

CONTRIBUTION OF THE MARGINALISED CLASS TO THE EARLY MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIAN SOCIETY: AS GLEANED FROM SCULPTURE

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Abstract

Indian sculptural heritage is recognized for producing various masterpieces which represent the glorious past of art and culture. These sculptures have diversified representation with the main focus on religious devotion, imperial class, and aristocracy. However, sculptures also portray contemporary Indian society which can be considered as particularly characteristic of Indian sculptural art.

Sculpture as a source of historical reconstruction not only signifies the elite class but also represents the social, cultural, and economic development of the contemporary society. The patronizing nature of ruling dynasties such as, Chalukyas, Hoysalas, Rashtrakutas, Chola, Pandyan, Pallava, etc. contributed tremendously to developing sculptural art during their time. To date using the sculptures as a source of History writing, the focus was remained on aesthetic forms such, as structural decoration and sculptural expression, clothes or ornaments, etc. These valuable sources of History i.e., Sculptures have never been utilized in writing history of marginalized sections.

Hence the sculptures can be used as an archaeological source to reconstruct the history of not much-celebrated class i.e., marginalized class.

In the present paper, an effort has been made by taking a shift to rewrite history from the perspective of marginalized or unaddressed classes of the period on the basis of the sculptures. For the study, a number of sculptures have been selected found in different parts of the south Indian region. The study is totally based on the information extracted from the Sculptures and Sculptural panels.

Keywords: *Entertainers, Marginalised class, women, temple sculptures, dancers, musicians.*

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Introduction

Indian sculptural craftsmanship is acknowledged for producing numerous masterpieces. Indian temples are living examples of prosperous sculptural art and culture. These temples are extensively decorated with such sculptures and sculptural panels. Although, the central theme of the sculpture or sculptural panel revolves around royal class, nobility, and religion but simultaneously, illustration and figures are very diversified within it. Additionally, it is obvious to consider that sculptors have taken stimulation from the contemporary Indian society which is an unconventional characteristic of Indian sculptural art.

Sculptures are not only the decorative art on the temple walls but as an archaeological source of is used for historical reconstruction because they indicate the social, cultural, and economic growth of the contemporary society. The rulers and various ruling dynasties of the southern region has a significant contribution to the development of the architecture and art during their period such as, Pallava, Hoysalas, Rastrakutas, Chola, and Eastern Ganga, etc. Although, as an archaeological source sculptural representation cannot be tempered like texts, it has been widely utilized as a source of writing history earlier too, but the focal point persisted to be on aesthetics, surface decoration, and sculptural appearance, jewelry, and attires, etc. But, sculptures as an important source of historical information have never been utilized in writing history of the downgraded sections of the society. Consequently, these sculptural panes and sculptures can be applied as a historical source to reproduce the history of not much-celebrated classes i.e., marginalized class.

In the present research article, an attempt has been made to rework in history from the perception of marginalized classes of the early medieval South India. It can be said an endeavor in taking a shift from documented sources to archaeological sources. For analysis, sculptures have been carefully chosen from distinctive parts of the south Indian region. The time frame that has been particularly selected dated from 7th century A.D. to 12th century A.D. which is eminent by their development in maturity in style and techniques. Moreover, textual sources are either not providing any information or giving accidental data associated with the marginalized classes/ unaddressed classes and their activities. The research article is completely based on the investigation of data extracted from the sculptural panels or sculptures primarily focusing on the occupational activities of marginalized classes of the period.

In the present paper, sculptures from various temples of the south Indian region are assembled for the study. The collection of six sculptures is part of the analysis from different centuries may be described as follows: Sculptures are assembled to make the basis of this article.

