

Chapter - 6

CONCLUSION

Wise men do not put faith or attachment in this fragile body, which soon disappears like a dream; they regard abiding fame itself as their lasting body

(Harshacharita VI)

An evaluation of the results discussed in the preceding chapters has brought to light several multidimensional facets of the memorial stone tradition in the study area, Hassan District, Karnataka. The memorial stones were previously perceived as mere cultural entities that reflect a subaltern concern involving the glorification and commemoration of the deceased ancestors. The current research has however shown that such simplistic explanations may not suffice in evaluating the identity of these artefacts. Further, the character of the memorial stones in the region was previously mainly understood by the contents of the epigraphs inscribed on them. An undue stress upon the inscribed memorials and the reading of the inscribed content in addition to the lacunae observed in the previous studies undertaken on memorial stone traditions in the Indian sub-continent highlighted in section 1.1, has greatly limited our understanding of the tradition.

An understanding of the aforementioned shortcomings along with the need to situate the memorial stone tradition in the study area in lieu with the recent trends in evaluating the identity of a tradition necessitated an examination of the multiple facets of the tradition. Hence primary surveys were undertaken in the region to document the memorial stone heritage taking into account their spatial and temporal contexts, followed by investigations upon the engraved epigraphic records, sculptural art traditions, and the oral traditions and contemporary

practices associated with the memorial stones. The current research in this regard marks the first attempt in which diverse methodological approaches were adopted to situate the memorial stone tradition in lieu with the social, cultural and political background of the region. A methodological framework which involved the incorporation of the cultural intangibles such as oral traditions and contemporary practices associated with the tradition along with the their gleanings from literary traditions which highlight the underlying ethos of the memorial stones was adopted in the current research to situate the tangible manifestation of the tradition involving the glorification of heroic death. Further, intellectual traditions that culminated in theorizing social behaviour and representing social dimensions which form an integral element of South Asian society was explored in this work. Such approaches are seldom undertaken as the beliefs and practices associated with a given tradition are hard to identify and explain with the existing methods of archaeology. These methodological constraints occur primarily because of the over emphasis of material remains and the necessity to validate statements by supplying material remains as validating components. However, the current research has revealed that such cultural components if examined with a degree of caution, provides a holistic picture of the tradition.

The surveys undertaken in the region led to the documentation of seven hundred and thirty two (732) memorials found in multiple cultural contexts. The memorials were classified under three heads viz. *veeragals*, *mastikals* and *nishidhis* on the basis of the nature of heroic death commemorated by the memorials as evidenced by their form, sculptural representations and their engraved epigraphs. The vernacular nomenclature of the three distinct memorial types found in the region has been used in the current research. The most dominant memorial type identified in the region include the *veeragals*, which are memorials erected to commemorate individuals killed in combat or in fulfilment of a socially significant cause that was perceived as an integral element one's *dharma* in the past. The second dominant variety include the *nishidhis*, which are memorials engraved or

set up to commemorate members of the Jaina faith who were perceived to have achieved 'ritual death', an act which was considered to be the supreme quintessence in Jaina ethos. The third variety include the *mastikals*, which are memorials erected to commemorate the sacrifice of the wives of deceased individuals who attained the status of a sati through the rites of *sahagamana* or *anugamana*.

Whilst the *nishidhis* were chronologically dated on the basis of their inscribed records alone, the chronological framework of the *mastikals* and *veeragals* in the region was established based on the analysis of the inscribed record in correlation with the sculptural art traditions. Whilst the *nishidhis* were chronologically classified on the basis of calendar years with a period of a hundred years serving as a unit, the *veeragals* and *mastikals* were classified based on the prevailing influence of the ruling powers which influenced their own distinct artistic conventions in the region. Based on the available evidence the *veeragals* and *mastikals* were chronologically classified under three periods viz. Ganga (c. 800-1000 CE), Hoysala (1001-1350 CE) and Vijayanagara and Nayaka Periods (1351-1800 CE). The aforementioned scheme of chronologically classifying memorials under different time periods whilst resting upon parameters established by earlier workers (Settar 1982; Sessa Sastry 2004); also took into account representations of attributes such as postures exhibited and drapery adorned by the figures depicted in the memorial in determining the chronology of the memorial stones.

