

TURUGOL AND PENBUYYAL HERO STONES IN KARNATAKA

A Comparative Study of South Karnataka, North Karnataka and Selected Regional Traditions of India

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Abstract—

Hero stones constitute one of the richest categories of memorial evidence for reconstructing the social, military and economic history of medieval Karnataka. Among their most informative categories are Turugol hero stones, commemorating deaths associated with cattle raids and cattle defence, and Penbuyyal or Pendirudeyurchu memorials, associated with the defence of women in situations of violent assault or distress. This article examines these two categories comparatively across South Karnataka and North Karnataka and places them within a wider Indian framework including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Rajasthan. The study focuses on the relationship between heroic death, local economy, village organisation, gendered social values, political authority, landscape and community memory. It proposes that Turugol stones can be read as evidence for cattle wealth, pastoral-agricultural relations and local conflict, while Penbuyyal stones illuminate ideas of protection, honour, gendered vulnerability and community ethics. The regional comparison demonstrates that the frequency, iconographic treatment and inscriptional emphasis of hero stones vary according to political formations, ecology, economy and local memorial practice. The article employs epigraphy, archaeology, iconography, historical geography, oral traditions and GIS-oriented field documentation. It also emphasises source criticism: monument type cannot be assigned solely from visual appearance, and regional differences should be tested against inscriptions, chronology, provenance and local historical context.

Keywords—Hero Stones; Viragallu; Turugol; Gograhana; Penbuyyal; Pendirudeyurchu; Cattle Raids; Women's Protection; Karnataka; South Karnataka; North Karnataka; Maharashtra; Tamil Nadu; Andhra Pradesh; Telangana; Rajasthan; Memorial Stones; Epigraphy; Iconography.

1. Introduction

Hero stones are memorial monuments commemorating persons who died in circumstances regarded as heroic by their communities. Karnataka possesses an exceptionally rich corpus, in which inscriptions and sculpture often preserve the cause of death, the hero's name, political context and the community's memory of the event. The classification of Karnataka memorial stones includes Turugol, Penbuyyal, Kote-kalaga, Gadi-kalaga, Uralivu, hunting hero stones and several other categories.¹

Two categories are especially important for reconstructing local social history. Turugol memorials are associated with cattle-raiding or cattle-defence episodes. Penbuyyal, also described as Pendirudeyurchu in the Karnataka Itihasa Academy classification, refers to death while protecting the modesty or honour of women subjected to assault or distress.² These categories are valuable because they connect the memorial monument with specific forms of social conflict.

The present article compares South Karnataka and North Karnataka and then places the Karnataka evidence within selected traditions from other Indian regions. The purpose is not to rank regions but to identify historical patterns and regional variations.

2. Research Problem

The principal research problem is how far Turugol and Penbuyyal hero stones can be used as historical evidence for reconstructing local society. The question is particularly significant because memorial stones are often treated as illustrations of warfare, while their economic and social meanings receive less attention.

The study asks: How did cattle wealth influence conflict? How did village communities respond to cattle raids? What social values are expressed through memorials to persons who defended women? Do South and North Karnataka show different concentrations or iconographic emphases? How do Karnataka's traditions compare with memorial practices in neighbouring and distant regions? And how can these monuments be documented systematically through GIS and digital heritage methods?

3. Research Objectives

- To study Turugol and Penbuyyal hero stones as historical sources.
- To compare South Karnataka and North Karnataka in terms of chronology, distribution, iconography and inscriptional evidence.

- To examine the relationship between Turugol memorials and cattle wealth.
- To analyse Penbuyyal memorials in relation to protection, gender and community values.
- To compare Karnataka with selected memorial traditions of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Rajasthan.
- To define the geographical, chronological and thematic scope of a future field-based corpus.
- To develop a material and documentation framework for epigraphic, archaeological and GIS research.

4. Research Scope

The core geographical scope is Karnataka, divided analytically into South Karnataka and North Karnataka. South Karnataka includes the historical Ganga-Hoysala and later southern zones, including the Mysuru, Mandya, Hassan, Bengaluru and adjoining regions where relevant. North Karnataka includes the historical zones associated with the Badami Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Kalyana Chalukyas, Seunas and related political formations, including districts such as Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri, Belagavi, Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Koppal and Ballari for comparative purposes.

The study then extends to selected comparative regions: Maharashtra and the Deccan; Tamil Nadu; Andhra Pradesh and Telangana; and Rajasthan. These are comparative cases rather than exhaustive state-wise surveys.

