



Hero-Stones From Venkatagirikota Mandal, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh: A Study

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ABSTRACT

The present paper gives a study being carried out on Hero stones, as part of my research work in Venkatagirikota Mandal of Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. It illustrates the kind and categories of Hero stones and their historical and thematic representation being depicted as a tradition prevailed during 8th, 9th and 10th century CE. Types and categories are divided according to different thematic view being depicted over locally available slabs which are generally found outskirts of village fields, the tradition survived over centuries over throughout south India but here in a simple form and are still under worship on festive occasion which are remembered with several episodes of local anecdotes, however received respect, protection and conservation.

Key words: Anecdote, Chhatra, Concept, Commemoration, Eternity, Life-time, Sacrifice, Welfare.

INTRODUCTION:

Hero stones are one of the important icons found in the outskirts of many villages and towns in the fields, bank of local tanks, and along with some specific village gods and goddesses in south India. These are connected to a social concept of eternity associated with the dignity of a human being in his/her life-time performance during their life-time. It is the result of an outcome remembering such people who sacrificed their lives for the welfare of an individual or for the entire society mean the form of erecting hero-stones as memorial stones as mentioned above, which can be dated mostly during Medieval period.

These are found be either in the form of sculpture/s and it was a custom and tradition that emerged in the past and can be treated a separate historical entity in different parts of India (Settar and Santheimer 1982) in which South India forms part and hence takes an important place as a specific feature associated with socio-economic and religious aspect of the then human society which are witnessed still now in many corners of India like Andhra Pradesh.

Hero stones are found erected being depicted over granite in three forms and the sculpture represent the Hero and associated human, animal and other life-features along with epigraph and sometimes both and are known as hero stones, sati stones and memorial stones belongs to those who died observing a religious vow, sacrifice for the society as a social responsibility. The practice of setting up hero stones has been described to commemorate the warriors who laid their life for the cause of the society in which they lived and it forms the basic theme associated for remembering their attitude towards the society, as they lived and performed their welfare activity for the sake of the society. Here it denotes the anxiety for commemorating the fame of such persons in setting up hero stones, while it connected to the funerary practices already existed in the society according to Allchin and Allchin (1982: 243-45) and Thapar (1981:293-316) and others.

In this context the present paper dealt with Hero stones found in Venkatagirikota Mandal (popularly known as V. Kota) of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. Its main objective is to understand the specific type and distribution pattern of hero stones in the villages where they are found in view of socio-economic and religious features associated with the then tradition practiced among the present population in historical perspective like other areas of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh regarding Hero stone study (Chandrasekhar Reddy 1994).

The Area (Venkatagirikota Mandal):

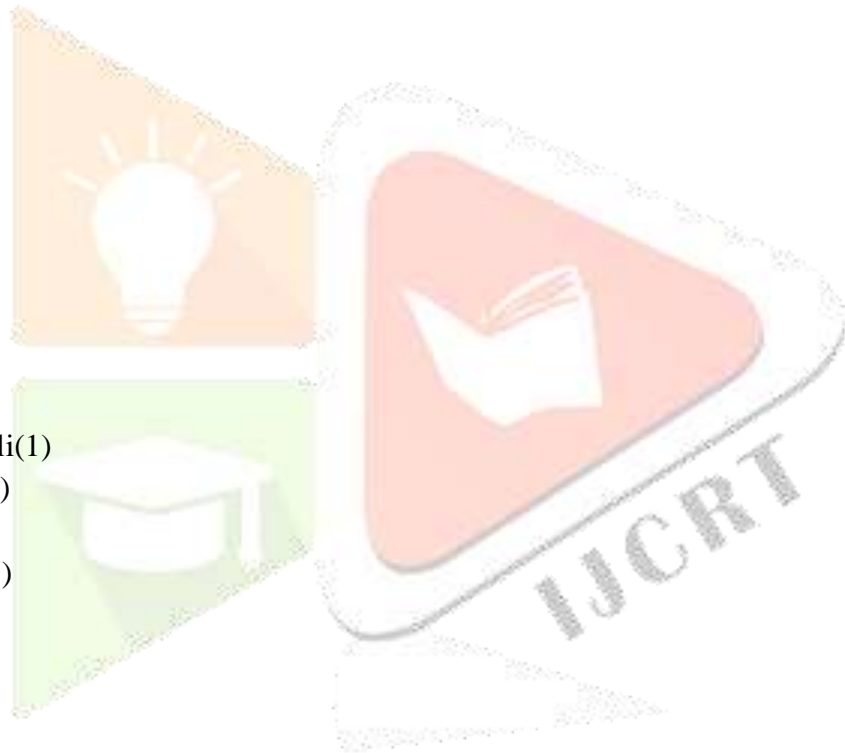
Venkatagiri Kota (13.0000°N; 78.5000°E), a Mandal head-quarters with a population of 12,803 (2011 census) inhabited by 32 village panchayaths with a total population of 88,321 in an extent of 191.30 sq.km. lies north of Ramakuppam and Santhipuram Mandals, south of Baireddipalli Mandal and bordered with Tamil Nadu and Karnataka States in the east and west respectively. Lying amidst Tamil Nadu and Karnataka States the people of Venkatagiri Kota Mandal poses multi-culture of both religion and castes engaged on different occupations, however, mostly depend on agriculture of growing flowers, vegetables and other important cereals and pulses. It is historically occupied by megalithic monuments and hero stones in many villages.

