

# Kumarsambhavam Panels of National Museum of Nepal: Study of Tangible and Intangible Features

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**Abstract-** The stone sculptures of Kumarsambhavam, displayed here in the stone work section of the National Museum, Nepal, are known as the important narrative panels of Lord Kumar the son of Mahadeva and Parvati. There are five different sculptures which describes the nativity story of Kumar. Kumarsambhavam is a Sanskrit poetry written by a famous Sanskrit poet Kalidasa in 4th century A.D. It is believed that the narrative panels are based on the version of the story of the poetry as mentioned above. No doubt, the Nepalese artists of ancient period perfectly carved the main notion of such poem as narrated by the renowned poet Kalidasa in his literature. These sculptures are regarded as the master pieces of aesthetic appeal of the artists especially the form of stone work of ancient Nepal. Through the sculptures, the artist has tried to describe the stories like Parvati in penance Arpana, Shiva in the disguised form of young Bramhachari, Shiva Parvati in amour, dancing Shiva Parvati and Shiva Parvati with infant Kumar celebrating his birthday in their beautiful imagination and creation. There are some studies regarding the Kumarsambhavam panels, but there is still a lack of research and publication as its perspectives of tangible and intangible features. Keeping it in mind, this article is prepared to provide the proper solution of the problem.

**Index Terms-** Kumarsambhavam panels, stone sculpture, tangible, intangible, features, dating issue.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the real sense, culture represents a system of tangible and intangible components. Tangible components of culture represents material culture and comprises productive force and physical elements necessary to support human life, such as clothing, tools, food, buildings, paintings, and many other cultural objects and artifacts. Intangible elements represent non-material culture and refer to values, beliefs, attitudes, morality, ethics, spirituality, traditions, and customs (Reisinger, 2009, p. 90). Apparently, culture exists everywhere, at various levels of society, and everyone belongs to at least one, super-national level (western and eastern civilization), at the national level (American, French, Japanese), at the ethnic level (Chinese and Malay of Malaysia), and so on. Culture can also be applied to other social units such as occupational group (lawyers, accountants, physicians etc.), corporations (IBM, Shell, and Disney) and even tourism sectors (restaurants, hotels, airlines) (Kunwar, 2015, p.3). As per the above mentioned components culture can be classified into numerous forms. Whereas, viewed

from material and non- material perspectives it can be classified into tangible and intangible, two different forms.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The article is based on descriptive and analytical research designed. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. For this article the essential primary data and information have been collected by doing frequent surveys of National Museum in *Chhauni*. The secondary data and sources are considered important factor for this study which has been collected through the previous research work as well as published and unpublished literature. Regarding the *Kumarsambhavam* panels, we can find some studies have been carried out by different native scholars and from abroad as well. No doubt, all the studies and publications concerning these panels help to provide the description and artistic appeals of the sculptures. But there is still a lack of specific research as it's the perspectives of tangible and intangible features. Hence, realizing a strong need for the study, an effort has been made to respond afore mentioned research gaps. In this respect, this article entitled *Kumarsambhavam Panels of National Museum of Nepal: Study of Tangible and Intangible Features* is expected to address the need to some extent.

## III. ANALYSIS TO THE PANELS

Different Hindu religious scriptures like *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, *Puran*, *Meghaduta*, *Raghubansa*, *Kumarsambhavam* mentions the description about the *Kumar*, his birth, his parents and cause of his birth in the universe very clearly. In these texts *Shiva*, *Ganga*, *Agni*, *Swaha*, *Kritika* and others are mentioned as the father and mother of *Kumar*. During the epic period *Kartikeya* was venerated as the God of war. According to *Pauranic* literatures, *Tarakasur*, a demon was blessed that he could only kill by five years infant baby and non others which brought massive movement in the heaven. *Kumar* is known to have born from Lord *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* in order to kill the demon *Tarakasur* (*National Museum, 2018, pp.17*).

