

## NARRATIVE SCULPTURES OF NORTH CANARA REGION OF KARNATAKA



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### Summary

*The North Canara region of Karnataka has been specially identified in the narrative sculptural art. Geographical conditions and diverse culture of this region influenced the narrative sculpture. Here artist has used locally available materials like stone and wood for the carvings of narratives. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight the narrative sculptures of North Canara region, with special reference to wooden narratives, narrative sculptures of Hero stones, narratives in temples and erotic sculptures. The study covers the period from early times to early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The area of study as mentioned confined to North Canara regions of Karnataka and it mainly focused on the Haldipur, Hegde, Dhareshwar, Manjaguni, Sodigadde, Kogre, Shirali, rural areas of Udupi, Gokarna, Kekkar and etc.*

### Key words :

Narratology, Sculptures, Hero Stones, Wooden Chariots, Ashramas, Erotic Sculptures

### 1. Introduction

Narratology is one of the most ancient arts which convey its views in a convincing manner. The prehistoric man who is unknown to the language used the pictographic symbols to express his views. When the civilization process was started, the human being thought over to shape his lifestyle with some social and religious bindings. As a part of communication, he used language symbols, the incidents and stories transmitted orally that could be historical or mythical. In the context of

India, the proofs of antiquity of narrative stories can be traced to its earliest literature namely Vedic literature. The *Samaveda*, Sutras of *Rigveda* dialogue hymns are the usually roots of Indian drama. As a part of Vedic literature '*Vedangas*', 'the *Upanishadas*', '*Aranyakas*' and epics like the '*Ramayana*' and 'the Mahabharata' and the '*Bhagavata*' came in to existence which are the steps ahead towards the development of phonetics, grammar and narration of moral values, which are to be the bases of literary narratives. In literary discourse a story with series of events in the relation to the existence, assumes the form of narrative. A story becomes

narrative and its depiction becomes discourse, 'Katha', 'Akhyana', 'Upakhyan', 'Akyaika', 'Vrattana', 'Charitra', 'Prabhanda' and 'Itihasa' are the various names by which Indian narratives are known. (Subhash Khannari, 2007, p. 80.) The works like the Ramayana the Mahabharata, the Puranas, the *Panchatantra* and others which form the theme of narratives were much popular. That they were not only made use for literary compositions like poetry and drama but also to the formation the classical and folk culture.

## **2. The Sculptural Modes**

In the presentation of the stories, incidents or themes the artist used a variety of compositional devices. It is presumed that, the theme or the story which artist wants to convey through the sculptural mode already known to the viewer by the background of the narratives. Various modes were adopted for presenting the narratives in sculptural art and paintings. (Vidhya Dehejia; 1991, pp. 45-57).

- (i) Mono Scenic mode : Infact this was the briefest mode of presenting a story or theme. It comprises a single significant and easily identifiable scene taken from a key episode in the narrative, (Padigar, S.V.; 2001, p. 13) for ex: Mahishasuramardhini at Shirali Museum and Narasihma at Chandavar (Kumta Tq).
- (ii) Continuous Narration : Continuous narration comprises of presentation of two or more episodes of story in a single location without regard for time factors. (Kristi Evans; 1997, pp. 8-11.)
- (iii) Horizontal sequential narration : The episodes are represented side by side horizontally. Thus, through characters may recur in the episodes; the time and setting of the episodes are different. (Vidhya Dehejia ; 1991,

pp. 45-57.) This technique is adopted particularly for the narration of episodes from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Purans, the best example such narration is Khetapainarayana temple, Laxminarayana temple and Santappa Narayana temples of Mudabhatkal (Bhatkal Tq.)

- (iv) Sequential Narration in vertical format : The technique consists of presentation of various episodes of story in separate compartments arranged one below the other. The sequence may be from top to bottom or bottom to top. (Vidhya Dehejia ; Op Cit.)
- (v) Sequencing of stages of single episode in the single frame : This is a unique mode of narration the episode presented in single with different stages of episodes.

The above are important modes of narrations. The narrative story of Gautama Buddha's life on the *stupas* of Sanchi (M.P), Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), Barhut and Bodhgaya (Bihar) are the first instances of visual narratives in India. The same tradition is continued in South India, along with the spread of Buddhism. Amaravati (Andhrapradesh), Kanaginhalli (Karnataka) provide visual proofs of their spread in Deccan. Discovery of terracotta disk like lid from Vadgoan-Madhavapur (Belguam dist, Karnataka) dating from 1<sup>st</sup>- 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD seems to depict the *Markhandeya* episode mono scene mode is the best proof for the non-Buddhist visual narratives. (Sundara, A; 1981, pp. 88-91) Rapid growth in the temple architecture has provided ample scope for the artists to reproduce the epic, puranic and secular stories in stone and wood. These visual narratives served the purpose not only for decorating the temples but were intended

to convey contemporary myths, morals and ideals.