Chronologically, the core discussion covers approximately the fifth/sixth century CE to the late medieval and early modern continuities of the tradition. The earliest Karnataka evidence is associated with the early medieval formation of the memorial practice, while the number and narrative complexity of hero stones expanded in subsequent centuries. Published scholarship notes that early examples are particularly associated with southern Karnataka and that the practice subsequently became widespread in central and northern parts of the region.³

The thematic range includes: Turugol/Gograhana, Penbuyyal/Pendirudeyurchu, battle, village defence, border conflict, hunting, self-sacrifice, maritime or transport imagery where relevant, religious symbolism, oral tradition, ritual use and landscape context.

5. Materials and Sources

The study uses the following categories of material:

- Inscribed hero stones and memorial stones recorded in the field or published in epigraphic corpora.
- Epigraphia Carnatica and other epigraphic publications.
- Archaeological survey reports, museum catalogues and heritage databases.
- Sculptural evidence: battle scenes, cattle, horses, weapons, women, deities, apsaras, sun and moon symbols and other motifs.
- Local oral traditions concerning heroes, village defence and memorial worship.
- Historical maps, settlement records and landscape evidence.
- Photographs, measured drawings, GPS coordinates and proposed 3D scans.
- GIS datasets linking monuments to settlements, routes, rivers, pasture zones, forts and political boundaries.

6. Methodology

The methodology combines epigraphy, archaeology, iconography, social history, historical geography, oral history and digital documentation. Each monument should receive a unique identification number. The field sheet should record state, district, taluk, village, GPS location, present setting, original provenance where known, stone material, dimensions, preservation condition, inscription, script, language, palaeographic features, sculptural registers, weapons, animals, gendered figures, religious symbols, local name, oral tradition, ritual status and bibliography.

The study follows a source hierarchy. An explicit inscription naming a Turugol or Penbuyyal event is stronger evidence than visual resemblance alone. Iconography is then used to corroborate or contextualise the inscription. Oral traditions are recorded as living memory and tested against material and textual evidence. This method prevents over-interpretation of damaged or uninscribed stones.

7. Turugol: Meaning and Historical Context

Turugol, commonly associated with Gograhana or cattle-raiding/cattle-defence episodes, represents one of the most historically informative categories of Karnataka hero stones. The Karnataka Itihasa Academy explains that cattle were considered wealth and that hero stones were erected for persons who died while defending cattle from raiders.⁴

The economic background is important. Cattle were connected with agriculture, dairy, transport, ritual gifts, social status and movable wealth. A cattle raid therefore involved more than the loss of animals: it could threaten the productive capacity and social standing of a settlement. Hero stones commemorating such conflicts can consequently illuminate economic history and village organisation.

A Turugol narrative can be reconstructed as: cattle wealth → raid or seizure → mobilisation → combat → heroic death → memorialisation. Inscriptions may identify the hero, locality, ruler or local official, while sculpture can represent the combat itself.

8. Turugol in South Karnataka

South Karnataka preserves important early and medieval evidence for the hero-stone tradition. Published scholarship notes that early hero stones are especially represented in the southern and southwestern Karnataka zone, including areas associated with the Gangas and Kadambas, before the practice expanded more widely.⁵

The Bengaluru region provides particularly useful evidence. The Srinivagilu inscriptional tradition includes an eighth-century Kannada hero stone commemorating Palchhatereyamma, who died while fighting to rescue cattle in a Turugol context.⁶ T. Dasarahalli also preserves Turugol hero stones connected with Injatur; one inscription commemorates Kosigaramalta Guramareya, while another records Marasinga's death in the Turugol of Injatur.⁷

These examples show that Turugol memorials can preserve not only heroic narratives but also historical place names, administrative terminology and evidence for local conflict. Their importance therefore extends from military history into settlement history and historical geography.

9. Turugol in North Karnataka

North Karnataka presents a broad and diverse memorial landscape associated with the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Kalyana Chalukyas and later political formations. Hero stones in districts such as Haveri, Dharwad, Gadag and neighbouring areas display varied combinations of battle, cattle defence, hunting and other heroic themes.

The Haveri region is particularly significant for animal-related hero stones. Published research on Haveri documents categories including Turugol, Penbuyyal, Kote-kalaga, Gadi-kalaga, Uralivu and several hunting types. The same study identifies tiger, boar, elephant, deer, snake and other animal-related memorials.⁸

This diversity suggests that North Karnataka should not be reduced to a single Turugol pattern. Instead, its hero-stone corpus can be studied as a record of multiple forms of conflict and interaction between human communities, animals and landscape.

10. Penbuyyal / Pendirudeyurchu Hero Stones

Penbuyyal, also recorded as Pendirudeyurchu, belongs to a distinct category of heroism in Karnataka. The Karnataka Itihasa Academy defines it in relation to persons who died while protecting the modesty of women in situations of assault or distress.⁹

The category is historically significant because it provides evidence for the social values through which communities interpreted heroic death. Unlike Turugol, where the principal material resource is cattle, Penbuyyal centres on protection of persons and the social value assigned to women's safety and honour.