The analyses of the chronological distributions of the memorial stones in the region revealed that the period between 7th Century CE and 10th Century CE is dominated by the *nishidhi*, the period between 11th Century CE and 14th Century CE is dominated by the *veeragals*, and the period between 15th Century CE and 18th Century CE is dominated by the *mastikals*. However, whilst the practice of setting up of *mastikals* and *veeragals* are no longer a living tradition in the region, it was observed that the practice of setting up of *nishidhis* to honour the members

of the Jaina faith who achieved 'ritual death' continues to be a living tradition in the region.

The memorial stones documented were further classified under various sub-types based on their form and nature of sculptural depictions. The *veeragals* were classified on the basis of the mode of death that is represented in the sculptural registers representing the theme of 'heroic death' in conjunction with engraved epigraphs. An analysis of the typological variations within the *veeragal* record reveals that the number of modes or instances leading to death represented during the Ganga period (c. 8-10th Century CE) are five, the Hoysala period (1001-1350 CE) are six and the Vijayanagara and Nayaka period (1350-1800 CE) are three. The *mastikals* which are predominantly datable to the Vijayanagara and Nayaka period (1350-1800 CE) were classified under two sub-types on the basis of the nature of sculptural depictions on the memorials. The two varieties observed were classified as *vira-mastikals*, where the deceased husband is depicted along with the sati and the *mahasatikals*, where only the sati has been represented. The *nishidhis* documented in the region unlike the aforementioned memorial types, are not characterised by any uniformity in their form and were thus classified on the basis of the form of the memorials. An analysis of the same revealed seven varieties ranging from simple engraved records on undressed rock surfaces to elaborately carved memorial columns set up individually or in specially built pavilions. The variations in the dominance observed amongst different varieties of memorial stones in the region over time is argued to be a reflection of societal concerns, which emphasised upon the sacrifices of individuals through specific modes or instances in fulfilment of a cause, perceived to be in adherence to one's *dharma*. The society in turn glorified such sacrifices by the setting up of memorials at prominent junctures either within the settlement or at sacred centres.

An examination of the spatial distribution of the memorials revealed that whilst most *nishidhis* were found set up within the vicinity of Shravanabelagola,

Channarayapatna *taluka*; the *mastikals* and the *veeragals* were found distributed across the area under investigation. The *nishidhis* being a relic commemorating a sectarian tradition were set up in memory of the deceased by one's followers or kin at sacred centres even though the deceased was believed to have undergone mortification and achieved 'ritual death' elsewhere in south India. Shravanabelagola being the most sacred of the Jaina pilgrimage centres was chosen as the ideal location to commemorate such individuals who achieved 'ritual death'. The early history of Shravanabelagola is in fact very much associated with the strive to achieve 'ritual death', with the inscribed records identifying the Chandragiri hill here as *Katavapra* or *Kalvappu*, meaning 'suicide hill' (Settar 1986).

The *mastikals* are found in a few settlements in the area under investigation and were mostly found to occur in dense clusters. These settlements were however not characterised as cult centres that glorified the sati *parampara* owing to the lack of definite evidence and were designated as mere 'find spots'. The *veeragals* on the other hand are found scattered throughout the region and although found to also occur in clusters, their density is far less in comparison to the *mastikals*. The spatial distribution of the *veeragals* was further investigated to test the validity of the propositions put forth by earlier scholars to explain their patterns of distribution. The propositions put forth by Whitehead (1921), Settar (1982) and Sontheimer (1982b) highlighting the factors that governed the spatial distribution of the *veeragals* were taken up for examination. The aforementioned scholars had previously suggested that the memorials formed an integral element of the rural tradition that involved the glorification of the deceased ancestors. Further, it was also suggested that the memorials are usually densely concentrated in those areas which served as buffer zones between two or more ruling powers. Such a tense socio-political environment forced the inhabitants of such zones to make their own arrangements to counter external threats. In addition, it was also suggested that the concentrations of distinct typological varieties of *veeragals*