*Kumarsambhavam* is an image of narrative panel which represents the nativity scene of Lord *Kumar* the son of *Mahadev* and *Parvati*. The subject of these reliefs has been identified by N.R. Banerjee as *Parvati's* Penance as described by *Kalidasa* in *Kumarsambhavam*. In this respect, *Banerjee* mentions that Sati,

daughter of *Daksha*, had been married to Shiva, but was moved to her shocking death at the uncalled for insult to her husband deliberately meted out by her father at a sacrifice to which he, i.e. Shiva, had not been invited. She was reborn thereafter as the daughter of *Himavan* (Himalaya) and *Menaka* as *Parvati*, and was firm in her resolve to have Shiva again as her lord and husband even in her reincarnation. Soon after she came of age she repaired to the hills and began her austere penance to gain the favour and hand of Shiva. The story of her penance has come down to us from the *Brahma Purana*, *Kalika Purana* and the *Varaha Purana* respectively. The quintessence of the event was culled by *Kalidasa*, as early as the fourth century A.D., and rendered into exquisite poetry in his famed *Kumarsambhavam*, dealing with the events leading to the birth of *Kumara* or *Kartikeya* (*Banerjee, 1968, p. 27*).

Thus Pal mentions that, it seems abundantly clear that the sculptures could not have used *Kalidasa's*, the *Kumarsambhavam* as their textual source for these reliefs. A far more likely source is the *Kumarsambhava* section of the *Matsya Purana* or perhaps the lost fourth *Pada* of the *Devi Purana*, which treated the same theme and probably formed the basis for both *Kalidasais* and *Matsya Purana* versions (*Pal, 1974, p.151*). In fact *Kalidasa's* version of the *Kumarsambhavam* has been built dealt with very graphically in five disjointed panels of limestone, which anciently formed the veneer stones of a temple, undoubtedly of Shiva. Stone temples of the *Sikhara* type, commonly prevalent in India, were obviously not unknown in Nepal even in the early days of the *Lichchhavi* rule (*Banerjee, 1968, p.28*).

The narrative panels displayed here in the stone work section of the museum are based on the version of the story mentioned on the Sanskrit poetry *Kumarsambhavam*, composed by a famous Sanskrit poet *Kalidasa*. By analyzing its Mongolian physical structures, hair, dress, garments, ornaments and other sculptural features some scholars have viewed that these panels are not related with the story of *Kumarsambhavam* and other description available in the *Pauranic* literatures (*Chhetri & Rayamajhi, 2060, pp. 105-106*). A very interesting piece of sculptured relief of this trend like *Temptation of Mara* of National Museum comes from *Nagaltol* (fig. 32 and 33). Presumably narrating the legend of the *Kumarshambhavam* the relief actually purports to present a very sweet sensuous domestic scene with love, care and tenderness. The soft sensitivity of the plastic treatment, the vibrant composition, the leader curvaciousness of line, the graceful movement of figures and the fine and subtle display of light and shade make it a most interesting human document. The rhythm of the sweeping curves adds a peculiar charm, which is unmistakably informed by the warmth of the senses (*Ray, 1973, p. 35*).

Nepalese artists perfectly caught the theme as narrated by the renowned poet *Kalidasa* and beautifully depicted their imagination in these panels. These panels were recovered from *Kathesimbhu* and *Naghaltol*, Kathmandu. In Nepal the tradition of engraving *Kumarshambhavam* panels existed from the *Lichchhavi* period. The five panels concerned with the story of *Kumarshambhavam* which are displayed in national museum, are known as the beautiful examples of stone work. The stories like *Parvati* in penance *Arpana*, Shiva in the disguised form of young *Bramhachari*, *Shiva Parvati* in Amour, Dancing *Shiva Parvati*

and *Shiva Parvati* with infant *Kumar* celebration his birthday is depicted in different panels on the basis of the theme as narrated by the renowned poet *Kalidasa*.

