

Chapter - 2

METHODS OF STUDY

You know my method.

It is founded upon the observation of trifles.

Sherlock Holmes (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)

The present chapter deals with the different methods and techniques adopted in the current research to assess the memorial stone tradition and elucidate their 'identities' in Hassan District, Karnataka. As the current research adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to achieve the aforesaid goal, the rationale of applying each method of study is highlighted here. In addition, the chapter also includes the classificatory scheme adopted in the research to categorise the memorial stones documented.

The research methods and techniques adopted in the study are as follows:

2.1. Literary survey

The first step in this research involved a survey of existent literature in the field of study. During the course of this research, various publications viz. academic journals, monographs, conference proceedings and unpublished dissertations were referred to in the libraries at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara; Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune and Mythic Society, Bangalore. This exercise besides focussing upon existent literature on the memorial stone heritage in South Asia also engaged in the study of literature in the allied fields of art history, epigraphy and ethnography. The survey focussed upon existent literature in both English and Kannada languages. Such an undertaking facilitated in the formulation of the research problem; an understanding of the current state of research in the field of study; the focus of research in both multi-disciplinary projects and projects governed by 'time-bound research priorities' in the past and their shortcomings; the

widespread nature of the practice of erecting memorial stones in South Asia and how scholars from diverse geographical regions have perceived them. An understanding of these facets, allowed for the development of methodological concepts to address the shortcomings in previous research and the means to incorporate analytical techniques used in the allied disciplines of art history, epigraphy and ethnography, all of which aimed towards reconstructing the memorial stone tradition in a given geographical area and elucidating their 'identities'.

2.2. Field surveys

A review of existent literature in the field highlighted certain shortcomings in previous researches undertaken. Previous studies on the memorial stone traditions have generally been descriptive, focussing upon the inscribed memorial stones and their sculptural art traditions. These studies although useful in building local histories of the region, have seldom addressed the broader concern of reconstructing their 'identities'. To overcome these lacunae, it was necessary to undertake primary surveys in a given area to facilitate first-hand documentation of memorial stones, its current location and its ecological settings. Hassan District, Karnataka was chosen as the area for carrying out surveys owing to it being a rich memorial stone yielding area (Settar 1982; Rajan 2000; Vrushab 2010, 2014) and its rich cultural legacy.

An extensive village to village survey was undertaken with a focus on documenting memorial stones along with their geo-coordinates; raw material used for their making; inscriptional data; sculptural art; and associated intangible components. In addition, two museums viz. Archaeological Museum, Halebid, Archaeological Survey of India; and District Museum, Hassan, Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Government of Karnataka were also visited to document the memorial stones in their collections.

Attempts were also made to see how the local populations perceived these memorial stones and its impulses in contemporary society.

From the field surveys it was observed that the contextual meaning of some of the memorials have been made culturally insignificant due to their relocation/dislocation. This made it a little difficult to relate it with its ecology as assigned by its authors. However, it may be noted that the respect for the tradition and the associated cultural intangibles are kept in mind by the local populations, which allowed for the preservation of the memorials over time. Therefore, the exercise of linking ecology with a great majority of the memorials is carried out with a great degree of caution.

2.3. Classification of memorial stones

A review of the previous researches on the memorial stone traditions in the study area revealed that there exists no uniform system of classification (for instance, Settar 1982; Rajan 2000, Sessa Sastry 2004). In this study, the classificatory scheme adopted is based on the nature of death the memorial stones commemorate. The vernacular nomenclature of these memorial stones has been adopted. Thus the memorial stones documented in this study were classified under three heads viz. (a) *veeragals*, (b) *mastikals* and (c) *nishidhis*.

Veeragals or hero stones are those memorial stones which glorify and commemorate individuals who were killed in battle; cattle raids; feuds; defence of the community; while protecting the interests of one's overlord or in pursuit of one's *dharma*. These were further classified under various sub-types based on the cause or nature of death as depicted in the sculptural register representing the theme of 'heroic death' in conjunction with the inscribed record. Thus the *veeragals* in this study have been classified as under viz. (a) battle, (b) cattle raid, (c) skirmish, (d) self-immolation, (e) hunting or killed by animals and (f) memorials for pets.

Mastikals or sati stones are those memorial stones commemorating the death of women via the rites of *sahagamana* or *anugamana* following the death of their husband. These memorials are further classified under two sub-types viz. (a) *vira-mastikals*, where the sati is depicted along with the deceased husband and (b) *mahasatikal*, where only the sati has been depicted.

