

Mother Goddesses with Boat Motifs on Stone Sculptures from Goa

Maritime history of Goa dates back to the early centuries of the Christian Era and finds the place in the Ptolemy's *Geography* as Koba. Amphorae sherds and Roman coins are the testimony of Goa's overseas trade relations with the Mediterranean countries (Fr. Costa 2002). Later on, Kadambas in 11th-13th century AD were the great maritime power in the west coast of India and had their port capital at Gopakapattana (Kamat 1990) on the estuaries of the river Zuari (Shirodkar 1990:52-54). An onshore excavation revealed the extension of the Kadamba period road up to the coast where some of the port structures were exposed during low tide (Gaur 1992:57-60).

Representation of the boat motifs in painting, seals, on the hero-stones, rock caves and coins have been amply found in the Indian subcontinent, some dating back to the prehistoric period, to the modern times. Archaeological Museum at Old Goa housed two hero-stones, one of which depicts a naval battle, depicting two boats overlapping and men fighting with bows and arrows. The second one portrays a ship being transported on a wheeled carriage for launching, indicating a greater organization of sea-faring activities (Rao 1988).

The present paper deals with detailed descriptions of boat motifs portrayed on

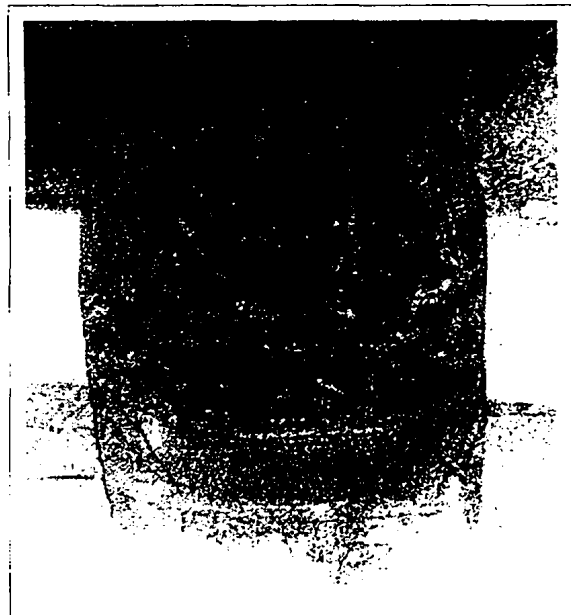


Fig.1. Ashtabhujas sculpture with boat motif from Savarde

various stone panels, which are recently discovered along the river Mhadai, a local name of the major river Madovi and its tributaries. It yielded eight sculptures with boat motifs in Sattari taluka of the North Goa District. The paper also discusses the significance of these boat motifs in reconstructing of the maritime history of Goa.

There are eight sculptures with the boat motifs discovered at various localities. The details of each locations and sculptural panels are provided here.

NAGVE

The site is situated on the bank of a seasonal



tributary of the river Mhadai. There are four sculptures lying in a dilapidated condition in dense forest which is practically unapproachable during the monsoon. Traces of foundation, probably of an ancient temple complex, have been noticed here. The site yielded an important schist stone sculpture of a deity, known as *Naukayana Devi* (Goddess of Boat). The Goddess, standing on the boat, is holding a dagger on her right hand and a bowl on the left hand. She is adorned with a beaded necklace. Stylistically, this sculpture appears to be of a folk tradition popular in that region. The panel is carved in a half-circled panel and partially buried in earth. The height of the panel is 61 cm, width at bottom is 54 cm, and the average thickness is 10 cm.

The boat, probably a flat bottomed one, on which the Goddess is standing, has high and extended prow and stern. The triangular sail is comparatively high, which is present in the aft portion of the boat. At the top of the sail a square panel with the figure of a monkey is depicted. A panel of fish is depicted on the outer surface of the boat. Three oarsmen are noticed in the boat. Each oar consists of a pole, and a round blade at the end.

SAVARDE

The temple of Sateri Kelbai Brahmini Maya is situated on the outskirts of the village Savarde. Twenty four sculptures have been found placed in a shaded area outside the *mandapa* hall of the temple. The panel, depicting a Goddess on a boat, is also

semicircular in shape with a maximum height of 50 cm and width at bottom 37 cm. It is carved out of schist stone. The Goddess, known as *Ashtabhuj*a (eight hands) *Durga*, is sitting on a pedestal with a foot resting on the head of an oarsman. She holds a dagger in her right hand and bowl in left.

The representation of the boat is different from the earlier one. This finely carved boat is comparatively smaller in dimension. Prow and stern is slightly higher than the rest of the boat. Two oars and five people are present in the boat. The boat has regular vertical lines (Fig. 1) and appears to be a flat-



Fig.2. Mahishasuramardini on the boat from Shell-Melawali



bottomed one.

DHAMASHE

Sateri temple is situated within a cashew plantation. There are three sculptures with boat motifs. Two of them are broken and lying outside the temple, while the intact one is placed inside the temple. Sculptures lying outside appear to be made of schist stone. One panel has 48 cm length and 43 cm width while the other one is 40 cm in height and 51 cm in width.