commemorating different modes or instances leading to the death of the individual is determined by the physiography of the region. Citing examples of his observations made on dense concentration of *veeragals* commemorating death during cattle raids in those zones which are not conducive for large scale agricultural operations and the near absence of such varieties in fertile zones, Sontheimer (1982b) argues that the physical ecology of the region determined the nature of memorial type found. The above propositions are however governed by ideological and methodological constraints as highlighted in section 5.1. The current research, revealed that the *veeragals* were found to mostly occur in close proximities of the urban centres. In addition, it was seen that the concentration of distinct varieties of *veeragals* are not entirely determined by the physiography of the region but also by the socio-political conditions of the period.

Whilst the study of the memorial stones in the past have focussed primarily on the engraved inscribed records, the earlier studies on the same have rarely stressed upon highlighting the character of the memorial stone inscriptions and the manner in which they differ from other classes of inscriptions. The analysis of the engraved records on the *veeragals* and *nishidhis* based on their translations and transliterations presented in various volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica*, revealed that the memorial stone inscriptions imbibe a distinct character of their own. They differ from other classes of inscriptions in the region under investigation with an emphasis stressed upon recording the qualities of the individual commemorated by the memorial. Whilst the *veeragal* inscriptions glorify the martial ethos and stress upon the martial prowess of the deceased commemorated, the *nishidhi* records glorify the attainment of 'ritual death' and record the qualities of one's spiritual preceptor and that of the deceased along with the mode through which 'ritual death' was obtained. Whilst some common elements observed in other classes of inscriptions are present in the memorial stone inscriptions, they vary with other classes of inscriptions with very little emphasis paid in recording the qualities of the ruling power in the region and the qualities of the patron of

the record. The *mastikals* in the region are mostly of the non inscribed variety, with only two inscribed memorials found. The two *mastikal* inscriptions besides being brief and fragmentary are mostly effaced with only the name of the deceased commemorated decipherable. The reasons for not inscribing the *mastikals* in the region may perhaps be due to conventions of the period or may be a result of the belief that as the woman who achieves the status of a sati invariably becomes a goddess (Chidanandamurti 1982), it was perhaps deemed unworthy to record the mortal details of the sati. The above proposition put forth by Chidanandamurti (1982) to explain such a practice was found valid during field surveys in the region.

During surveys it was observed that most memorials were rich in sculptural detailing. A review of the previous studies on the sculptural art of the memorial stones revealed that such studies besides being descriptive were undertaken without any concurrence with a textual treatise (for instance, Kariyappa and Kalaswamy 2013; Guddadevashwarappa 2013; Kalaswamy 2013, 2014; Kariyappa 2014; Paramesha 2014). To comprehend the nature of their sculptural representations and their underlying meaning, the sculptural representations were analysed through the medium of *Natyashastra*, a pan-Indian text on dramaturgy. *Natyashastra* was chosen as the medium for analysis of the sculptural representations in the current research as the text is the earliest composition on dramaturgy. In addition, its choice as the medium of analysis was further warranted by earlier studies on sculptures adorning other monumental edifices in the region, which revealed that the sculptors in the region were aware of the principles enumerated in the *Natyashastra* (Nandagopal 1990; Esver 2012). In contrast to the former, the analysis of sculptures via later compositions on dramaturgy in the region is limited. The analysis of the sculptural art of the memorial stones through the medium of *Natyashastra* although limited to the sculptural registers of *veeragals* representing the themes of 'heroic death' and 'transitional journey to heaven' owing to concerns elaborated in sections 5.1 and

5.4, revealed that the sculptural representations serve as pictorial translations of the underlying notions behind the setting up of the memorials and the theme stressed upon in the inscribed record. In addition, the study besides highlighting the underlying sentiments in the compositions, further led to the understanding that the sculpted figures with regards to their postures, gestures and ornamentations are bound by the *shastric* prescriptions, thereby further highlighting its urban character as against a product of autochthonous forces as previously held.