1. The enormous sculptural panel of the 7th century A.D. is of the Pallava period, built under the patronizing king of art and architecture Narsimhavarman I amid his reign. Moreover, this large panel is portion of Krishna Mandapam of cave temples as it is the largest among the cave centuries at Mahabalipuram, Kancheepuram District, Tamil Nadu¹. The theme of sculptural panel from Krishna Mandapam is majorly inspired by the Hindu mythology². Diorite rock has been used to carve out this massive sculptural panel which is two-dimensional in nature and bas – relief (low- relief) in its technique. the complex is entitled as “Krishna Mandapam” and analyzed relief is part of this panel that illustrates the Krishna’s life as a herdsman. Further, adding to this is it also throws light on the day-to-day social life and activities of the countryside people of the contemporary period. Indeed, even nowadays this scene is exceptionally common in Indian villages³.
2. Hoyasalesware Temple of Halebid, Mysore, Karnataka is famous not only for architecture but also sculptures. The second sculpture of this research paper is part of this temple. The temple was built around 1143 A.D. dedicated to Lord Shiva⁴. King VVishnuvardhana⁵ commissioned the construction of this temple during his reign. Soapstone is used to carve out the sculptures with high relief in technique and two dimensional in nature⁶. A *Dvarrapalika*(women door guard) is situated outside the door⁷ of the sanctum of the temple. However, the right hand of the sculpture of the female figure is broken. The sculptor has carved out the female door guardian in full human size to create a more realistic impression on onlookers⁸.
3. The third sculpture of the article also belongs to Halabied, Mysore of the Hoysala Period. The sculptural panel is elongated which is more in horizontal in length than its vertical height. King Vishnuvardhana constructed this temple devoted to Shiva⁹ and can be dated around c. 12th century A.D.¹⁰ The sculpture panel is carved from soapstone and is a part of the temple wall placed just below the ceiling¹¹. The theme of the panel illustrates the dance and orchestra of music performance. The sculpture is high relief in nature. The panel describes the group of men and a woman total of six in number¹².
4. A 10th century stone sculpture panel belongs to Shiva temple¹³ of Chola dynasty at Chidambaram¹⁴, Tamil Nadu. The temple has been damaged, repaired, renovated, and expanded several times so, the major surviving structure of the temple is addition and belongs to the late 12th and early 13th centuries A.D.¹⁵. The panel is carved in high relief technique by sculptor and the dado with wide borders around the stone sculpture. The panel is comprising its oblong in shape with two dimensional in nature. The relief is a portion of

of four women and one man total of six figures on the stone panel. The sculpture describes a group of performers, a few of them are playing musical instruments while others are dancing¹⁶.

5. The fifth gigantic stone sculpture belongs to Sun Temple at Konark, Puri district, Orissa. King Narasimhadeva I of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty had constructed the temple during c. 1238-1264 A.D.¹⁷. The deity of this grand temple is also known as the Black Pagoda. The temple is built from Khondalite rocks and three dimensional. The entire sculptural theme is dominated by amorous sculptures¹⁸. Architectural ornamentation of the temple is standing independently on the outer portion. The sculpture is gigantic in size as carved to enhance it aesthetically¹⁹. The stone sculpture has depicted a female performer playing a musical instrument.
6. Another stone panel which belongs to Sun Temple at Konark, Puri district, Orissa. The temple is dated roughly around c. 1238-1264 A.D. constructed by King Narasimhadeva I²⁰ of Eastern Ganga dynasty. The stone sculpture is exceptionally colossal in its vertical measurement in an attempt to make it look grand. The figure is three-dimensional in nature built from Khondalite rocks. The female is portrayed holding a musical instrument in her hand in such a posture as if she is playing it and her body shows that rhythm too. The stone sculpture is placed on the external portion of the temple²¹.

The interesting and fascinating stone sculptures make these temples sanctuaries grand and exceptionally momentous. Sun temple of Orissa has described the invisible aspects of the ordinary people like their work and daily life which makes it particularly significant. The neglected segment of the society in the rest of the stone sculptures or panels in south Indian temples understudy is rarely illustrated. However, these stone panels are also an enthusiastic carrier of the cultural norms. The contribution of marginalized men and women can be sketched from antiquity which is found a heterogeneous class in nature. *Apastamba Dharmasurtain* informs about the contribution of *Sudra* people in activities like martial arts, dancing, singing, and music²² on festive occasions. Written document sources inform about a literary gallery that was a special chamber in the court. It goes on to mention the specified seating protocol in the chamber according to the status as after the king, the place was allotted for poets and then to actors, dancers, singers, musicians, bards, and others were seated respectively²³. Women performers essentially associated tour class as stated by Dhananjayain *Dasarupa*²⁴.