The first panel (pl. no.1) discovered from *Naghaltol*, is now displayed in the museum which represents the story of *Parvati* in penance *Arpana*. As per the records maintained by the museum it was collected and registered in 2030/05/02 with the size of 94 cm and 41 cm in length and breadth respectively. This is the longest panel at *Naghaltol* shows a hilly background within a framework of a flower-bearing tree on either side. This is the scene of *Parvati's* penance as depicted by *Kalidasa* (*Banerjee, 1968, p.29*). In this panel, there are three human figures which are depicted in different physical postures and expression. In the middle, there is a beautiful carving of goddess *Parvati* in seating posture as a penance within the cave. *Parvati* has two hands which perform different business. The right is rising toward her head putting the elbow on her thigh presenting *karna mudra* (gesture) whereas; the left one is trying to carry the flower pot given by another female figure. Goddess *Parvati* has been sculptured with big and lengthy hands, legs and fingers which are the main physical features of the figure.

Apart from these, due to the broken condition we couldn't observe the overall facial structure of the figure of *Parvati*. There is a transparent garment on the upper part while the lower part of the body is seemed to have been cover by a decorative drapery. We can observe the beautifully adorn hair dress on the head. These are the major dresses and ornaments which is seemed to be used in the figure of *Parvati*. But regarding the image of female Nepalese art historian, *Joshi* isn't agreed to the figure of goddess *Parvati*. He viewed that the female figure might be the icon of queen or woman possessor (*Joshi, 2032, p. 31*). There are two female figures seated on the right and left side of Goddess *Parvati*. On the right side two handed female figure sits and serves the feet of *Parvati* through a hand, as a maidservant. Unfortunately, remaining one hand is already broken. There is another figure of maidservant on the left which serves the flower pot through her left hand and right seems busy catching the elbow of *Parvati*. There are two trees on both flanks of the cave where we observe beautiful carving of a deer on the right and a wild boar on the left of the bottom and also a bird sitting on a branch of the tree.

The second panel (pl. no. 2) represents the story of Shiva in the disguised form of young *Bramhachari* with its beautiful engraving. Record of the museum tells that this sculpture was collected and registered in 2030/05/01 by measuring the length 53 cm and the breadth 41 cm. This panel was also recovered from *Naghaltol*. There are two human figures and a deer on the middle portion of the panel. Among the figures, *Banerjee* interprets the scene as that where Siva, disguised as a young and attractive *Bramhachari*, comes to test the earnestness of *Parvati's* penance and fidelity (*Banerjee, 1968, p. 30*). But regarding the figure, Pal suggests that the figure might be the image of *Virabhadra* one of the beautiful member of Shiva family (*Pal, 1974, p. 48*).

And the other is *Parvati* on a penance mood within the cave. *Parvati* has already lost her hands and facial parts, so we couldn't observe the gestures of her hands and facial appearance as well. Shiva is standing on the back side of *Parvati* with the flowers on his hands. There is lack of garments on the upper part

while the lower part of the body is seemed to be covered by a decorative drapery. Beautifully adorn hair dress, earrings on the ears, garland with locket on the neck are the major dresses and ornaments of the figure of Lord Shiva.

The third panel (pl. no.3) too recovered from *Naghaltol*, is now displayed in the stone art section of National Museum which represents the story of *Shiva Parvati* in amour which seems very beautiful and realistic in nature. Record of the museum tells that it was collected and registered in 2030/05/03. The size measuring of the sculpture is 50 cm and 43 cm in length and breadth respectively. According to *Banerjee* the third panel shows even in its damaged condition, a couple in ecstatic intimacies and dancing in joy. This is no doubt a picture of divine couple in their ecstasy as they have found out about the portending birth of Kumar, whose forthcoming advent is indicated by the delineation of his mount, the peacock, at the right of the couple (*Banerjee, 1968, p. 31*).

Obviously, there are two human figures that are Shiva and *Parvati*. In this panel two handed *Parvati* is sitting on a kneeling posture and holds flipper on his right and a *Korra* (a weapon of wooden handle made by the rope) on the left hand. There are no garments on the upper part while the lower part of the body is seemed to cover by simple drapery. We can observe the figure of Shiva near *Parvati* with beautifully adorn hair dress, earrings on the ears, garland with locket on the neck and presents *Abhayamudra* from the right hand and putting on the waist to the left.