The sculptural registers of the *veeragals* representing the theme of 'transient rewards in heaven', the sculptural depictions adorning the *mastikals* and the elaborately carved *nishidhis* although not analysed via the medium of Natyashastra, a visual examination of the same revealed them to be replete with symbolism. The analysis of the aforementioned sculptural representations could not be undertaken via the principles of Natyashastra as the underlying sentiment in these depictions are not validated by the Natyashastra, but by later compositions such as *Abhinavabharati* (De 1981) and *Bhagavata Muktapala* (Raghavan 1940).

In the case of the sculptural registers of the *veeragal* representing the theme of 'transient rewards in heaven', the composition which includes several sculpted figures embodies the idea of the eternity of the soul and the hero's right of sitting in the presence of the deity for all eternity owing to his heroic deeds. The *mastikals* on the other hand carry depictions of attributes such as a mirror; a lemon or a citrus fruit, along with the arms of the sati being decked with bangles, which symbolically represent marital bliss. The raised right arm of the sati, bent at the elbow at a right angle, with an open hand, whose palm face outwards is interpreted to represent the practice which involved the woman blessing the onlookers before entering the funeral pyre (Chidanandamurti 1982; Sontheimer 1982b) and thus represents the purity and the condition of the sati (Thapar 1981).

Such representations along with the depictions of the deceased husband standing besides the sati, and the sun and the moon at the apex of the memorial reflects the underlying sentiment of the 'perpetual union of the couple' and the continuing bond of the couple based on marriage in the land of the dead. The elaborately carved *nishidhis* carry representations of a Thirthankara or the pursuant of 'ritual death' seated in the meditative posture. In addition, in a few cases the *nishidhis* also carry depictions of the pursuant being instructed about the codes prescribed in the *Aradhana* texts and being initiated into the process of 'ritual death' by one's spiritual preceptor. The posture of the figures depicted along with the representations of certain attributes such as a peacock broom, a *kamndalu*, a *yogapatta* and a *thavane kol* represents the abandonment of worldly pleasures, awareness of the prescribed codes enumerated in the *Aradhana* texts and steadfast commitment to the achievement of 'ritual death' by the pursuant.

During surveys it was revealed that the memorials were observed to play a significant role in the everyday social life of the people who resided in their close vicinity. Whilst the ethnographic surveys undertaken amongst the *veeragals* and *mastikals* in the region reveal that the two memorial forms are found in multiple cultural contexts and are perceived variously by the local populace who reside within their vicinity, it was observed that the *nishidhis* were always located within the *basadi* complex or in close proximity to the *basadi* and are seen as relics honouring a sectarian practice. Most *veeragals* and *mastikals* in the region were observed to be worshiped and identified with either individual families or by the community in general and are appropriated at regular intervals. Besides their regular worship, the memorials are worshiped during specific occasions such as birth of a new member in the family and before any weddings. The worship of the memorials during such occasions is believed to ensure longevity of life and marital bliss for the newly married couple. There is an inherent fear amongst the local populace that the ignorance of worship of the memorials would result in the occurrence of famines and death of cattle within the settlement. In addition, it was

also observed that a few memorials were found placed along the boundaries of disputed lands as it is believed that the placing of the memorial along their boundaries would prevent further outbreak of conflict between the disputing parties. Thus, the aforementioned practices involving the coming together of the society in the worship of the memorials suggest that the memorials act as centres of 'social-gravity'. The worship of the memorials to ward off epidemics and vagaries of nature, reveals the transformation of the status of the deceased commemorated by the memorials from human to superhuman entities. Such transformations reveal the manner in which the human psyche associates oneself with the deceased who were perceived to be heroes. Although, the precise memory of the deceased commemorated by the memorial over time is long forgotten, the reverence shown to a relic commemorating his actions across centuries reflects an unconsciously driven cognitive element that has withstood the onslaughts of time.

The *veeragals* and the *mastikals* in the region were also found associated with certain beliefs or a *nidhi*, which records that harm would befall any individual who displaces the memorial along with the onset of famines and outbreak of epidemics in the region leading to death of cattle of the settlement. Such measures appear to be deliberate attempts introduced by the society that erected these memorials to ensure the posterity of the memorial record. The aforementioned proposition is supported by the reading of a few *veeragal* inscriptions (for instance *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1984, Vol. VIII, Ag. 105; *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1997, Vol. X, Ak. 284; *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1990, Vol. IX, Sk. 67; *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1984, Vol. VIII, HN. 17) that record that the erectors of the memorials wished for the posterity of the memorial.