Nishidhis are those memorials erected in memory of members of the Jaina faith who achieved 'ritual-death' following the codes prescribed in the *Aradhana* texts. These memorials have been classified under various sub-types such as (a) rock memorials without sculptural art, (b) rock memorials with sculptural art, (c) memorial pillars, (d) memorial columns (e) memorial columns within a pavilion, (f) memorial slabs without sculptural art, (g) stepped platforms and (h) *Samadhi mantaps*.

Thus while the former two memorial types reveal a secular character, the *nishidhis* were erected to commemorate 'ritual death' attained by the members of Jaina faith, and is sectarian in nature.

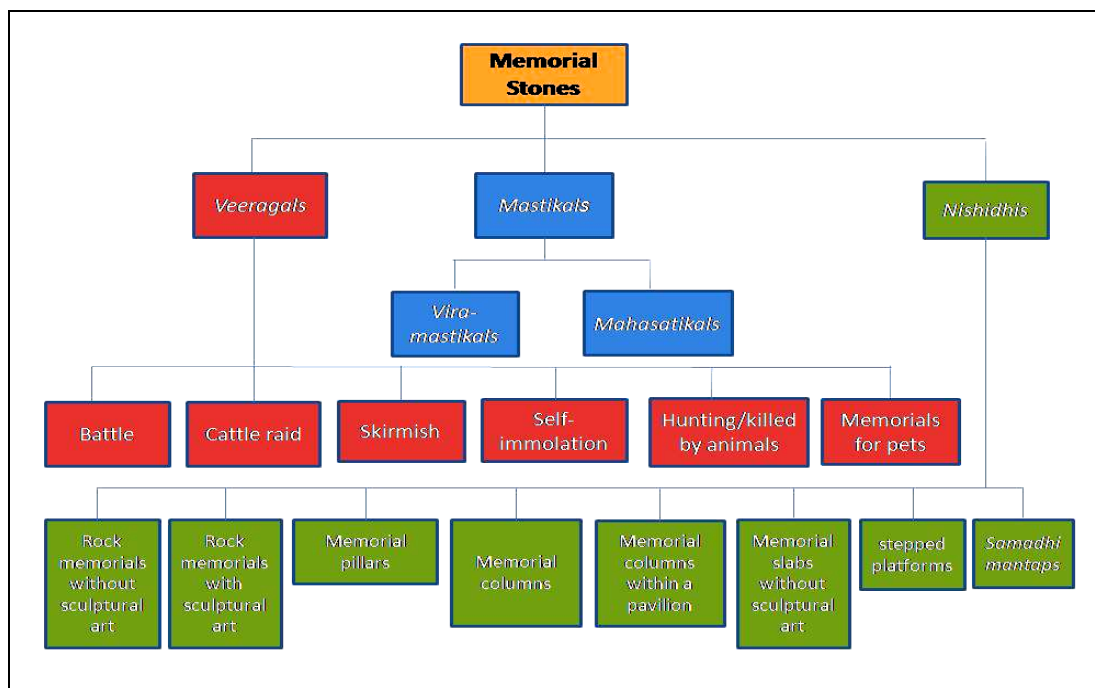


Figure 2.1: Typological classification of memorial stones in Hassan District, Karnataka

The aforesaid scheme of classification has been adopted here as each memorial type has a distinct character and were erected or caused to be made to commemorate a particular instance or mode of death. The vernacular nomenclature is used here as these best reflect the nature of the memorial as against the existing terminologies for the memorials (for instance, Settar 1982; Rajan 2000; Reddy 1994; Chidanandamurti 1984). It was thus necessary to analyse each memorial type individually, followed by a comparative analysis of their synthesised data. Such an approach has been successful to a great degree in understanding the evolution of the form of the memorial type; the character of their inscriptions and sculptural art; and the socio-cultural ethos of the people responsible for the setting up of memorials.

2.4. Chronology of the memorial stones

The chronologies of the memorials in the region were established using multiple parameters. The inscribed memorial stones documented during this study were dated on the basis of their inscribed record. These were designated as 'type-varieties'. In dating the non inscribed memorial stones, a comparative assessment of their size, raw material used in their making and sculptural art traditions with the inscribed memorial stones and other sculptural edifices in the region were undertaken. This exercise was undertaken based on the premise put forth by Settar (1982), who stated that 'the artists responsible for carving these stones followed a definite pattern during different time periods'. He further elaborates that the sculptor being trained in the prevailing art traditions of the period, followed similar practices as other sculptural edifices in their execution of the memorial stone.