Likewise, the forth panel (pl.no.4) was also discovered from *Naghaltol*, which is now displayed in stone art section of National Museum, represents the events of dancing moods of Lord *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* with its beautiful engrave. Record of the museum tells that this sculpture was collected and registered in 2030/05/01 by measuring the length 64 cm and the breadth 41 cm. In this panel there are two human figures and a peacock which is presents a beautiful dance within the cave. Shiva is sitting on the right, *Parvati* on the left and a peacock too sits on the left of *Parvati*. Two handed Shiva holds a flower with stick from his one hand and touches the land with the next. *Parvati* also has two hands, among which one is put on her knees and other is completely broken.

Similarly, the fifth or last one (pl.no.5) was also recovered from *Naghaltol*, now is displayed in stone section of the museum which represents the celebration of birthday program of infant *Kumar* with the presence of *Shiva Parvati*. As per the records of the museum it was collected and registered in 2030/05/01 with the size of 68 cm and 42 cm in length and breadth respectively (*National Museum, 2018, p. 18*). Here in this panel there are three human figures and a peacock which look busy in celebrating the birthday party of their son *Kumar* within the cave. In this sculpture Shiva and *Parvati* are standing in left and right sides respectively. In the middle section of the panel there is infant *Kumar* with his mount peacock.

#### IV. MAJOR FEATURES

Whatsoever, these narrative panels are known as the masterpieces of sculpture art of Nepal during the fifth to sixth century A.D. These are considered most remarkable narrative friezes among the other found scattered around the *Kathesimbhu*

area. Unfortunately, due to the absentees of date and inscription, we couldn't provide the absolute date of its creation. At present, these are regarded as the illustrative examples of stone work of the country which reveals the high classed and well trained workmanship of artists. The scenery of all the panels are laid amid the hills, the Himalayas, indicated by characteristic grooves used conventionally as a symbol to denote rock (*Banerjee, 1968, p. 29*). The mongoloid facial structure, colossal and giant physical appearance, curly and unusual hair dress, well developed breast, expression of sexual appeal, elasticity and flexibility of body, dynamic and alive nature, selection of quality stone, expression of secular life style, happiness of life are the common characteristics of the sculptures whereas, the specific features as the tangible and intangible forms are as following:

#### Tangible Features

Tangible culture can be seen in material forms. It can be observed through the senses. This form of culture includes those types of physical elements which are constructed by the men for the fulfillment of their needs. For illustrations dress and ornaments, food and drink, tools and weapons, buildings and utensils, road and means of transportations, different forms of art and architectures and many other material objects can be included in tangible form of culture. As per the above mentioned provision, the physical posture, hand gestures, dresses and ornaments, weapons and tools which can be observed in these panels are included within the tangible features of the sculptures.

#### Intangible Features

Intangible culture cannot be seen in material forms. It can only be observed by inner feeling of human beings. The UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage 2003 defined intangible culture as follows: the intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skill as well as instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated there with that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize it as a part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. UNESCO further classified the intangible cultural heritage in five different domains i.e. (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship (*UNESCO, 2003, pp.6-8*).

Folktales are considered as the intangible heritage, associated with oral traditions and expressions. According to *Banerjee* these sculptures were created on the basis of folktales of birth of *Kumar*, found in the poetry of *Kumarsambhavam* whereas, *Pal* is associated with these sculpture with the folktales of *Virabhadra* found in *Matsya Purana* (*Pal, 1974, pp. 47-48*). Whatsoever, narrative panels of *Kumarsambhavam* have helped to reveal the folk stories mentioned on ancient Hindu literatures. Workmanship is another heritage concerned with the domain of

traditional craftsmanship. The Mongolian facial composition, unique hair style, proportionate limbs, elasticity of body, beautiful garments and ornaments of these panels are considered to be the exotic creation of Nepali artists and high classed skill of craftsmanship. Skill and style is another part of intangible feature of the sculptures. These sculptures reveal some ceremonies especially marriage and birth through their carving which can be associated with the rites and rituals of Hindus. Aesthetic emotion is the feeling of beauty which is an important part of intangible features of the different forms of the arts which can also be found in these panels.