Dress and ornaments are considered basic components of culture as it reflects

people's desire for aestheticism. Contemporary sculptural panels provide valuable information about costumes, ornaments, hairstyles, ornamental headdresses of males and females. The class difference can be noticed in the classification of clothing and ornaments of the portrayed figures. The sculptural panels from the south India area good example of social and cultural representation of contemporary society of the early medieval period.

Male outfits delineated in the contemporary sculptures is consisted of two pieces of unstitched clothing. The upper garment generally covers the shoulder or elbows with its end falling up to the waist²⁵. The upper bodies of males in sculptures are uncovered²⁶. Modern *dhoti* is synonymous with *Antalya* (loincloth) worn by all men around their midsection (waist) up to or above the knees. The semi-transparent clothing indicates the expensive fabric²⁷. The loincloth of poor people is made of thick fabric with no sophisticated finishing²⁸. Headgear or headscarf (*gamcha* 'angvastram') was the part of attire worn by few males in the selected sculptural panel around their head²⁹.

In early medieval south India, the fashion style and the dress of the women had three prevalent garments. To cover the upper part of the body, *Uttariya* was utilized as a piece of cloth like a *Dupatta* (*odhani*). In sculptural panels, few females are illustrated draping a beautiful *dupatta* around their arms³⁰. In selected panels, *Kanchuka* or bodice is shown specially designed to cover the breasts in a usual fashion³¹. In some sculptural figures, the band to cover the upper body of female is less visible due to the fine translucent fabric³².

The *Chandataka* (*Dhoti* or drapery) a lower piece of clothing was worn as an undergarment. Female figures of different panels or sculptures are depicted wearing the lower garment covering the body up to knees³³ or sometimes above the ankle³⁴. The dresses of the few females in the panel are much luxurious as the fabric seems to be semi-transparent which is an indication of very fine fabric³⁵ and it further demonstrates the status of the woman among the marginalized section.

However, some panels depict lower garments nearly invisible or of very thick fabric with no decoration or least decoration. It indicated the people of lower strata were wearing thick fabric clothes which don't need any sort of special manufacturing skill as they can't afford expensive garments³⁶.

Male and female hairstyles in sculptural panels signify the contemporary fashion creativity of society. Generally, women used to keep long hair but females in the panels have a very exceptionally basic hairstyle. The variety of bun (*Juda*) in the shape of round³⁷ or elongated³⁸ or loosely tied³⁹ with neatly combed hair was knotted

at the back of the head by females. In one sculpture, a female door guard has her hair extensively decorated with some headdress but not decipherable⁴⁰.

Male's hairstyle is resembled that of females keeping the length of hair up to shoulders which are combed and tied in a loose bun⁴¹. The Sculptural panels also depict males keeping mustaches⁴².

These sculptural panels and sculptures represent the entertainment class, service sector, and ordinary people which can be classified into two categories on the premise of jewelry adorned by them. Females in some sculptural panels are decorated with extensive ornaments like long beads mala, necklace around their neck, armlets (*bahu-sandhi*), earrings (*kundala*) and bangles in their wrists (*Atchafalaya*), anklets (*nupur's*), well embellished griddles (*mekhela*) with hanging chains or beautiful beads horizontally as well as vertically⁴³, *ghungroo (kinking)*⁴⁴ and *matha Patti*⁴⁵. Additionally, males are represented wearing two layered beads chain in the neck, armlets, earrings, and bracelets on their wrists⁴⁶.

However, the other category of sculptures is adorned with the bare minimum ornaments or no ornaments. The female in the panel is described with a single bead necklace (*jalakanthi*) around her neck, armlets⁴⁷ and bangles⁴⁸. It is an indication of the social status of these less adorned figures in society. Some figures carry no ornament on their body⁴⁹. Therefore, dresses and ornaments are also a representation of status and living standards in the society or an indication of existing hierarchy within the marginalized section.

