the memorial; temporal and geographical distributions; nature of inscriptions and sculptural art of the memorial stones; and social significance of memorial stones in

contemporary society. The chapter aims to provide a synchronistic framework through which the data acquired from diverse approaches are incorporated and presented in a meaningful manner.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The concluding chapter of this thesis outlines the important points emerging from the discussions in the previous chapter. It highlights the significance and limitations of the present work and future scope in the current field.

## **Appendices**

This last section presents the list of memorial stones along with their geo-physical co-ordinates and time-period that were documented during the present study.

## **References**

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## STATEMENT – I

(Statement showing the particulars, on which the work is based, the discovery of new facts and of new relationships between facts observed by others and how the work tends to help the general advancement of knowledge.)

The memorial stones are seen as ‘cultural survivors’ of the preceding megalithic traditions. These have been noticed in most parts of the Indian sub-continent, wherein the tradition has either ceased to exist or continues to be practiced adherently in some regions. Earlier studies on these traditions have mostly been focussed upon highlighting their inscribed content; sculptural art traditions; and geographical and temporal distributions and their variance (for instance, Settar 1982, 1986, 1990; Reddy 1994; Rajan 2000; Sesha Sastry 2004; Thakuria 2011). These studies although significant to a certain degree towards building local histories, have perceived them as a regional phenomenon, emphasising upon merely one attribute of the memorial stone. This preferential neglect of other attributes in the synthesis of data has hampered our understanding of the memorial stone tradition. The current research has sought to address these lacunae and seeks to develop a synchronistic framework to incorporate and synthesise data acquired from diverse approaches. Taking Hassan District as a case study, the current research has revealed the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches towards reconstructing the memorial stone traditions and understanding their ‘identities’ from the time of their making to contemporary times within a geographical area.

**Following are the major findings of the work:**

1. The current research led to the documentation of 732 memorial stones along with their geo-coordinates. These include both inscribed and non-inscribed memorials. The non-inscribed memorial stones were previously ignored and



their incorporation in the study has further enhanced our understanding of the tradition.

2. The typological classification of memorial stones was undertaken as per their nature and purpose of erection. Their vernacular nomenclature has been adopted in the current research. They have been classified under three heads viz., (a) *Veeragals*; (b). *Mastikals*; and (c) *Nishidhis*. These have been further classified under various heads.
3. The chronological distribution of memorial stones was undertaken based on their epigraphic data. In the absence of inscriptions on them, these were dated on the basis of their sculptural art. To facilitate the incorporation of non-inscribed memorial stones in a uniform schema of temporal distribution, the memorial stones were dated as per the prevailing influences of various dynasties in the regions. Hence, the memorial stones were chronologically classified under three time periods viz., (a). Ganga (c. 800-1000 CE); (b). Hoysala (1001-1350 CE); and (c). Vijayanagara and Nayaka Periods (1351-1800 CE).
4. The study of the memorial stone inscriptions has revealed their nature and how they vary from other classes of inscriptions. The memorial stone inscriptions emphasis upon the genealogy, martial qualities of the deceased and his ideals in whose memory the memorial was erected as against the ruling elite and the prevailing broader socio-cultural conditions in other classes of inscriptions.
5. The sculptural art of the memorial stones were studied via the medium of *Natyashastra*, a pan-Indian text on dramaturgy. The aforesaid analysis was restricted to the *veeragals* as the figures depicted on them imbibe vibrancy as against the other two memorial types. The expressions and postures depicted by the figures on the *veeragals* exhibit certain emotions. To understand the significance of these depictions and appreciate the causes of behavioural

elements, their sculptural art were analysed as per the principals enumerated in the text. Their analyses have revealed the recurrence of particular postures and expressions in which the sculptural figures are depicted. These highlight the deliberate measures taken by the sculptors to portray certain ideals.

6. Ethnographic surveys undertaken revealed that the memorial stones are found in multiple contexts and are perceived differently by the contemporary populace living within the vicinity of the memorial stones. These surveys have revealed the various processes leading to the shift in the context of the memorial stones, from the time of their making to contemporary times, thereby determining their 'identity'. The data acquired from associated intangible components such as oral traditions; worship practices and beliefs have been rationally incorporated in the thesis by minimising subjective elements.
7. The data acquired from the aforesaid diverse approaches have been incorporated in this thesis in a coherent manner. The incorporation of data besides highlighting the diverse facets of memorial stones has revealed the need for such studies to better understand the tangible expressions of certain significant cultural ethos of past societies.

## STATEMENT – II

(Statement indicating the sources of information and the extent to which the thesis is based on the works of others and the portion of the thesis claimed as original.)

The study is based on the memorial stones documented through extensive explorations undertaken in Hassan District, Karnataka between 2012 and 2014. The research seeks to reconstruct the memorial stone traditions and seeks to situate them in the socio-cultural history of the region. The memorial stones here were previously studied by Settar (1982, 1986, 1990) and Rajan (2000), who took into account only the inscribed memorial stones. Similarly, following the efforts of several scholars, the inscriptions on the memorial stones in the region have been systematically collected and published in various volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica* (1973, Vol. II; 1984, Vol. VIII; 1990, Vol. IX; 1997, Vol. X)

The portion of the thesis claimed as original include the documentation of memorial stones on the basis of their temporal and geographical distributions and their variance; study of sculptural art depictions via the medium of *Natyashastra*; the formulation of the character of their inscriptions; and the analysis of associated intangible components. Through these analyses, an attempt is made to elucidate the ‘identities’ of the memorial stones.

**The following is the list of references which formed the basis for the formulation of concepts used in the thesis.**

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