The road leading to Gudiyattam and Vellore in Tamil Nadu is a beautiful stretch of landscape looks descend from the Deccan plateau to the plains of Tamil Nadu. People feel the difference in temperatures in winter the weather is cool and in summer it is little hot when compared to other adjoining Mandals and it receives rainfall from both monsoons equally. It is a junction of three states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and well known for its vegetables, flower market, business centre as it mainly stretches along the national highway. People can speak all three languages fluently and the soil is different from varies from area to area; cross cousin marriages are performed in this area. One can see a complete Dravidian culture here. The physiographic view of this Mandal area comprises hills, plains and uplands which normally increases in elevation between 600-900 meters from east to west and it is occupied by Archaeans of Peninsular Gneissic geological complex with acid intrusive of Proterozoic Age compositions of granite and quartz veins. It is drained by many hill streams and almost all are of non-perennial in nature, however there is a water-fall area at Kaigal located in the north -east direction which gets abundant water due to hill-streams, especially during rainy season. The climate is dry and healthy but due to varied topography the temperature ranges from 12° C and 40°C, minimum and maximum respectively and the annual precipitation of the area is 9350 mm. The area is predominately covered with red soils with portions of alluvium cover along the stream banks. Black soils are noticed at limited parts in the area and the vegetation cover belongs to dry tropical deciduous thorny scrubs and tropical dry evergreen forests. The area was

under the hegemony of many minor and major dynasties such as Banas, Cholas, Nolamba Pallavas, Rashtrakutas, Vaidumbas, Vijayanagara and Western Gangas.

A total number of 53 hero stones were located (Sandhya Rani 2021:108-159) at 28 villages in this Mandal belongs to various themes being depicted on granite slabs. Most of them are found in the outskirts of these villages proper. The list and number of hero stones found at each village are given in the brackets as follows and two important hero stones are described below and all hero stones are according to their themes which are categorized as per Table.1:

1. Arimakulapalli* (1)
2. Balendrapalli (1)
3. Bellakunta (4)
4. Boyachinnaganapalli (1)
5. Chadipalli(4)
6. Chinnasyama(3)
7. Chintalaellagaram (2)
8. Eguvapalli(3)
9. Gasthimpalli(1)
10. Kallupalli(1)
11. Betabanda(3)
12. K.Kothuru(1)
13. Kotlagoru(4)
14. Maddiralla(1)
15. Mavattoor(1)
16. Mudramdoddi(3)
17. Nakkanapalli(2)
18. Nellithippa(3)
19. Pacharumakulapalli(1)
20. Padigalakuppam(2)
21. Papepalli(1)
22. Pichagundlapalli(1)
23. Peddagutta(2)
24. Ramapuram*(1)
25. S.Bandapalli(1)
26. Sivunikuppam(1)
27. Vibhudiellagaram (2) and
28. Vogu (2)



1. Arimakulapalli*(12°.93973' N; 78°. 52762'E): This village is situated in S.Bandapalli panchayath and the hero stone is located under bamboo tree in the field of Govinda Reddy, a resident of the same village. It contains (145 x 129 x 15 cm) Hero and two sati figures. Hero holds a bow in his left hand and raised right hand with an arrow. He has crest hair style, ear rings, necklace over the neck and two chains spread over the chest. He did not wear upper garment but has two thread like belts being arranged over his waist to which tied a long sword having a prominent handle. Dhoti formed the lower garment separately tied over both legs and its border is spread over his knees. His both arms are held with bracelets at the wrists and ankles, placed both feet towards left but held apart. Two Sati stand right to him and the first Sati lifted her left hand high showing a flower and a pitcher in her right hand down. Both arms have bracelets over wrists, poses bun hair style, ear rings and a necklace as well as two chains, one above the other, in the neck. She wore a blouse tied down below the breasts, poses a waist belt below which sari formed the lower garment with its border above the feet kept towards Hero. Whereas, the second woman also poses similar objects in her both hands, ear rings, bun hair style, necklace around the neck and a chain hang over her

chest. She wore a blouse tied below, between the breasts, sari spread below the waist belt with many folds kept towards left side. No worship has been noticed at this hero stone.