A relief depicts the villagers and their cattle where a mother is holding her child in her lap and also carrying two pots on her head. In spite of the fact, her facial features have been faded away and her right hand is folded at elbow parallel to her head. Another female figure appears to be a milkmaid carrying tier of three earthen pots in her left hand and a rolled mat or bundle of grass or fodder in her right-hand keeping over her head. The sculpture represents particularly those women who are engaged in the daily life activities. Apart from the agricultural activities, women were also engaged in the work of animal husbandry⁵⁰. This kind of work is not considered sufficient enough to be mentioned in the textual sources.

A flawlessly carved female door guard holding a fly-whisk in her left hand is rendering her defined services. The female is intensely jeweled which demonstrate her status and the association with the aristocracy or the priestly class as she is portrayed in the temple⁵¹.

The terminate is utilized for women entertainers who work as dancing girls as informed by *Amarkosa*⁵². Those artists who were termed *Nartaki* who are well

versed in possessing (*hela*), feeling (*bhava*), represents the (*sattva*), temperament, sweet mannered, physically pleasing to watch, delicate in singing and thrilled in dancing and brilliant in appearance⁵³. The female artist is the central figure of attraction in panels due to their sensuous figure, lean waist, well-proportioned breasts, aesthetically gentle and communicative gestures of hands and fingers⁵⁴.

The dancing pose (*nrtya mudra*) of hands and legs designates the dancers well versed⁵⁵ in dancing. In sculpture, both hands of the dancer are appeared above the head folded at the elbow making a classical dance gesture⁵⁶. The legs of the dancers in the panels are shown moving with the rhythm as both legs are folded at knee and toes are open on outward direction atypical classical pose of legs in Indian dancing⁵⁷. In almost all the panels, the head of the dancer is tilted on one side⁵⁸. Male and female musician figures were also portrayed dancing to the rhythm of the music⁵⁹. However, there is a lack of synchronization among dancers and postures rude due to the lack of training of street entertainers⁶⁰.

The sculptures of music and dance have represented a variety of musical instruments played by the entertainers devoid of gender. The sculptural panel from the Hoysala period, Halabied is exceptionally significant as it shows that people from the entertainment sector were very accomplished⁶¹. The stone panels describe a different kind of instruments like, *dhlok*⁶², *mridangam*⁶³, *cymbals (tala)*⁶⁴, *damru (pellet drum)*⁶⁵, *ghanti*⁶⁶, *dhol*⁶⁷ etc. The aesthetic sense of musical instrument is kept in consideration by sculptors⁶⁸. Music instruments are also an indication of the class of entertainer's audience within the imperial or elite class⁶⁹. However, the musical instruments like *dholak* and *cymbals* are carved very simply with no decorations at all⁷⁰ See Plate- III & IV.