### **3. Wooden Narrative Sculptures**

Wooden carving is very familiar in the temples of Canara region. *Pallaki* and wooden chariot (Ratha) are common in the temples. Chariot is a replica of the temple. It is also known as "Moving temple". It reaches to the common people who are unable to attend temple and temple activities in personal. *Rathotsava* (Chariot festival) is the oldest form of religious ceremony, where most of the people participate irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The main purpose of this festival is to convey the message of equality and brotherhood. It also reflects the socio-religious and economic activities of the people. As that of temple, chariot (Ratha) has also *kalasha*, dome, *mantapa* and *bhitti*. The *kalasha* and dome of chariot is decorated and covered with the colorful cotton or silk cloth. The *Mantapa* part, where *utsava moorti* is worshipped. It is covered with painted panel of Gods and Goddesses.

The Gadde (Chajja) part is decorated with beautiful miniature carvings of flowers and geometrical designs and series of dancing girls and musicians. In the next step, carvings of *Dashavatara* scenes and incarnation of Lord Shiva and Vishnu and *Ashtadikpalakas*. It is followed by the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the next panel the artist has depicted the day to day life of common man. In some wooden chariots, he has highlighted the erotic scenes. The wooden chariot of Haldipura, (Tq: Honnavar) is the best example for such sculptures.

Wooden chariot of Mahabaleshwara Temple of Gokarna is one of the oldest and biggest chariots in Karnataka, Portuguese traveler John Freyer, who visited Canara region in 15<sup>th</sup>

Century mentioned about this wooden chariot and chariot festival. It is beautifully decorated with narrative stories of Shiva and *Vishnu Puranas*. Wooden chariots of Banavasi belong to about 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century AD. This chariot is donated by the Sonda Chiefs to God Madhukeshwara of Banavasi. Wooden chariots of Hegde (Kumata), Haldipur (Honnavar), Dhareshwar (Kumta) and Manjuguni (Sirsi) are also decorated with the beautiful traditional narrative panels of Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the past these *Rathotsvas* were patronized by the royal families.

The typical form of worshipping of heroes is still in practice in the coastal Canara region. They are called as *Kampliveera* (Hero from Kampli, Shivmogga Dist.) *Kanbeer* (protector of forest). Such type of varieties of wooden masks are worshipped once in a year. The worship of sati (heroic woman) in the form of wooden doll is also practiced in the sati temples of Sodigadde, Kogre, Shirali, Jattamasti (all are in Bhatkal Tq). Besides this, the worship of devils and members of the royal families in the form of wooden dolls is also popular in the rural areas of Udupi and South Kanara districts. Particular dress code of decoration, ornamentation and hair style of these wooden sculptures are the continuation of old practices. These are the best examples for living narratives of Canara region.

Such type of wooden narrative panels are the indication of past glory of Canara region which are still existed in this region as an unique antique.

### **4. Narrative sculptures in Hero stones**

Narrative sculpture on Hero stone is of typical style of narration in Canara region. Hero stones of Kekkar, Haldipura (Honnavar Tq.) Hiregutti, Valagalli, Gokarna (Kumta Tq.), Mogata, Bhavikeri,

Vandige (Ankola Tq.) are special in features.

Black stone pillar is cut in to octagon shape with *kalasha* or *amlaka* on top and all sides of this stone, sculptor engraved beautiful narrative stories of Ramayana, life of Rama, episode of *Vanavasa* and war with Ravana and coronation ceremony of Rama. The artist of Valagalli (Kumta Tq.) has tried to trace the ancient war techniques, hair styles of Heroes, war equipment's, beautiful dress and ornamentation of common people. Animals like elephant horse and etc., are depicted in one side. On other side the pictures of contemporary social life are depicted. The artist of the hero stone of Kekkar (Honnavar Tq.) has not only given the details of the war, but also depicted about erotic sculptures.

Hero stone from Mogata, Bhavikeri and Vandige (Ankola Tq.) are known for the miniature sculptures. These hero stones are divided in to four divisions. First side of the inscription is decorated with the narratives of the Ramayana - Rama in exile, meeting of Rama and Sugreeva, Hanuman in the court of Ravana and Rama's fighting with Ravana. In second portion, a hero fighting with his enemy. Here the sculptor has carved about the ancient war techniques and traditional weapons. It follows the hero's death in the war and his journey towards heaven along with *Apsaras* and the dancing girls. The third part of the inscriptions consists of the picture of wrestling and hunting man(?). All these sculpture are in local traditional style.

Hero stone from Mallapur (Honnavar Tq.) is typical in nature. It narrates the death of a hero, who jumped in to the burning flames to pay homage to the death of his master. Number of people follow with the musical

instruments and put ghee etc, to show him honor.