The representation should nevertheless be interpreted historically rather than morally generalised. The monument records a community's commemorative value system at a particular time and place. It should not be treated as a timeless description of the status of women in all of Karnataka.

11. Penbuyyal: South and North Karnataka Comparison

In both South and North Karnataka, Penbuyyal imagery can be studied through the relationship between the hero, the protected woman, attackers and weapons. In some cases, the same memorial may combine Penbuyyal with Kote-kalaga or another form of conflict, showing that categories could overlap in practice.

North Karnataka evidence is particularly useful for comparative iconography because published classifications identify Penbuyyal alongside Turugol, border conflict, village defence and hunting categories.¹⁰ South Karnataka evidence should be investigated through inscriptional records, temple collections, village memorial sites and museum holdings.

A major research opportunity therefore exists: a systematic district-wise survey could determine whether Penbuyyal memorials show regional differences in the representation of women, weapons, attackers, horses, architectural settings and upper-register religious imagery.

12. South Karnataka and North Karnataka: Comparative Framework

Feature	South Karnataka	North Karnataka	Interpretive significance	Evidence required
Early development	Strong early evidence in Ganga/Kadamba zones	Early and later evidence under Deccan dynasties	Chronological expansion of memorial practice	Inscription + palaeography
Turugol	Cattle defence and local conflict	Turugol plus wider battle/hunting corpus	Pastoral/agricultural economy	Text + sculpture + landscape
Penbuyyal	Requires district-wise systematic study	Clearly represented in published classifications	Protection, gendered social values	Text + iconography + oral history
Animal	Cattle,	Broad	Human-animal	Iconographic

motifs	hunting animals, horses etc.	hunting and conflict repertoire	relations	comparison
Political setting	Ganga, Hoysala and later traditions	Chalukya, Rashtrakuta, Kalyana Chalukya and later traditions	State and local power	Dynastic/administrative references
Landscape	Agrarian, forest and semi-Malenad zones	Deccan plateau, dry zones, river valleys	Ecology and mobility	GIS + field survey

13. Comparative Study with Other Indian States

Region	Memorial tradition / motif	Primary historical theme	Potential research value	Caution
Karnataka	Turugol / Gograhana	Cattle raid and defence	Pastoral-agricultural economy, village conflict	Event should be confirmed by inscription/context
Karnataka	Penbuyyal / Pendarudayurchu	Protection of women	Gendered social values, protection and community memory	Avoid projecting modern/generalised meanings
Maharashtra / Konkan	Naval hero-stone imagery	Maritime conflict	Coastal warfare, craft and mobility	Ship image alone does not prove trade
Tamil Nadu	Nadukal / hero memorials	Heroic death and memorial worship	Literary, ritual and social memory	Terminology and ritual context vary
Andhra Pradesh / Telangana	Memorial traditions of the Deccan	Battle, local heroism and religious context	Regional political and cultural history	Corpus and terminology vary by period
Rajasthan	Horse/camel rider memorials	Warrior, pastoral and mobility traditions	Warrior identity, ecology and transport	Vehicle alone cannot establish status

The Karnataka categories become more meaningful when compared with memorial traditions elsewhere in India. The comparison below is functional rather than typological: it asks what kind of social world each memorial category can help reconstruct.

14. Material and Technological Scope

The material study of hero stones is essential because stone type, workmanship and carving technique can reveal regional production practices. Field documentation should distinguish granite, schist, soapstone, sandstone and other local materials where identifiable. The Maniyur Turugolu hero stone reported in 2026, for example, was described as a soapstone monument from the Hoysala period.¹¹ Such observations are valuable for understanding quarrying, transport, carving technology and regional artistic traditions.

The research material should include the monument itself, inscriptional surface, sculptural registers, associated architectural fragments, stone-tool marks where visible, pigment or ritual traces, base and setting, and any evidence of relocation. High-resolution photography, RTI and 3D scanning should be incorporated where feasible.

15. GIS and Digital Research Scope

A future Karnataka Hero Stone GIS should assign a unique ID to every monument and record: state, district, taluk, village, coordinates, date, dynasty, type, event, animal/vehicle motif, inscription, language, script, material, dimensions, present location, original location, conservation status, oral tradition and bibliography.

For Turugol research, spatial layers should include historic settlements, pasture lands, irrigation tanks, agricultural zones, river

crossings, trade routes and political boundaries. For Penbuyyal research, settlement clusters, forts, roads and known conflict landscapes may provide additional context.

The database can support comparative maps such as: (1) Turugol distribution; (2) Penbuyyal distribution; (3) animal-hunting hero stones; (4) inscriptional chronology; (5) stone-material distribution; and (6) relationship between hero stones and historic settlements.