Whilst the awareness of the precise nature of the memorial amongst the local populace who live in their close proximity is negligible in most cases, the role of archaeologists and historians who periodically visit areas rich in cultural legacy in

the region and play the role of disseminators of knowledge pertaining to artefacts within the settlements is commendable. In addition the role of state agencies and the NSS in the preservation of heritage remains, either by supplanting them in different parts of the settlements or rehousing them as museum exhibits, although appreciable, such activities often results in the loss of 'context'.

Thus, it is seen that the memorials in the region, although originally a relic commemorating the heroic sacrifices of individuals through diverse modes and instances, constitute a significant element of the cultural repertoire of the present. Whilst ethnographic evidence in the form of the oral traditions and contemporary practices are seldom incorporated in archaeological researches, the current research has revealed that such cultural components if examined with a degree of caution throws light on the manner in which the memorial stones were perhaps perceived in the past. In addition, ethnographic evidences in the region point to the changing 'identities' of the memorials over time, i.e. from a mere artefact commemorating the heroic death of the deceased to either an object of veneration, an aesthetic element which is strongly associated with the community or as relics of the past housed in museums or protected within the archaeological site itself. The identification of certain memorials by individual families and communities as their ancestor deity as a measure to ensure upward mobility in social stratification cannot be ignored as well. The term 'identity' has been used in this piece of research to express the congruence in which the memorial exists and reflects their perceptions amongst contemporary populations and status accorded to the memorials.

The current research has pointed out that the memorial stones in the region are characterised by multiple facets, each warranting their own distinct investigations. The incorporation of evidence acquired from the multidisciplinary approaches lead to the understanding of the character of the memorial stones in the region. Whilst the memorials in contemporary times are found in multiple cultural

contexts, at the time of their making, it was a tradition closely associated with the urban set up of the region, whose practice was promoted by the socio-political elites to protect their interest. This was carried out by intoxicating a social or a sectarian group by intimating them of a privileged or enjoyable social status, which is 'non-existent' in this physical world, but consciously made believable as an achieved elevated status in the 'other world'. Such acts of inducing the local populace towards accepting death without hesitation as the ultimate goal of their legacy was achieved by erecting memorials that carried depictions that underlined the heroic sentiment and carried representations of the themes pertaining to the heroic death along with the transient rewards in heavens or perpetual union of the deceased couple in heaven. In addition, the underlying sentiment is also reflected in the engraved epigraphic records that stress upon the martial prowess or the spiritual qualities of the deceased and the manner in which the individual commemorated by the memorial approached a certain death without hesitation.

6.1. Lacunae and future scope of the current research

The inferences drawn in this thesis are mainly based on the archaeological surveys coupled with investigations upon the form, engraved epigraphs, sculptural art, and intangible components associated with the memorials in the region with a lot of caution. The data presented here is mainly based on archaeological surveys in the region and any form of change in the contexts of the memorials and cultural practices associated with the memorials during further study is possible.

Evidence of such changes are already visible, for instance, a *veeragal* at Masaganahalli, Channarayapatna *taluka*, is previously reported to be erected in a field (*Epigraphia Carnatica* 1997, Vol. X, Cp. 102), although it is presently placed besides a road and worshipped (Vrushab, *in press*). Similarly, the three *veeragals* at Muguluru, Arkalgud *taluka*, are recorded to be placed besides the main road (*Epigraphia Carnatica* 1984, Vol. VIII, Ag. 124, 125, 126), although they were recently moved and placed besides the Anjaneya temple by the local unit of NSS.

In the aforementioned context, the role of state agencies in the preservation of memorials and dissemination of their significance by relocating them as museum exhibits was also observed in a few cases (for instance, *Epigraphia Carnatica* 1984, Vol. VIII, HN. 70). Whilst such activities register a loss of 'context' of the memorials and transformation of their 'identities', it is imperative that such changes are recorded in future which would allow for an examination of the process of the transformation of their identities.