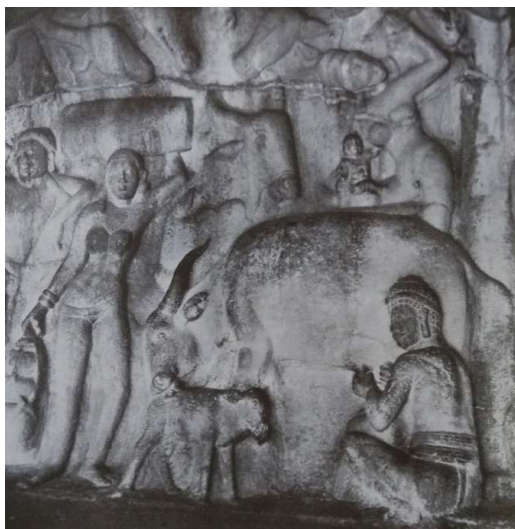


Plate - I

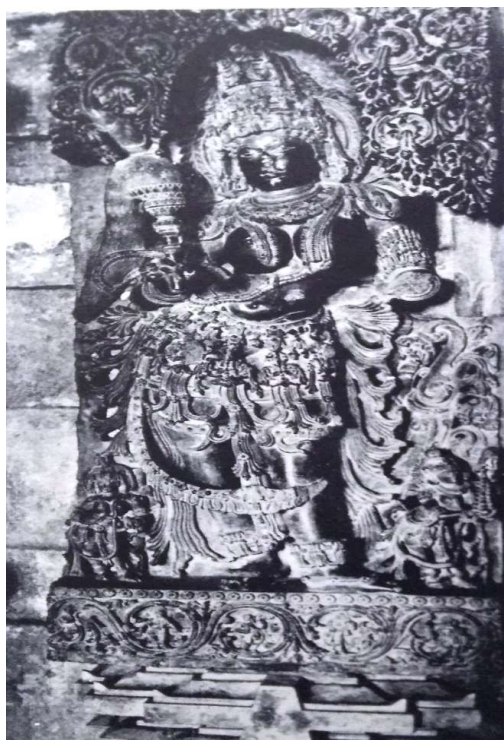


Plate - II



Plate – III

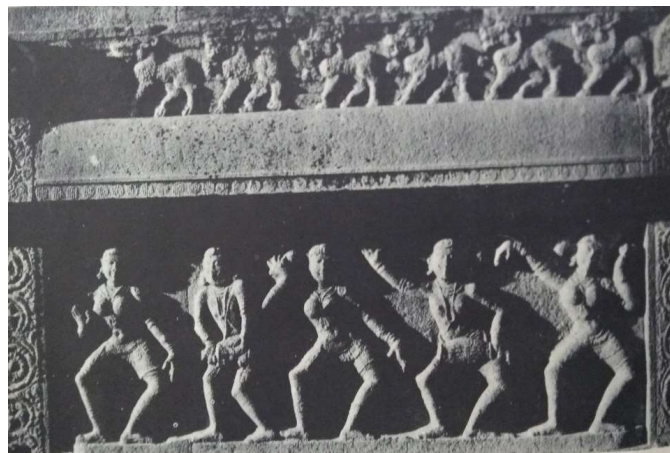


Plate- IV



Plate-V



Plate-VI

. Such entertainers seem to belong from lower strata of society, probably of *sudra* caste delivering their performances in public gatherings. Henceforth, the category of musical instruments played can also make a difference in the status of performer artists.

The prevailing distinction in the hierarchy among inside the marginalized group is characteristically signified in the sculptures and sculptural panel. Women were involved in different areas such as the entertainment sector, service sector, and pastoral activities of the village is represented in the sculptures. Evidently, it points out the heterogeneous nature of the marginalized groups and contemporary society. The women's contribution to the economy is considered as a passive member. Additionally, sculptures also highlight the work, livelihood, and living standards of the neglected classes. Moreover, sculptures and stone panels describe the predominant culture in the early medieval south Indian society.

Endnotes

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- 25 See Plate- III.
- 26 See Plate- I, III & IV.
- 27 See Plate- III.
- 28 See Plate- IV.
- 29 See Plate- III.
- 30 See Plate- II & III.
- 31 See plate- I, II, III, IV & VI.
- 32 See Plate- V.
- 33 See Plate- III & IV.
- 34 See Plate- II, V & VI.
- 35 See Plate- II, III, V & VI.
- 36 See Plate- I & IV.
- 37 See Plate- V
- 38 See plate- VI.
- 39 See Plate- I & III.
- 40 See Plate- II.
- 41 See Plate- III.
- 42 Idem.
- 43 See Plate- II, III, V & VI.
- 44 See Plate- III.
- 45 See plate V & VI.
- 46 See plate- III.
- 47 See Plate- IV.
- 48 See plate- I.
- 49 See plate- I & III.
- 50 See Plate- I.
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- 54 See Plate- III & IV

- 55 See Plate- III.
- 56 See Plate- III &IV.
- 57 Idem.
- 58 Idem.
- 59 Idem.
- 60 See Plate- IV.
- 61 See Plate- III.
- 62 See Plate- III &IV.
- 63 See Plate- III.
- 64 See Plate- V.
- 65 See Plate- IV.
- 66 See Plate-III.
- 67 See Plate- V.
- 68 Idem.
- 69 See Plate- III.