Story telling must have been an art of great antiquity. It would have formed a significant aspect of culture of human social groups which had attained a level of perfection in communicating language. One can propose a pre-historic antiquity for it. The stories transmitted orally could be historical, semi-historical, ahistorical or mythical. In regular oral transmission they must have found ground in bardic traditions. In the context of India the proofs of antiquity of narrative stories can be traced to her earliest literature, namely, the *Vedic* literature. The *Samvada-suktas* of *Rigveda* (dialogue hymns) to which usually the roots of Indian drama are traced, are in fact also of the nature of narratives. In the *Brahmana* literature myths woven around deities like Vishnu are also in the nature of narratives. A large body of literature called *Itihasa* and *Puranas* came into being in course of time. The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which are regarded as *Itihasas* are pregnant with numerous myths, legends and anecdotes. Similarly, the vast body of *Mahapuranas* and *Upapuranas* are replete with historical and mythical narratives. It should be pointed out that before these were committed to writing, they were handed down from mouth to mouth, some times enlarged, and so on. The diverse versions of the stories contained in *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Purana etc.*, may be regarded as proofs of this process.

Several narrative stories may be deemed as representatives of mythical and secular examples. They too have continued sometimes in their original
form and sometimes slightly altered wherein the names of the characters and
details could differ. The great stupas of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati etc., have
made use of Buddhist Nidana tradition to produce great quantity of narrative
outputs. Dure-nidana and Avidure-nidanas of the great stupas of Bharhut,
Bodhagaya and Sanchi emphatically exhibit how Buddhist religious leaders
found in them a contrivance for propagation of Buddhist ideals. These may be
considered as the first true instances of “visual narratives.” A visual narrative is
defined as “a story which is presented in a series of fixed images.”¹

Visual narrative tradition in India has since proliferated to various
regions of South India along with the spread of Buddhism. Amaravati in
Andhra, Bhaja in Maharashtra, Kanaganahalli in Karnataka provide visual
proofs of their spread into the Deccan. That during the Satavahana period in
Karnataka non-Buddhist visual narratives were current is proved by a terracotta
disc-like lid from Vadagaon-Madhavpur² (Belgaum Dist.), dating from 1st -2nd
Century A.D. It seems to depict the Markandeya episode in mono-scenic mode.
These visual expressions are aptly called “the medium of stone writing.” The
emergence of stone temples on a grand scale in the Deccan provided ample
scope for the artist to reproduce in stone the Epic, Puranic and secular stories.
Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal, the centres of Karnataka temple architecture
between 6th and 8th centuries, on their temple walls, pillars, superstructural
details etc, have accommodated large number of visual illustrations of such
stories. Indian artists have used a variety of narrative modes in visual
narratives. This is so in Karnataka, too. Identifying and understanding of these
themes and their interpretation have been entrancing to the art historian. These
visual narratives served the purpose not only of decorating the temples, but
were intended also to convey contemporary myths, morals and ideals. It is
therefore necessary that these visual narratives are subjected to proper study in
depth.
A Review of Earlier Literature

The period of the Chalukyas of Badami provides the first instance of use of stone in large quantities for temples in Karnataka. For the art historians this is the most advantageous fact, as the monuments survive in their original form to a great extent. This is also the period when sculptural depictions of large and small figures formed part of monuments. It is this situation which allows the art historians to assess their chronological and thematic as also technical aspects of the sculptures in question.

As early as 1940s British officers visited the caves at Badami and recorded their amateurish opinions. In 1866 Meadows Taylor and Furgusson published a work entitled *Architecture in Dharwad and Mysore*. The purpose of this work was to introduce the monuments with photographic illustrations under various heads. (The complete work was not available for study to this scholar). It contained some photographs of the monuments of the region, which among others, included those of the Durga Temple at Aihole and Galaganatha, Kasivisvesvara etc., temples at Pattadakal.