The major issues in studying such relocated or dislocated artefacts are that we are not in a position to situate it in its original context. Here one needs to assume that while a memorial is installed by a cultural group, the group places it within the most appropriate context (context may mean, location of the incident leading to one's death or a place that was benefitted by the action of the deceased or his/her favourite environs etc.).

Whilst relocating or dislocating the memorial, we may lose the actual derivable meaning and it may be said that the 'assigned meaning of the context' disappears and the meaning that emerges is the 'meaning of the interpreter', which is heavily based on his/her acquired knowledge and perceptions which are methodologically and ideologically bound. Therefore the 'identity' thus may not be real and may be 'assigned'.

Although intensive field surveys were undertaken as a part of the current research, a few zones in the *malnad* tract of Sakleshpur and Alur *talukas* could not be investigated in their entirety owing to thick forest cover, inhospitable terrain and presence of wildlife. The adoption of random transects in the future could perhaps throw fresh light on the memorial stone tradition in the region and lead to the identification of various cult centres associated with ancestor and hero worship. In addition, it is also imperative to examine if the memorials in the region imbibe a sepulchral character, which could be examined by excavating the

area surrounding the memorials. Whilst the investigator puts forth a few propositions highlighting the urban character of the tradition and negates the earlier propositions put forth by Whitehead (1921), Settar (1982) and Sontheimer (1982b) which suggests a subaltern nature of the tradition; it is imperative that the area under investigation is expanded laterally to examine if the observations made in the present piece of research holds true.

In addition, it is necessary to clearly delineate the areas of political, cultural and social boundaries and their changes over time and examine the memorial stones in the light of the aforementioned demarcations. Another important feature, which demands further investigation, is examining the social stature of the deceased commemorated by the memorials. Whilst it was possible in the current research to reconstruct the social stratification of the deceased commemorated by the *nishidhis*, the same needs to be undertaken in the case of *veeragals* and *mastikals*. An examination of the etymologies of the names mentioned in the inscribed record along with the depictions of specific attributes on the memorials could throw light on the same. Such reconstructions would perhaps enable us to understand if the practice of setting up of memorials was restricted to specific communities or was a tradition not restricted to social boundaries in the region in the past.

An examination of the sculptural art of the memorials in the current research was undertaken via the principles enumerated in the *Natyashastra*, a pan-Indian text on dramaturgy. Its adoption in this research was warranted as the text besides being pan-Indian in nature is the earliest composition on dramaturgy. Further, earlier studies on the sculptural art in the region (Nandagopal 1990; Esver 2012) have attested that the sculptors in the region were aware of the principles enumerated in the text. The adoption of *Natyashastra* as a tool to understand the nuances of sculptural representations was however successful in a restricted scale as the underlying sentiments of a few depictions were not authenticated by the

text, but by later compositions such as such as *Abhinavabharati* (De 1981) and *Bhagavata Muktapphala* (Raghavan 1940). In future, it is hoped that the sculptural art of the memorial stones would be analysed on the basis of the aforementioned texts. In addition, the adoption of regional texts such as *Lasya Ranjana* as a sculptural manual by the artists needs to be investigated.

To conclude it should be noted that the practice of erecting memorials for the dead is a widespread tradition across the Indian sub-continent. A great variation in the tradition is observed in terms of the nomenclature and form of the memorial, raw material used in their making, purpose of setting up of the memorial, intangible components associated with the tradition and the nature of death commemorated by the memorials. The inferences put forth in the current research are applicable to a given area where the memorials are characterised by a degree of uniformity in their form, nomenclature, sculptural art and epigraphic traditions. Whilst the current research is restricted to a small geographical area, in an ideal scenario, these traditions should not be viewed in an isolated context. However, the present piece of research highlights the need to carry systematic studies involving primary surveys coupled with multidisciplinary analyses to reconstruct the identity of the memorials and avoid simplistic generalized observations. It is imperative that distinct methodological frameworks are developed to address issues that characterize the memorial stone traditions in different parts of the Indian sub-continent.