### **5. Narratives in temples**

Khetapainarayana temple, Laxminarayana temple and Santappa Narayana temples of Mudabhatkal belongs to Vijayanagara period. These temples are constructed by the members of the trading community like Khetappayya and Santappayya. Narrative panels of these temples are in the traditional techniques. Miniature sculptures are engraved on the niches of the temple also in the inner and outer walls of the temple. Majority of them belong to different forms of Vishnu. In which narratives of the *Bhagavata* and *Vishnupurana* are found. The supportive pillars of the *Sabhamantapa* are also decorated with narratives of *Krishnaleela* and the episodes of *Dashavataras*, *Govardhanadhari* Krishna, *Gopikavastrapaharana*, *Balakrishna*, Krishna as a cow boy *Gopala Krishna* (cow harder) and BalaKrishna with butter bowl.

The lower part of the left side of outer wall is fully decorated with narrative story of the Ramayana. In these series the sculptor has given description as follows.

On the first panel Dasharata is performing '*Putrakamesti Yajna*' with his wives. *Agni* (fire god) is giving *Payasam* to Dasharatha. Dasharatha hands over this *payasam* (sweet) to Kausalya and Sumitra.

In the second one, Rama and Laxman were in the ashrama of Vishwamitra, where they are getting advice from Gurumata. Also there is depiction of conversation of Shurpanakha with Rama and Laxman, deshaping of Shurpanakha's nose and ears.

In the third one, there is a narration of an episode of Golden deer (Marichikke). The next episode explains Ravana in disguise as an acetic and asking for alms from Sita. On this occasion he

takes away Sita in *Pushpaka vimana*.

In the fourth coming penal, the bird Jatayu trying to stop Ravana to rescue Sita. But Ravana cut down the wings of Jatayu.

The next penal explains about meeting of Rama and Laxman with Sugreeva Hanumant and *Kapi sainya*. Also it depicts the bravery of Rama, Ahilyas *Shapavimochana* and the cutting of Seven trees (*Saptashalya*) by the archery powers of Rama. Again there is picture of a fighting between Vali and Sugreeva. Rama kills Vali by standing behind the tree. Also one can see the portrait of Laxman, Sugreeva and Hanumanta in *Namaskara* position and Rama hands over the ring to Hanumanta. Then, Hanumanta flew over ocean and reaches Lanka. He entered *Ashokavana* to meet Sita and hands over the ring to Sita, which was given by Rama. Hanumanta destroys *Ashokavana* then, the Rakshas catches him and bring him before Ravana. There Hanumanta seats on the mound of his tail. Next, there is a narration of bonifire of Lanka (*Lankadahana*) by Hanumanta. There is a portrayal of the fight between Rama and Ravana. There is also a beautiful depiction of movements of arrow from both side. Besides this there is a depiction of fight between Rakshas and Vanaras. In the final penal there is a graceful narration of the death of Ravana. Mandodhari, Rama and his followers are observing his death. It also contains the images of Rama's return to Ayodya and his coronation as a King.

## **6. Erotic Sculptures**

Sexual life is an integral part of every living being. The Indian sexual life is considered as the most sacred art and limited to homely affairs. It is an act used for the continuation of the generation as well as fulfilling sexual desires.

As per religious tradition to maintain its purity and sanctity, this is

made as a part of *Varnashramadharm*a system.

According to *Varnashramadharm*a, man is bound to perform certain duties and functions when he passes through the different stages of life. As per *Varnashramadharm*a there are four stage of human life. They are;

*Brahmacharya*: It is meant for the age of studies and self control.

*Grahashtashrama* : In this stage as a family holder he has to perform and fulfill his sexual needs and bare the responsibilities.

*Vanaprasta*: It is period of renunciation of partial domestic and material pleasures to go for spiritual understanding of life. But without completely living house hold life.

*Sanyasa*: A complete dedication to divine powers to achieve Moksha.

From philosophical point of view abdication (control) over sexual life is the only way to attain Salvation. In these above contrast views the saints and philosophers wanted to maintain the balanced life. In such contradictory views. The patrons of the temple used temple premises for conveying the message through the erotic sculptures, which are engraved on the walls of the temples.

In Canara region, we find a very few erotic sculptures of post-Vijayanagara temples like Khetapainarayana temple of Mudhabhatkal and Natha Temple of Marugadde (Ankola Tq.). The scholars opine that, the Natha temple of Marugadde is a centre of sexual activities, which is used for obtaining the super power and religious rituals to worship God.

## **7. Conclusion**

The narrative sculpture of this region are represented in regional and local styles. The study of this narrative sculpture generally helped us to know about the local life style, dress, ornaments, economic conditions, means

of transport, commercial activities like carpentry, pottery iron work, domestication of animals etc. Narratives of the inscription and hero stone of this region particularly helped us to know about war techniques, ancient weapons and heroic battle fought by the soldiers. Socio-religious, economic and political life is revealed through various sculptural studies. The worship of non-bramhanical deities is very popular tradition in Canara region. Gunaga, a priest from potter (non-Brahmin) community is the chief priest of Kanabeera, Jainabeera, Jattiga, Karidevaru, Holidevaru and etc. The folk culture of this region was richer than culture that was developed during dynastical rule. It is significant note that social change witnessed in this region.

With all these evidences we can come to the conclusion that the narratology of North Canara region has expressed the day to day life of the people, it has uphold the moral values which the people were cultivated.

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