

## **Hero Stones-The Heritage of the Tamils –A Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The ancient Indian heritage is unique. Indian art and architectures are globally attracted and admired because of its dedicated workmanship and crafts. The practice of worshipping forerunners and war hero had been continued from historical time to present day. The establishment of hero stone was one of the age old practice among the Tamils. The purpose of hero stone was remembering the slain warrior in which his figure sculptured with animals encountered by him. At present number of hero stones were discovered in agricultural land as well as forest. This study confined with hero stone establishment among the Tamil people. How far they given importance to common man is analysed. Today we come to know about silpasastra for sculpture making .The Tamils in their early grammar book Tolkappiyam itself laid down the method of erecting Hero stone.

### **KEY WORDS**

Hero stone, Nadukal, Veerakal, Memorial stone ,Menhir

The memorial stone or Hero stone establishment was a Ancient cultural custom all over the World. Erecting memorial stone was the common custom of Megalithic people<sup>1</sup>.The megalithic period culture witnessed the establishment of Menhir for the tribe who attained martyrdom in a war between ethnic or enemy groups. Recently discovered Menhir and cairn circle is belonged to 2300 B.C near pollachi in Tamil Nadu.<sup>2</sup>We know the existence of memorial by the discovery of human figurine and tercotta objects in Indus Valley and other contemporary civilization. In Tamil , We have Literary references for the establishment of memorial stone in Tolkappiyam ,Agananuru,Purananuru and Silapadikaram. In the Agananuru, warrior contribution to the welfare of the country are recorded and established memorial stone for the slain warrior also mentioned.In the Purananuru memorial stone establishment was for protector of Cow from thief is mentioned and Silapathikaram speaks about memorial to God of Chastity i.e. Kannagi.

Through the memorial stone we know the culture and life of common people. Further it provides the information about the dress, ornaments and warfare. The belief of the ancient people also revealed from the hero stones, Whether the stone was for welfare of the people or religious sacrifice. Some of the hero stone have the inscription explaining the deeds of hero, in which cause for his death also mentioned. Others have not inscription but tells the story through the sculpture. Most of the hero stone didn't have inscription. The Royal Monarchical inscription and sculpture were placed in the Temple but memorial stones were not found place there. They were commonly placed in the burial sites or middle of the land or villages.

In the Tamil literature memorial stone is called as Virakkal or Nadukkal<sup>3</sup>. The memorial stones have variety of sculpture. The royal ancestors were posthumously deified by their direct heir apparent known from the statue of SembianMahadevi by Rajendrachola I in A.D.1020<sup>4</sup>. The king made provision for worship and offering. But hero stones were not getting such type of royal patronage or provision to worship or offering. They were worshipped by village people and offering were made occasionally. Many hero stones are dilapidated condition in nowadays. Even though memorial stone sculpture are common in TamilNadu careful study is need for its peculiar character but they provide on the origin and development of sculptural craftsmanship.

The early works of Tamil grammar Tolkappiyam lay down the rules and regulations for erecting hero stones. The age old practice continued in the pallava and chola period also. They inscribed their records on hero stones<sup>5</sup>. But later it was confined with an unknown warrior and small region or village. According to Tolkappiyam for setting up of a Hero stone followed six ritual process as Katchi, Kal-kol, Nirp-padai, Nadukal, Perumpadai and Valttal<sup>6</sup>. Katchi means looking and selecting a suitable stone then Kal-Kol means bringing it; Nirp-Padai means placing in water; Nadu Kal means setting it up; Perumpadai means honoring it with sacrifices and Valttal means praising it. The hero stone become deity after the spirit of Hero invoked to reside in the stone.

The formation of hero stone mostly in standing posture bearing on one face a sculptured figure or scene with an descriptive inscription. The sculpture may be simple or highly finished or a series of panel depicting the various story and the inscription. In the stone depicted the battle scene. Next the hero was carried to paradise after his death surrounded by heavenly representative. The sculpture of hero depicting his death which may have taken place in battles or in reclaiming stolen cattle, in self defence against robbers, or in the hunting field. Some of the stone had the name of the hero and his fame. A few examples of these monuments noteworthy to be mentioned in detail. A slab stone found in sivampatti village at mattur in Krishnagiri District bears sculpture with paintings<sup>7</sup>. Another hero stone discovered at kappalankarai village near kinathukadavu in Coimbatore district which bears sculpture of a warrior killing a tiger with his sword with left leg bending and right one strongly standing in the soil giving strength to hero to

encountering the tiger. He holds a spear and left side of his waist hanging cover of small knife and wears a head dress <sup>8</sup>.

In Vadacheri near Vaniyambadi a 15<sup>th</sup> century hero stone is discovered. It is a sati stone bears a sculpture of a warrior in grand manner with sword in one hand and another hand bears small sword. Near to warrior is women .she is said to be wife of the slained warrior and did sati due to his husband death sculpturd with him. She holds a lotus and carrying a stone pot<sup>9</sup>.Another hero stone discovered in Narasingapuram village near Sathiyankottai in Dindukal bears the sculpture of man killing wild boar surrounded with two Dogs.The man killing the wild boar using his both hand sword is sculptured in a fine manner.<sup>10</sup>Memorial stone discovered azhgupillaithangi near pillur in Sivagangai District bears the sculpture slained warrior. The sculpture posed in a standing style as warrior carrying bow in one hand and arrow in another hand and carrying the arrow basket in his shoulder .His ornaments are in a elaborate way chiseled wearing a small dress in his waist. His hair is styled in a knotted manner. His earring is in grandeur neck is decorated with necklace. On the top of the slab to heavenly men sculpture show that they carried warrior to paradise after his death. Below his sculpture a man standing with folded hand .He might have been a soldier. The warrior might have been leader of the army.On the top of the stone name was inscribed as Muthannan<sup>11</sup>.Hero stones were not getting the patronage of the ruler and no provision were made by anyone in the early period. It might have be a popular one among the tamils as a result it got a place in literature. We have reference in the seventh and eighth centuries about donation of lands in the name of hero stones<sup>12</sup>.The revenue of the land was used to maintenance and festive celebration. General belief of hero stone was that it is abode of hero soul.

The sculpture of hero stone is showing the craftsmanship and artistic value of the sculptor. The weapons of early society is sword, knife and spear known from the hero stone.Many of the ornament they used in their body show the wealth as well as valour and belief based. Kundalam was vogue among the sculpture of hero as earring The rings on his arm wearing for valour of the warrior it is called as virakappu. Warrior mostly knot a bead in their leg arm that is called virakazhal. Another feature of the Hero stone is warrior chain that was called as sannaveeram. A chain passing crisscross in the body of hero also found in the sculptures.These show the impact of daily way of life on the arts and crafts. In the ancient period people lived near mountain or hillsand did their agriculture near river. Their wealth was cattle. Protecting cattle was primary duty of every tribe in their village. They gave protection from wild animals, enemy and thieves for this cause died man was deified as hero in their village and got prominence among the village people. Because many hero stones bearing the sculpture of hero with animals like Tiger ,Boar and some stone bear the sculpture of hero with sword.From these we know that for what cause the hero died. They show the real history of ancient people in a pictographic manner.It is noteworthy heritage of these people because hero stone was not only for the royal people but for

the common people also. Some of the name mentioned in the stone was not at all familiar person and he might have been the village folk.

## **Conclusion**

Remembering and respecting elders was a custom in the ancient civilized society. In the sense, the people of southern regions speaking Tamil language had the traditions of erecting stone from time immemorial. It has been symbol of gratefulness to martyr. The literature also laid down the rules and regulation to Hero stone establishment is amazing heritage of the people.

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