The first serious attempt at first hand study of the early Chalukyan monuments was done by James Burgess in 1874. In this work a good descriptive account of the caves at Badami and the caves and certain temples at Aihole and the two temples of Virupaksha and Papanatha at Pattadakal was given. Burgess was able to identify most of the sculptural themes on these monuments. The work contained a few photographs and a number of drawings of sculptures. Needless to add, there were also drawings and identifications of *Krishnalila* themes found in the caves. Hence Burgess can rightly can be regarded as the pioneer of the study of narrative themes of Chalukya temples. This report was followed by his long article on *Rock Cut Temples at Badami in the Deccan* published in *Indian Antiquary* Vol.VI, in 1877. This article was illustrated by a number of sketches (Fig. 1-5) of themes from Cave-III at Badami. Several narrative themes connected with *Krishnacharita, Samudramathana* have been correctly identified by him in this article.
The next important work referring to the sculptural themes of early Chalukya temples was by T.A. Gopinatha Rao. In his work on *Hindu Iconography* (1914) he addressed to the problems of iconographic identifications of various themes along with the background of Puranic mythology and agamic prescriptions. His work provides a good account of the mythological stories contained in the *Puranas, Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. But since his concern was iconography, he did little in respect of other aspects of sculptural narration.

A very noteworthy work focusing on the caves at Badami alone appeared in 1928. This was by R.D. Banarjee and entitled *Bar Reliefs of Badami*. All the Hindu caves at Badami are described in this work along with identification of images as also the narratives in greater detail than what Burgess had done. The most outstanding aspect of this work is the photographic illustrations including those of the narrative sculptures on the beams. However sculptures in the Jaina cave are not considered in this work.

In 1957 C. Sivaramamurti published a classic paper on Gangavatara and story of Amrita narrative found at Pattadakal. This was also the first attempt at discussing the two themes beautifully presented on the faces of a pillar of the Virupaksha temple. He is meticulous in identifying every detail against appropriate literary background in his own inimitable style. He has since published several books in which diverse themes from Indian sculptures are considered against the literary background.

A.M. Annigeri's *Pattadakalla Gudigalu* (1960) is a significant work. Though the work had a wider canvas of describing historical, epigraphical and temple architectural dimensions, appropriate place has been given to systematic identification of large number of narrative themes depicted on pillars and walls of the temples at Pattadakal.

A similar work on Aihole by the same author appeared in 1974. Aihole is not rich in narrative themes. But those available on Durga temple particularly the *Ramayana* scenes are dealt with in this work.
Kiratarjuniya was a favourite theme in the Chalukya period. A closer study of the sculptural representations by M.S. Nagaraja Rao revealed that the story slightly differs from that known from standard Mahabharata. This was very well discussed in Nagaraja Rao’s work *Kiratarjuniya in Indian Art* (1979).10

K.V. Soundara Rajan made a first hand study of the cave temples of the Deccan on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India (1980).11 The work incorporates detailed descriptions of the cave temples of Badami and Aihole, in addition to those found in the other parts of the Deccan. However there is no attempt in this work to focus on the dimensions of narrative art.

A series of articles was published by S.V. Padigar between 1978-2009 in which certain unidentified narrative reliefs of the Chalukya period were properly identified, sometimes giving explanation for the variation in visual depiction. For instance he identified the Gajakachhapa Yuddha theme as also the Tittibha-samudra-katha of the Panchatantra in Mallikarjuna temple at Pattadakal.12 Similarly he has explained the presence of a tortoise in place of crocodile in the sculpture depicting Gajendramoksha at Pattadakal.13 In his work *Vishnu Cult in Karnataka*14 he has brought out the significance of the changes occurring in Vaishnava themes of pre 650 and post 650 A.D. periods.

In his study of the early cave temples of the Chalukyas of Badami he has considered in considerable detail the facets of narrative sculptures.15 The questions relating to art-architecture and craftsmen of the Chalukya period has been dealt with by the same author in the introduction to the volume *Inscriptions of the Chalukyas of Badami* (2010).16

Among the other studies having bearing on the subject matter of this thesis mention may be made of Aschwin Lippe’s Iconographic and stylistic study of Chalukya images,17 Carol Radcliffes *Early Chalukya Sculptures*, S. Rajashekhara’s *Early Chalukya Art of Aihole*; Rajendra Prasad’s *Chalukya Temples of Andhradesa* may be mentioned. A significant contribution to the study of Panchatantra themes has been made by C.S. Patil.18 Umadevi’s paper on Ahalya and Indra theme has brought to light the fact that certain variations

The recent work by Raghvendra Kulkarni on *Pre Chalukya Sculpture* incorporates an account of narrative sculpture particularly related to the early phase of Karnataka art.

One striking feature of the above studies is the fact that they restrict themselves to one or the other of the following:

1. Identification of narratives, their characters and mythological background.
2. Identification of differences in the existing versions of the story as against those depicted in sculpture.
3. Affording explanation for the variation.