#### V. DATING ISSUE

There is a lack of date and inscription with these illustrative panels, so it is very difficult task to identify the exact date when these were engraved. According to *Kramrisch* the sculptures which were recovered from *Kathesimbhu* are belonged to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (*Kramrisch, 1964, p. 32*). *Banerjee* has suggested all the five, in spite of the differential ravages of time, belong together, forming different scenes of compact dram, and can be dated to about the fifth – sixth centuries A.D. (*Banerjee, 1968, p. 29*). Pal determines that from the Gupta period, at least in the *Gangetic* plains, the Buddhist seems to have made a little use of narrative reliefs in embellishing their shrines. On the other hand, both the *vaishnavas* and the *Saivas* show a new zeal for propagating and popularizing their myths by visual means, probably as a direct result of the redaction of the *Puranas*. In Nepal, the kings of the seventh and eighth centuries, with the exception of *Bhimarjundeva*, reveal a distinct preference for *Saivism*, which must have been further strengthened by the *Lichchhavi* marriage that relates with the royal house of *Kanauj* and *Magadha*. Thus it is quite possible that these reliefs once did grace a *Saiva* temple erected by *Amshuvarma* or one of the later *Lichchhavis*. If a *Lichchhavi*, the monarch most likely to have consecrated such a temple would be the avowed *Saiva* poet king, *Jayadeva II*. Therefore, the date of these sculptures might be 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (*Pal, 1974, p. 151*).

In this issue, *Ray* says that the tradition of sculpturing these types of panels was already existed in the northern provinces of India from the early period which brought influences to the Nepalese school of art and the artists were created this works of art in *Lichchhavi* period (*Ray, 1973, p. 35*). In the view of other several scholars, these sculptures which were recovered from *Kathesimbhu* and *Naghaltol*, Kathmandu are belonged to 6<sup>th</sup> /7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (*National Museum, 2018,p.17*).

From the wall of the demolished *Pati* (rest house) of *Kathe-Swayambhu, Naghaltol*, three different types of stone sculptures were recovered which indicates the spontaneity attitudes of artists. On the basis of artistic appeal, feeling, features, style and skill, especially the female figures remaining similar with the female images which were constructed by the *Amarawati* School of Art during the preliminary phase of Christianity. But these are not as old and ancient as the sculptures of *Amarawati* of India. Only, these sculptures are dated as the illustrative sculptures of eight to ninth century Christian era (*Joshi, 2032, pp. 31-32*).

There is a lack of date and inscription in these sculptures. Therefore, it is very difficult to determine the absolute date of these images when these were sculptured. In archaeology, there are two types of dating methods which are absolute and relative. In this respect, due to absentees of date and inscription, we can go through the relative dating method to determine the date of these works of art. Finding physical features, workmanships, skill and style, quality of stone, lack of holy threads in the male figures, limited use of ornaments and other evidences suggest that these reliefs might have been sculptured during the 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> century Christian era.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

As a whole the sculptures placed in succession here represent, *Parvati* in a tough penance to show her undaunted love for her beloved Lord Shiva, (*Shiva* in the disguise of a young celibate monk), the divine wedding, *Shiva Parvati* in an amorous mood, divine romance and celebrating the birth of their son *Kumar/ Kartikeya*). The facial composition of these sculptures display some Mongolian features and possess charming expression. With the execution of unique hair style, the harmonious balance of body proportion, beautiful garments and ornaments, these panels are considered to be the exotic creation of Nepali artists. Tangible features can be seen in material forms whereas; intangible cannot be seen in material forms. It can only be observed by inner feeling of human beings. Physical posture, hand gestures, dresses and ornaments, weapons and tools which are found in these sculpture art can be included in tangible feature whereas, folktales, craftsmanship, skill and style, rites and rituals, aesthetic emotion which are shown in these panels can be included within intangible features.



**Plat No. 1**



**Plat No 2**



**Plat No. 3**



**Plat No 4.**



**Plat No 5.**

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