16. Research Hypothesis

The study proposes three working hypotheses. First, the distribution of Turugol memorials is likely to correlate with landscapes in which cattle represented significant movable wealth and where local conflict over livestock occurred. Second, Penbuyyal memorials provide evidence for community concepts of protection and honour, but their meanings are historically specific and should be reconstructed from local evidence. Third, regional variation in hero-stone iconography reflects differences in ecology, economy, political organisation and cultural memory rather than a single pan-Indian model.

17. Research Gaps

- A systematic district-wise comparison of Turugol stones in South and North Karnataka remains necessary.
- Penbuyyal memorials require a dedicated corpus with inscriptions, iconography and oral traditions recorded together.
- Many village stones remain unpublished, uninscribed or poorly documented.
- Material analysis of stone type and carving technology is comparatively underdeveloped.
- GIS-based mapping of memorial categories is still an important area for expansion.
- Comparative research across Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra-Telangana and Rajasthan needs a common metadata standard.

18. Limitations

- The terms South Karnataka and North Karnataka are analytical categories and contain substantial internal diversity.
- Not every uninscribed stone can be confidently assigned to Turugol or Penbuyyal from sculpture alone.
- Weathering, repainting, damage and displacement can alter the original evidence.
- Oral traditions may preserve historical memory but can also change through time.
- Regional comparisons are selective and do not constitute exhaustive state-wide inventories.
- Modern concepts of gender, honour or community identity should not be projected uncritically onto medieval memorials.

19. Conclusion

Turugol and Penbuyyal hero stones provide two complementary windows into the social history of Karnataka. Turugol memorials connect heroic death with cattle wealth, pastoral-agricultural life, local conflict and village defence. Penbuyyal memorials connect heroic death with protection, gendered vulnerability and community values. Their meanings become richer when examined across the geographical and political diversity of South and North Karnataka.

The comparison with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Rajasthan demonstrates that Indian hero stones should be studied as a family of regional memorial traditions rather than as a single uniform type. The most productive approach is to compare specific historical functions—cattle defence, protection, warfare, hunting, mobility and maritime activity—while retaining regional terminology and context.

A comprehensive research programme should therefore combine epigraphy, sculpture, material analysis, oral history, archaeology and GIS. Such a corpus would make it possible to map not only where hero stones occur, but also what kinds of social conflict, economic resources, ecological conditions and community values

they preserve. In this sense, the hero stone becomes a primary source for reconstructing local history from the ground up.

Notes / Footnotes

1. Karnataka Itihasa Academy, “Memorial Stones,” classification of Karnataka hero stones including Turugol, Penbuyyal, Kote-kalaga, Gadi-kalaga, Uralivu and hunting categories.
2. “Pendirudeyurchu, Penbuyyal” is explained by the Karnataka Itihasa Academy as death while protecting the modesty of women in distress being assaulted by enemies.
3. On the early development and later expansion of hero-stone practice in Karnataka, see S. Settar and Günther-Dietz Sontheimer (eds.), *Memorial Stones: A Study of Their Origin, Significance and Variety*, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, 1982; and related studies of medieval Karnataka hero stones.
4. Karnataka Itihasa Academy, “Go Grahana, Turugol – Defending Cattle.” The source explains cattle as wealth and Turugol memorials as commemorations of those who died defending cattle.
5. See published discussion of early Karnataka hero stones and the Tammatakallu example, c. 5th century CE, in studies of memorial stones of Karnataka.
6. The Srinivagilu hero-stone tradition records Palchhatereyamma’s death while fighting to rescue cattle in a Turugol context; the inscription is dated to the 8th century CE in published documentation.
7. T. Dasarahalli/ Injuratur Turugol hero stones include inscriptions associated with Kosigaramalta Guramareya and Marasinga; published digital documentation gives an approximate 8th–9th century context.
8. Y. Maddanaswamy, “Tiger hunting hero stones: With special reference to Haveri District, Karnataka State,” *International Journal of History*, 5(1), 2023, pp. 24–29. The study lists Turugol, Penbuyyal and other hero-stone categories and documents animal-related memorials.
9. Karnataka Itihasa Academy, “Pendirudeyurchu, Penbuyyal – Death while protecting modesty of women in distress being assaulted by enemies.”
10. The Haveri-focused classification in Maddanaswamy, “Tiger hunting hero stones,” lists Penbuyyal alongside Turugol, Kote-kalaga, Gadi-kalaga, Uralivu and other categories.
11. Deccan Herald, “Karnataka: CESCK team discovers 12th-century Turugolu hero stone of Hoysala period,” 22 May 2026, reporting the discovery of a soapstone Turugolu hero stone at Maniyur, Nagamangala taluk, Mandya district.

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