Hardly any serious attempt has been made for examining the numerous other aspects of narrative sculptural tradition. The possibility of looking at visual narratives from the points of view of technique, choice of theme, placement implications, diversity etc., has not been explored to the possible extent. A somewhat incorrect attempt is noticeable in the paper of Wrescheler Helen where she has proposed a political agenda for the exhibition of *Ramayana* themes on the Papanatha temple at Pattadakal.

Similarly Vidya Dehejia has worked on the narrative techniques of the Vakataka paintings in Ajanta. Kristi Evans has done a meticulous study of the narrative sculptures of the Hoysala temples at Amritapura and Halebid. However both these works fall outside the scope of the present work, as they respectively pertain to the art of different region and period than that considered in this work.

**Purpose and Scope of the Present Work**

The above survey of published literature on the art and architecture of Karnataka makes it clear that the study of narrative sculpture has sumptuous
scope for exploration. The period of the Chalukyas of Badami in Karnataka affords immense quantum of narrative art. Studies have shown that this period is also a transitional one in terms of the development of Puranic and epic mythological narratives. The narrative themes presented in sculptural art require to be documented exhaustively. Their proper identification and correlation to appropriate mythological texts is also a necessity. Further it is necessary to identify the possible reasons for special preference to certain narrative themes. With these in view the present work has set the following the objectives:

1. Documentation of narrative themes in sculpture of early Karnataka especially of the period of Chalukyas of Badami.
2. Co-relation of the depicted themes with mythological texts.
3. Identifying the possible variations of the versions of the narrative stories in chrono-spatial contexts.
4. Identifying the underlying factors contributing to preference of certain themes.

As pointed above the antiquity of visual narratives in Karnataka can easily traced back to the Satavahana period. The Buddhist stories have found a place on a significant scale in the sculpture of the stupa at Kanaganahalli. The post 3rd century period up to the advent of the Chalukyas of Badami as a political force in the Deccan about the middle of the 6th century, sculptural evidence of narrative nature is sparse. But from the time of the establishment of the Chalukyas in Badami in 543 AD for over two centuries hundreds of specimens of narrative sculpture are forthcoming. The sheer magnitude of these sculptures demands close attention of the scholars. In view of this the present thesis focuses on the period 543-757 A.D. which corresponds to the period of the supreme authority of the Chalukyas of Badmi in the Deccan, though for the sake of continuity examples of the pre-Chalukya period have also been taken into account. Thus this work broadly covers the period from about 1st century A.D. to 8th century A.D.
From the point of view of geography the study is confined to the northern part of Karnataka and contiguous region of Andhra Pradesh. The Satavahana narratives are found in Gulburga region while narrative sculptures of the period of Badami Chalukyas are particularly concentrated in Badami, Aihole, Mahakuta and Pattadakal in Karnataka and in Alampur in Andhra Pradesh. The Southern part of Karnataka could not be considered since the region is bereft of narrative representations during the period under study.

Methodology

In proceeding with the present work a simple methodology has been followed. A basic requirement was to study the published material relating to narrative studies with particular reference to Karnataka. This has given us an idea as to the extent of work that has already been done in the field. It was found that the documentation work was scanty in respect of narrative sculpture. Hence field visits were made repeatedly to the sites of Badami, Mahakuta, Pattadakal, Aihole and Alampur for photo documentation as also contextual documentation. These were systematically classified according to the themes. Alongside mythological texts like puranas, epics, Buddhist Jatakas, Jaina myths and secular stones of Panchatantra were subjected to study for identifying versions of the narratives found in the sculpture. Thus a co-relation between the visual narratives and textual narratives could be effected. The variation in the stories as found in the visual narratives were identified and the possible factors for the variation was also attempted to be suggested.

Frequency analysis and its implications were also looked in too. Thus it has been possible to discern the implications of preferences in visual themes. The material so collected, analysed and interpreted has been organized into various chapters that follow in the sequel.

Textual matter related to relevant stories, myths, etc has been included in appropriate places as a background. A good number of illustration wherever found necessary are incorporated. The resume provides the gist the finds.
Notes and References


List of Figures

1.1 Anantasina Vishnu and Bhuvanranga, Cave-II, Badami.
1.2 Stanu Narasimha and Vamana-Trivikrama, Cave-II, Badami.
1.3 Vishnu and harihara, Cave-II, Badami.
1.4 Krishnacharita and Mahabharata Scenes, Cave-II, Badami.
1.5 Krishnacharita Scenes, Cave-II, Badami.
Fig. 1.1

(Courtesy: Burjes James)
Fig. 1.5

(Courtesy: Burjes James)