Panel 1

Lower portion has a representation of boat. The boat is made by clinker technique as outer planks are represented in stepped fashion. It has a high prow and stern. Six persons are sitting on a boat. Goddess is with a dagger, bowl and *trisul* (trident) and bearing a *normunda mala* (Necklace of human skulls).

Panel 2

The sculpture is made on black hard stone. It has been carved very smoothly. The highly decorated *Ashtabhuj*a goddess is sitting on a pedestal with the right foot resting on the boat. The goddess holds a dagger, bowl, trident, bow and a human skull. An animal (bull) is depicted on the boat. Two persons with oars are plying the boat. Lizard and lion (Kadamba emblem) are also represented.

SHEL-MELAWALI

A big temple-complex, known as Jalmidev temple, is located in an isolated area of Shel-Melawali. A complete panel of sculpture,



Fig.3. Close-up of the boat portion from Shell-Melawali

made of schist stone, is lying outside the temple-complex below a tree. In this panel the Goddess, in standing posture, carries a dagger, *dand* (pole) and *gada* (mace) in her three hands while the fourth hand feeds an animal. She is flanked by two standing attendants. The total height of the panel is 67 cm and width is 38 cm.

The panel depicts a different type of boat from the earlier ones. It has curved stem and stern, similar to dug-out type. No human figure is shown in the boat. However, there are three oars.

DHADA

The Sateri temple is situated on roadside of Dhada on a high plateau. A few sculptures are housed in a subsidiary shrine of the temple. A huge sculpture, about 1 m in height, is found preserved, which is still being worshipped. The panel depicts *Mahishasuramardini* and a boat (Fig.2 and



Fig.3). The height of the panel is 100 cm and width at the lower end is 69 cm.

This is one of the finest representations of the boat noticed in this area. The flat-bottomed boat has a long and high stem and a stern. The boat is highly decorated, including the upper portions of stem and stern. Four persons with oars are plying the boat.

GULELI

The temple, known as Shantadurga, is situated on the outskirts of the village Guleli. Several sculptures are housed in a subsidiary shrine of the temple. The panel depicting boat is highly damaged. The remaining portion of the sculpture has 39 cm height, and width at lower end is 42 cm. It is also carved on schist stone.

The boat has a very high stem and stern and appears to be a flat bottomed one. Five oarsmen are plying the boat (Fig.4). Below the boat, a panel with floral design has been depicted.

SUM UP

The discovery of these boat-motifs is one of the most important findings in recent times from Goa in respect of the maritime traditions. Presently, the sculptures are either lying in open forest or housed in new temple-complexes. However, examples from Nagve and Guleli suggest that originally sculptures were placed in temples made of laterite dressed stone blocks, which might have been a tradition of the post-Kadamba period. At Savarde, a few architectural members lying

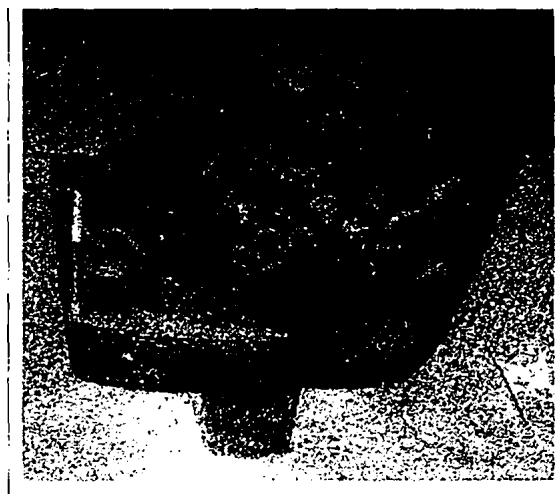


Fig.4. Fragmented sculpture with boat motif from Guleli

in the vicinity suggest that a temple existed during the Kadamba period. Though it is difficult to assign any particular date for these sculptures, yet on the basis of a lion figure in one of the panels (typical Kadamba emblem type), these could be dated to the 12th to 13th century CE, and also post-Kadamba period. However, we need additional data to correlate these figures to date them exactly. It appears that one of the *Saptamatrikas* (Seven mother-Goddess) has the representation of boat motif, which is purely a local and unique tradition in Goa. There is a possibility that the major portion of the population in this particular area may have belonged to the sea-farer community. Interestingly, two villages in the vicinity are called as Bondir and Naveli. Bondir is a corrupt version of Persian word *Bandar*, meaning a port, while the name of the village Naveli is derived from *Nava*, a Sanskrit term for boat. These evidences



indicate that this region has great maritime tradition since at least the 12th century.

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Ancient Byzantine Port Found

Tengineers have uncovered the ruins of an ancient Byzantine port during drilling for a huge underground rail tunnel in Turkey.

The ancient port uncovered last November in the Yenikapi neighbourhood has grown into the largest archaeological dig in Istanbul's history, and the port's extent is only now being revealed.

Archaeologists call it the "Port of

Theodosius", after the emperor of Rome and Byzantium who died in 395 AD. They expect to gain insights into ancient commercial life in the city, once called Constantinople, that was the capital of the eastern Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires.

-AP, *Istanbul*
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