This proposition was further elaborated by Sesha Satry (2004), who identified certain parameters to date memorial stones belonging to various time periods based on their size, raw material used in their making, presence or absence of inscriptions and artistic conventions. The aforesaid parameters were used in

this study with a few revisions as highlighted in chapter 4 and 5. In addition, the current research also examined sculptural attributes such as ornamentation and drapery of the sculpted figures to determine the chronology of the memorials.

In the context of the present study, both inscribed and non inscribed varieties of *veeragals* and *mastikals* have been incorporated. In order to facilitate the incorporation of non inscribed varieties of the aforesaid memorial types in the chronological framework, the memorials were classified under three broad time periods viz. Ganga (c. 800-1000 CE), Hoysala (1001-1350 CE) and Vijayanagara and Nayaka Periods (1351-1800 CE) based on the dynastic rule of various powers in the region. As each dynastic power in the region patronised a particular art tradition, it was possible to date these non inscribed varieties on the basis of the artistic conventions of the various time periods. In the case of *nishidhis*, the non inscribed varieties have not been incorporated in the study owing to the absence of any definitive evidence of their *nishidhi* character as sculpturally similar donative records were also caused to be made by the patrons of the grant. These memorials have been dated as per the absolute dates mentioned in the inscriptions and on the basis of the palaeographic evidence. They have been chronologically assigned in a time scale divided into a period of a hundred years.

2.5. Sculptural art

The quality of sculptural art on these memorials is difficult to appreciate as the artisans were primarily interested in making a memorial rather than a work of art. Therefore, the scales that can be used for determining the quality of sculptural art had to be modified a little, so that the elements of art can be brought out even from figure distortions which are not necessarily intentional as they were not meant to be exhibited as art objects, but only as memorials. Although there are a few memorials that reveal high workmanship, the

aforementioned limitation were kept in mind while assuming the sculptural elements of memorial stones.

The sculptured figures depicted on the memorial stones portray emotions through certain postures and expressions. To better understand the underlying meaning of these postures and expressions, and the behavioural elements of the lead characters and associated figures, the sculptural depictions were studied via the principles enumerated in the *Natyashastra*, a pan-Indian text on dramaturgy. The *Natyashastra* has been chosen for the current study, as the text is the oldest and a pan-Indian text on dramaturgy, from which other texts on the same have derived inspiration from. The aforesaid analysis was restricted to select sculptural registers of the *veeragals* as the figures depicted on the memorials imbibe vibrancy as against the other two memorial types. In addition, the sculptural depictions on a few registers of the *veeragals* along with the sculptural representations on the *mastikals* and *nishidhis* exhibit certain sentiments which do not come under the purview of *Natyashastra*, but are dealt with by later commentaries on dramaturgy as elaborated in Chapter 5.

The *Natyashastra* is the oldest Indian text on the theory of *Nrutyatanaka* (dance drama). It contains about six thousand verses spread over 36 chapters as per the south Indian tradition and 37 chapters as per north Indian tradition. As the name implies it deals mainly with the theory of *natya* or dramaturgy that has its own constituents such as dance, drama, music and aesthetics. It deals with the rules relating to theatrical performances and in short can be regarded as the science of stage. Like most ancient Indian texts, it claims a divine origin which secures it a greater sanctity and as it covers a wide range of knowledge, art, craft design and activity it is also referred to as *Natyaveda* and *Gandharvaveda*.

As per tradition, Brahma created it as per the request of the Gods. He created the fifth Veda that was open to all irrespective of caste and creed. He entered

into a yogic trance and recalled the four Vedas and drew the recitative (*pathya*) from the Rig Veda, songs (*gita*) from the Sama Veda, histrionic representations (*abhinaya*) from the Yajur Veda and sentiments (*rasa*) from Atharva Veda and passed it on to Bharata.

The text has been subjected to various debates regarding its antiquity. To be on the safer side its latest date may be fixed at 300 BC (Ghosh 1995, Vol. 1: xxxix). Difference of opinion also prevails over whether Bharata was a single author. De (1961: 36) opines that a work of this magnitude demands an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of many arts and hence it was not possible for a single scholar to compose such a work. He suggests that the word 'Bharata' originally meant an actor, and it was composed by several authors who followed the Bharata system of *natya*. The text is in the form of a dialogue between the sages and Bharata in the mode of the presenter. It has been variously interpreted in the past. The author himself allows for varied interpretations and modifications of his own injunctions. However, from the time of its composition, it has been held in high regard and all later writers and commentators on the theories of literature, dramaturgy, arts and aesthetics owe their allegiance to *Natyashastra*.