Fig.1: Hero with bow and arrow, two Sati to his right.

24. **Ramapuram* (13.02101N; 78.47677E): 134 x 145 x 14 cm.)** : This village is situated in the Nernipalli panchayath and the hero stone is located in the field of M. Mohan Babu, of the same village. It is a panel of several figures as described below. Hero (female) on a horse is held reins in his left hand and right hand has a spear, held high, as the horse lifted its fore limbs in the fashion of galloping action.

He has crest hair style, tied and held to left side, possessed large ear rings, nose stud, necklace and two chains, one above the other, in the neck. She wore a jacket like protection over the chest as well as covering the upper arm up to waist. She wore large bracelets on both arms at the wrist and upper arm positions along with three thread like waist belts to which attached a sheath of sword to her right side.

She kept right foot in the stirrup and poses anklets. The horse lifted its head with its ears being stiff and tied with three series of belts across the mane along with a circular ornamentation of a thread. Its tail is thick and curved reaching the ground and its testis indicate that it is a stallion. Its teeth and tongue appeared outside as it widely opened its mouth. As said above, the horse lifted its forelimbs high by standing on its hind limbs on the ground. A special cloth has been arranged on which the female Hero sat. Behind the horse there are three women standing among which the middle women, probably Sati, being depicted little more taller than the other two women. The woman standing just behind the horse holds chatra (umbrella) with her arms held high and possessed bun hair style, ear rings, nose stud, ornaments in the neck and blouse as upper garment. Both arms have bracelets at the wrist and upper arm portions and sari forms as lower garment bulging prominently over the waist. The second woman, the tall and middle Sati has bun hair style, ear rings, nose stud and holds a pitcher in her left hand held down whereas a flower being held high in her right hand. She has two series of ornaments in the neck and blouse as upper garment tied down below the

breasts. She has a waist belt below which forms sari as lower garment up to feet and there is a special apron across the chest. The last woman has bun hair style, ear rings, two or three chains over the neck spread across the chest which is covered with a blouse as upper garment tied below between the breasts. She has a waist belt, sari forms the lower garment and bracelets each at the wrist and upper arm portions on both arms. Her sari has been beautifully designed. Below the forelimbs of the horse stand a man and a woman, the latter holds a flower in her right hand and left hand with a pitcher held down.

Both arms have bracelets, bun hair style, ornaments over the neck but without an upper garment and sari being formed the lower garment. The man held reins of the horse in his hands and possess bracelets over both arms. He has crest hair style tied above and indistinct upper garment but below the waist 'Dhoti' forms the lower garment covering both thighs.



Fig. 24: Hero (female) on galloping horse, three women (Sati?) at the rear, woman and man in front of the horse.

Table 1: List of categories of Hero stones in Venkatagirikota Mandal

Sl. No	NAME OF THE VILLAGE	C1	C-1C	C-1D	C-1E	C-1F	C-1G	C-1H	C-1I	C-1J	C-1K	C-1L	C-1M	C-1N	C-1O	C-1P	C-1Q	C-1R	C-1S	C-1T	C-1U	C-1V	C-1W	C-1X	C-1Y	C-1Z	Total
36	ARIMAKULAPALLI																										1
37	BALENDRA PALLI			1																							1
38	BELAKUNTA															1	1										4
39	BHACHINNAGANAPALLI																										1
40	CHABPALLI	1			1																						4
41	CHINNANAMA																1										3
42	CHINTALALLAGRAM																1	1									2
43	EGVAPALLI				2																						3
44	GASTHPALLI																										1
45	KALLUPALLI																									1	1
46	KOTABANDA						1																				3
47	K. KOTHERE																										1
48	KOTLAGURU																										4
49	MADHUSALLA																										1
50	MAVATTOOR																										1
51	MUHAMMADIBITHI	1																									3
52	NAKKANAPALLI																										2
53	NELLITHIPPA																										3
54	PACHAMAKULAPALLI																										1
55	PADIGALAKUPPAM	1	1																								2
56	PAPUPALLI																										1
57	PICHUNDRAPALLI																										1
58	PEDDAGUTTA																										2
59	RAMAPURAM																										1
60	SRANDAPALLI																										1
61	SIVUNIKUPPAM																										1
62	VIRUBHELLAGRAM																										2
63	VOTU	1																									2
	TOTAL	4	1	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	53

CATEGORY:

- C-1: Hero with bow and sword.
- C-1C: Hero with bow and sword, Sati to his left.
- C-1D: Hero with bow and sword, Sati to his right.
- C-1E: Hero with bow and sword, Siva Linga and boy
- C-1G: Hero with bow and sword, sati to his right, two children, goat, dog, swan, tortoise and sun symbol.
- C-1H: Hero with bow and sword, sati to his right, dog and bull and another hero, on another slab, with sword and bow
- C-1I: Hero with bow and sword, man on the horse, woman, two girls and boy
- C-1J: Two Hero (both) with bow and sword, Siva Linga, deer and bull.
- C-1L: Hero with bow and sword, man with spear, a barking dog
- C-1M: Hero with bow and sword, sati to his right and a bull.
- C-2: Hero with bow and arrow.
- C-2A: Hero with bow and arrow, sati to his right.
- C-2B: Hero with bow and arrow in action, sati to his right.
- C-2E: Hero(Female) with bow and arrow (Rankalamma).
- C-2F: Hero with bow and arrow inactive and two bulls.
- C-2H: Hero (Female) with bow, Five women, bull and Siva Linga.
- C-2I: Hero with bow and dagger, sati to his right.
- C-3: Hero with sword.
- C-3A: Hero with sword, sati to his left.
- C-3B: Hero with sword and dagger, Sati to his right or left.
- C-3G: Hero with sword and shield.
- C-3H: Hero with sword, sati to his right and a dog.
- C-3I: Hero with sword and a lotus flower sati to his right.
- C-4B: Hero with sword on the horse, two Sati and man.
- C-6F: Hero on galloping horse, two sati, two girls, animals (Calf, cow, bull, parrot (on tree branch) and two men.
- C-6G: Hero on galloping horse, Two sati and Three men.
- C-6H: Hero on galloping horse, Two sati, girl and man.
- C-6I: Hero on galloping horse, Three sati, a woman and Three men.
- C-6J: Forelimbs of galloping horse and man.
- C-12: Hero fighting a tiger with spear or sword.
- C-18: Hero with bow and slain human head.
- C-18A: Hero with slain human head and sword, slain human body and a dead tiger.
- C-19: Hero with sword and slay animal head, sati to his left.
- C-20: Hero with bow and trident (Trishula) and a lion at his feet.
- C-21: Hero with flute, sati to his right.
- C-22: Hero with swords in both hands, sati to his left.
- C-23: Hero(Female) on galloping horse, sati and two men.
- C-23A: Hero (Female) on galloping horse, Three women (Sati ?) at the rear, woman and man in front of the horse.
- C-24: Hero with an axe, two women, dog and lion.

DISCUSSION

In the present paper (Table.1) Hero stones dealt are of non-inscriptional ones, hence their exact historical period may not be possible to illustrate. However, similar hero stones were reported from the adjoining areas of Kolar district of Karnataka and Madanapalli taluk of Chittoor district, especially in the south-western part of Chittoor district issued by the local chiefs, especially Vaidumbhas. On the basis of paleographical features studied by previous scholars(Chandrasekhara Reddy 1994) they may be assigned to about 8th, 9th and 10th CE. They represent commemoration in general, i.e., the death of warriors who took part in battles and also in connection with cattle raids. These rulers appeared to have been warlike chiefs more frequently involved in fighting with their neighbors namely the Lonkulas, the Cholas of Renadu, the Banas of Perumbanappadi, and the Nolambas of Nolambavadi (Sandhya Rani 2021:191).

The sculptural representation of hero stones dealt in Table..1 comprises hero, sati, men, women, boys, girls, animals (cow, horse, dog), weapons, ornaments(depicted across the body of hero and sati and horse decoration of metals), weapons like bow and arrows, swords, dagger, etc., indirectly suggest the

socio-economic aspects of the then existing society and their dress pattern especially Hero, Sati, Women, Men, boys, girls, etc., weapons, fashion of head-dress, leather objects like horse reins, waist threads, horse seat, stirrup, etc. The other horse decoration seen over the sculpture of hero stones give the information regarding the artisan classes in the then historical period in the region who are seen even in present day like gold smiths, black smiths, smiths of metals such as copper, silver and other precious stones (embedded in the Ornaments), leather workers, weavers, barbers and other communities engaged on various occupations related to agriculture and pastoralism (Sandhya Rani 2021:202). Therefore, it suggests that the then Hindu society with social hierarchy consisted of four-fold social strata in the region. The religion that prevailed was Saivism as Linga worship can be noticed in one of the hero stones from the area. However, the main theme of depiction of Hero and Sati forms represent the importance of service being rendered by the Hero to his society being recognized and respected by the society, hence importance of human life can be remembered by his family members, society and even relatives in commemorating a life, especially men. The depiction of Hero on a horse with all decoration, suggests that the men from the area were actively involved in battle fields hence they were perhaps involved in cattle raid protection and perhaps protected the village folk and settlements as the area was perhaps prone to frequent cattle raids and molestation of women neighboring Tamil Nadu.

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