Narratology as a distinct discipline is only of recent origin. It pertains to the aspects of narration of the theme in literature and it is now being extended to various forms of visual art including sculptural art. It aims to search closed narrative models. The emphasis is on action, context and the motto. In a literary discourse, a story with the chain of events in relation to the existence assumes the form of a narrative. A story becomes narrative and its depiction becomes discourse. The following diagram illustrates the interrelationship of the narrative texts with its components.¹

In the Indian system of narratology, the concept part played by the traditional literary narratives was clearly defined. Indian literary narrative traditions are extremely rich in allegory, myth and folklores. As such, sometimes the narrative tradition results in amalgamation of all the narrative in diverse forms.
Narrative Techniques

*Katha, akhyana, upakhyana, akhyayika, varitana, charita, kathaprabandha, itihasa* etc., are the various names by which Indian narratives are known. Works like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, the *Panchatantra* and others, which form the theme of narratives, were so popular that they were not only exploited for literary compositions like poetry and drama, both classical and folk, in every nook and corner of India, but also touched the realm of sculptural art. Thus, Indian temples are rich in visual narrative which may be defined as a story presented in the form of a single image or a series of fixed images.

In communicating the story to the audience, the artist uses a variety of compositional devices. It is presumed that the theme or the story which the artist wants to convey through the sculptural mode is already known to the viewer. Narrative art thus only aims at reminding the story through fixed image or images. This is the reason why to a person unacquainted with the story the narrative sculpture becomes unintelligible.

But for a researcher the narrative has various dimensions. In India even the most popular stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were redacted in regional versions. This phenomenon can be discerned by a study of a single myth finding various versions in different *puranas*. Such variations reflect on the way in which the myth narrator thought of the myth, as, for instance, his personal religious leanings. For example, the myth of Narasimha in the various *Puranas* has its own different versions as narrated in *Vishnupurana*, *Harivamsa*, *Bhagavatapurana* etc. A person looking into the narrative sculpture will necessarily have to find a particular version depicted in sculpture. That will give an insight into then current versions and thereby suggests the psychological ado.

With this background of the ‘narratives’ we may now turn our attention to various modes adopted for presenting the narrative in sculptural art. A good
deal of effort has gone into identifying the modes employed for narration in sculpture and painting form. They may be delineated as follows.

1. Mono-Scenic Mode

   This is the briefest mode of presenting a story. It comprises a single significant and easily identifiable scene taken from a key episode in the narrative. The viewer knowing the story would be reminded of it by recognizing the episode, hence recollecting the earlier and subsequent phases of the story. Some common examples of this mode are Bahubali’s penance (Fig. 10.4), Ravana lifting Kailasa (Fig. 7.28), Mahisasuramardini (Fig. 7.90), Andakasuravadha (Fig. 7.58), Tripurantaka (Fig. 7.50) etc.

2. Continuous Narration

   Continuous narration comprises of presentation of two or more episodes of a story in a single location without regard to the time factor. The artist chooses a key location in the story and repeats one or more characters occurring in the story in the same location so as to convey significant episodes and there by the story itself. Thus while the place of event is one and the same, events occurring in different points of time are accommodated in the same scene. This mode has been very popular in Indian art at least from the 2nd Century B.C. as evidenced in the sculptures of the Bharhut stupa. For example, Mrigajataka, Jetavanavihara, mahakapi-jataka etc. In Chalukya context some examples are Kamathopasarga of Parsvanatha (Fig. 10.3), Vamana Trivikrama (Fig. 6.44) etc conform to this mode.

3. Horizontal Sequential Narration

   The purpose of sequential narration is to present various episodes in a story in sequential order. The episodes are represented side by side horizontally. Thus though characters may recur in the episodes, the time and setting of the episodes are different. This technique is adopted particularly for narration of the episodes from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas etc. Some examples are Ramayana (Fig. 4.7-4.10) and Krishnacharita scenes (Fig. 6.74-
6.80) in Upper Sivalaya at Badami, *Ramayana* scene (Fig.4.18-4.25) in Durga temple etc. Horizontal sequential narration may be found in one of the following sub types.

**a. Without Compartment**

The narration of a story in this would be within a larger horizontal frame with no intermediary compartment to separate the episodes. The beams of temples are found to have such narratives. For example, some scenes of the *Samudramathana* (Fig.5.16) and *Krishnacharita* (Fig.6.63-6.70) in Cave II and III at Badami follow this technique. Human figures occupy central place in this technique. Therefore, the setting becomes almost insignificant.

**b. With Compartments**

There are cases when individual episodes of a narrative are presented in separate frames in sequential order arranged horizontally. For instance, the *Parijataharana* (Fig.6.70) depiction in cave III at Badami.

**c. Sequential narration in frames separated from one another by space**

In this technique the narration comprises of episodes of the principal story presented in individual frames that are separated from one another with space in between each pair of frames. Representations of the *Ramayana* themes on the walls of Virupaksha (Fig. 4.36-4.38), Mallikarjuna and Papanatha temples (Fig. 4.47-4.59) at Pattadakal are the best examples. The technique demands availability of adequate space.

Rarely, in such narratives, a secondary variety may be identified.

In these principal episodes are separated from each other. But intermittently continuous narration in vertical format is adopted. For example, the Jatayu episode from Mallikarjuna and Virupaksha temple walls at Pattadakal (Fig.4.37).
4. Sequential Narration in Vertical Format

The technique consists of presentation of various episodes of a story in separate compartments arranged one below the other. The sequence may be from top to bottom or bottom to top. The technique is found particularly in the Buddhist Chaityagriha cum Vihara at Aihole, where narrativies of Buddha’s life and *Jatakas* occur on the door frames (Fig. 9.4)

5. Sequencing of stages of single episode in single frame

This is a unique mode of narration observed in Chalukya context. The episode presented is single, but the stages of the episode are conveyed. The presentation looks like the elaboration of the mono-scenic. The best example of this type is the scene depicting killing of Hiranyakasipu by Narasimha on Upper Sivalaya at Badami (Fig. 6.27). In this Narasimha is multiple armed with each of his hands catching hold of Hiranyakasipu, who is attempting to escape from the God. Two arms of Narasimha ultimately tear open the abdomen of Hiranyakasipu lying on god’s thighs.

The aforesaid narrative techniques are adopted by the artists in Karnataka particularly during the Chalukyas of Badami. In the sequel, we will dwell on this aspect at length.
Notes and References


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.