The *Natyashastra* deals with both the interpretative and non-interpretative aspects of dance, which can be identified, in the dance sculptures. The non-interpretative aspect deals with the aspects devoid of sentiments and the interpretative aspect deals with the elements of sentiments in detail. The text seems to be the first in recognizing the two-fold importance of psychology about the production of a play. Its classification of heroes and heroines according to their psychological nature proves its admission of the importance of the subject on the creative side of the dramatic art, for; with a sufficient knowledge of all possible reactions of environments and incidents upon the different characters, the greatest possible success in characterization can be

achieved (Ghosh 1995, Vol. 1: xlvi). The Natyashastra also reveals the understanding of anatomical structure and even the physiological and psychological processes involved in dramatic presentation.

2.5.1. Natyashastra and its contents for investigation in the present research

The text as observed has variations through the passage of time. It is imperative to follow a universally accepted text to analyse the figures depicted on the memorial stones with reference to Natyashastra. Hence, the universally accepted Sanskrit texts with translations of Manomohan Ghosh and Adya Rangacharya of Natyashastra have been used (Ghosh 1995, 2003; Adya 2003a, b).

The above select works of Bharata's Natyashastra contains thirty-six chapters. Only selective chapters play a major role and are the key tools for the investigation, resulting in a selection of the required chapters. Though there are many other aspects enumerated, only limited selected text is preferred which comes in the purview to analyse the figures depicted on the memorial stones.

2.6. Ethnographic surveys

Ethnographic evidences such as oral traditions and contemporary practices associated with the archaeological record are seldom taken into account during archaeological investigations as they are often bound by myths and later interpolations. Although deprived of their objectivity, they serve as 'shared living experiences' and are useful in addressing issues pertaining to the perception of the past and the significance of the archaeological record to the local populace and their 'context'. These approaches are particularly useful in regions in which the material remains of the past form a significant part of the 'living context' of the present (Whiteley 2002).

In the context of the present study, the erection of memorial stones in Hassan District, Karnataka is not a living tradition. Further, the memorial stones are found in multiple cultural contexts, with a few treated with a greater degree of sanctity, while a few others serve as family heirloom, museum exhibits or lie unattended in the fields. In this context, it was felt necessary to comprehend the processes that governed the perceptions of these memorial stones amongst the local populace; the manner in which they influence the socio-cultural lives of the local populace and the reasons for the variations in the status accorded to the memorial stones and their context. Attempts to understand these facets of the memorial stones are seldom carried out, although isolated endeavours on these lines have revealed the utility of intangibles in addressing issues pertaining to reconstructing the significance of memorial stones in the past; the belief systems and cultural practices of the people involved in their making and the manner in which these memorial stones influence the socio-cultural lives of the modern populace (Fischer and Shah 1973; Chidanandamurti 1982; Hardgrove 1999).

Hence, in order to achieve the aforesaid goals, interviews with the local communities who associate themselves with the memorials by adhering to their own beliefs and traditional inheritance were conducted to document associated oral traditions and beliefs; worship practices; and their perceptions towards these memorial stones. The role of institutions responsible for the preservation of archaeological heritage in the region and the reasons for the preferential treatment given to select memorial stones were also evaluated.

2.7. Epigraphic studies

Besides other facets of the memorial stone tradition, the study of their inscriptions has received prime focus over the years. Hence, a large percentage of the memorial stone inscriptions in Hassan District, Karnataka, have been systematically documented and published in the various volumes of *Epigraphia*

Carnatica (*Epigraphia Carnatica* 1973, Vol. II; *Epigraphia Carnatica*. 1984, Vol. VIII; *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1990, Vol. IX; *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1997, Vol. X). These formed the basis of the study of the memorial stone inscriptions in the present study.

The current research focusses upon highlighting the nature of memorial stone inscriptions as against reinterpreting them and seeks to co-relate the inscriptions with other attributes of the memorial stones. These studies were undertaken to examine how the memorial stone inscriptions differ from other classes of inscriptions and understand the underlying theme in the memorial stone inscriptions and how they vary against each memorial type. Besides, the inscriptions on the memorial stones were also used to determine the chronology of the inscribed memorial stones. The non inscribed varieties of *veeragals* and *mastikals* were chronologically classified on the basis of comparative studies of their attributes with the inscribed memorial stones.