

## Chapter - 1

# INTRODUCTION

*Research is to see what everybody else has seen,  
and to think what nobody else has thought.*

(Albert Szent-Gyorgi)

Glorification of death and commemoration of the dead is a practice that characterizes most cultures. Although variously perceived and carried out, it is seen that the inherent fear or reverence for the spirit or the soul of the dead constituted one of the intimate sentiments of man since very early times. In addition, most societies share a belief that it is necessary for the names and deeds of the deceased to be remembered for all eternity. It is perhaps due to such innate sentiments that the practice of honouring the dead by the construction of elaborately adorned tombs and mausoleums or by the setting up of simple epitaphs and memorials came into existence. The variations in such commemorations were essentially determined by the economic concerns and the socio-cultural norms of the society that honoured the deceased through such tangible expressions.

A memorial stone in this regard was one of the means of commemorating the deceased. They can be considered as symbolic representations of the deceased individual(s) and constitute the 'tangible manifestations' of a significant cultural ethos that stressed upon the glorification of death and commemoration of the dead. Since the cultural components involving the glorification of death and commemoration of the dead 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 the application of 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.

The memorial stones in the Indian sub-continent are often characterised as cultural survivors of the preceding Megalithic traditions. In a few instances, a few typological varieties of the sepulchral nature, ascribable to the preceding Megalithic times are also characterised as memorial stones (c.f. Thapar 1981; Patil 1982; Soundara Rajan 1982; Rajan 2000). However, a distinction has been made in the current research, where a memorial stone is taken to represent an edifice which is non-sepulchral and purely commemorative in character, raised in memory or honour of the deceased, whose erection may or may not have formed a part of the funerary rites. Whilst such characteristics of the funerary or commemorative memorials can be established to those datable to the historical periods, on the basis of their sculptural depictions, engraved inscriptions and literary sources, it is difficult at this stage to precisely establish the character of the Megalithic remains due to lack of definite evidence. Under such circumstances, the current research restricts the currency of the term 'memorial stones' to exclude the Megalithic remains.

### **1.1. Previous studies on the memorial stone tradition in the Indian Sub-continent**

The beginnings of the studies on the memorial stone traditions in the Indian sub-continent dates back to the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century CE, where Orientalists such as Whitehead (1921), Vogel (1931), Walsh (1937) and Hornell (1942), viewed the memorial stones as an integral element of the cultural repertoire of the subaltern populations, which involved the veneration of the deceased ancestors and associated their worship as unworldly and spiritual. The post independence period witnessed a spurt in the studies undertaken on the memorial stone tradition in the Indian sub-continent. A few noteworthy studies include the works of

Archer (1947), who brought to light several aspects of the tradition of erecting memorials for the dead amongst the Kishnaut Ahirs of Central India. Similarly, Fischer and Shah (1973) undertook extensive surveys in South Gujarat region amongst the Chaudhari and Gamit communities and documented the process of setting up of the memorials and the manner in which the memorials for the dead influenced the socio-cultural lives of the present. Further, Vanamalai (1975) through an extensive review of the Sangam texts highlighted the mode of worship and the significance of the memorial stones in the socio-cultural life of ancient south India. In the early part of 1970's, a seminar on Hero-stones was conducted by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology. The proceedings of the seminar resulted in a publication brought out in 1974, which highlighted several aspects of the origin, antiquity, nature of engraved inscriptions and the interface between the archaeological and literary evidences pertaining to the memorial stone traditions in Tamil Nadu (Nagaswamy 1974). These studies like those undertaken in the pre-Independence period were, however, carried out in isolation, wherein scholars viewed these memorials as peculiar features of their particular regions and made casual attempts at drawing attention towards them through isolated publications.

The 1980's witnessed the first attempts to draw a holistic picture of the memorial stone traditions of the Indian sub-continent. Thapar (1981) reviewed the diversity of the memorial stone tradition in the Indian sub-continent and highlighted their differing character and practices associated with the memorials. Her observations further led to the understanding that the memorials formed a significant element of the substratum cults which contradict the generalisations made on life and death by the classical texts. In 1982, a comprehensive volume entitled '*Memorial stones, a Study of their Origin, Significance and Variety*' (Settar and Sontheimer Ed. 1982) carrying the proceedings of the seminar held in Dharwar in 1970's was published. The volume carrying 34 papers was the first comprehensive attempt to examine

the memorial stone traditions in the Indian sub-continent. Whilst emphasising upon the differing nature of the memorial stone tradition in the Indian sub-continent, the publication highlighted several aspects with regards to the origin, underlying philosophy behind the setting up of the memorials and the significance of the memorials in the social life of the contemporary populations who associate themselves with the memorial or live in close proximity to them. In addition, the volume also explored classical and vernacular literary traditions to examine if there are any visible links that could throw further light on the memorial stone tradition.

Chidanandamurti (1984), in his study of the memorial stone inscriptions highlighted several facets of the tradition in the regions comprising modern Karnataka whilst also briefly highlighting how the inscriptions engraved on the memorial stones vary from other classes of inscriptions. It also explored the underlying ethos of setting up memorials to honour the heroic death of individuals through a review of contemporary literary traditions in Kannada language.

Whilst the aforementioned publications focussed upon reading the holistic character of the memorial stone record, two noteworthy studies entitled '*Inviting Death*' and '*Pursuing Death*' by Settar (1986; 1990) successfully brought to light several aspects of a distinct typological variety of memorial that commemorated a sectarian practice involving the achievement of 'ritual death'. The former publication attempted to trace the history of ritual death in Shravanabelagola, Karnataka, through archaeological and epigraphic sources. The latter publication confines itself to an examination of the *Aradhana* and allied Jaina texts dealing with the philosophy of the circle of life and death and the mode of liberating oneself from the circle through the pursuit of 'ritual death'.

Reddy (1994) and Rajan (2000) on the aforementioned lines sought to investigate upon the memorial stone tradition in different parts of south India. Reddy (1994)

with an emphasis upon the epigraphic records engraved upon the memorial stones in the regions comprising erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, was successful in identifying several cult centres and practices which involved the setting up and appropriation of memorial stones.

Rajan (2000) views the memorial stone tradition as cultural continuities of the preceding Megalithic traditions. Citing evidence from Sangam texts, he traces the antiquity and development of the memorial stone tradition from the preceding megalithic traditions. In addition, he highlights the link between the spatial distribution of memorial stones and the land use patterns. Although focussing primarily on the memorial stone tradition in modern Tamil Nadu, the scope of the work extends across south India, in which he identifies the dominant memorial stone yielding zones and investigates the same in the light of literary evidences.

In one of her later publications, Thapar (2000) suggests that the memorial stones serve as social markers to clan and occupation groups. She further asserts that they represent the social aspirations of the community responsible in the setting up of the memorials. Sessa Sastry (2004) studied the hero stones in Karnataka from the Ganga period to the Vijayanagara and Nayaka periods in a comprehensive manner and listed out various parameters in determining the chronology of the hero stones belonging to different time periods.

Working on a premise put forth by Settar (1982), who asserted that 'as the artists responsible in the sculpting of the memorials were trained in the prevailing schools of art, the sculptural art of the memorials did not vary much from sculptural embellishments adorning major monumental edifices of different periods'; he was successful in identifying parameters based on raw material used in the making of the memorial, the size of the memorial and elements of sculptural art in determining the chronology of the hero stones.

In addition to the above, there exist multiple isolated and sporadic publications (for instance, Thakuria 2011; Reddy 2012; Suresh 2012; Devarajaswamy 2013; Kariyappa and Kalaswamy 2013; Guddadevashwarappa 2013; Kalaswamy 2013, 2014; Kariyappa 2014; Paramesha 2014) which focus on specific case studies, highlighting the spatial distribution of memorial stones within a restricted geographical region, comprising of a political unit or a village. Whilst such studies are significant in understanding the spatial and temporal variability of the tradition, sculptural art traditions and nature of engraved epigraphs, the manner in which the subject is approached along with the methodology adopted in the analyses of the data appear descriptive and governed by a lack of an understanding of the underlying concept behind the erection of the memorial. Further, a few aspects of the memorial stones, for instance, the engraved has garnered greater attention amongst the historians. Whilst the engraved epigraphs has been used effectively to reconstruct regional histories and corroborate information obtained from other sources, it is seen that the epigraphists have found the memorial stone inscriptions of lesser interest in contrast to the donative records and eulogies composed of high scholarship.

Thus, a review of the available literature on the memorial stone traditions in the Indian sub-continent reveal that the previous studies on the tradition have primarily been descriptive, focussing upon their typologies; inscriptions; sculptural art; geographical and temporal distribution and their variance. These studies, governed by 'time-bound research priorities', although successful to a large degree in reconstructing the local socio-political histories, have seldom strived to highlight the historical, cultural and social significance of the memorial stones and reconstruct their 'identities'. 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 (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. Further, 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'.

## **1.2. Scope of the current research**

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'. The memorial stones are tangible reflections of intangible components of culture that stressed upon the glorification of death and commemoration of the dead. Despite the fact that such components formed a significant aspect of the cultural repertoire of most societies, previous researchers have been averse to putting forth explanations which highlight its cultural significance primarily due to methodological constraints. These methodological constraints occur primarily because of the overemphasis of the material remains and the necessity to validate statements by supplying material remains as validating components. Further, it may be noted that a majority of these memorial stones in the Indian sub-continent are rooted in spiritual, behavioural and belief

oriented practices. Thus, in order to comprehend the character of the memorial stones it was necessary to undertake a multi-dimensional approach which involved a comprehensive examination of their various facets viz. temporal and geographical distribution; sculptural art; inscriptions and associated intangible practices.

To achieve the aforementioned 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).

The current research besides highlighting the memorial stone heritage in the region, also explored the intellectual traditions that culminated in theorizing social behaviour and representing social dimensions which form an integral part of South Asian society. Whilst discussing the archaeology of memorial stones the current research gives equal emphasis to derive information from select classical texts, whose ripples are still visible in contemporary art forms.

### **1.3. 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.