
Tracing the Inspiration of Sculptural Narratives of Krishna Lila at Loni Bhapkar: Observations and Analysis

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Abstract: Narrative panels from the epics are a major component of temples from the 8th century AD onwards. These narrative panels have a major role in the religious and philosophical development of the masses over the generations. They also are guided by the Puranic and epic texts as well as they convey the message of these texts in lucid and direct way. The authors have documented the epic panels from the temple of Loni-Bhapkar near Pune and have tried to re-analyse the earlier identifications along with understanding the noble philosophical and spiritual inspirations which they carry.

Keywords: Narrative Panels, Puranic, Epic, Loni-Bhapkar, spiritual Inspirations, Krishna Lila, Sculpture

Introduction

Sculptural narratives in Indian art tradition date back to the beginning of architectural tradition itself. It can be observed and seen in early Buddhist and Jain monuments. In this tradition of narration, the life of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, the incidents from the lives of the Tirthankaras found place on early monuments such as Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Khandagiri and Udayagiri (Huntington 1985). Subsequently, this form of sculptural narration was successfully adopted in the Brahmanical fold. In initial phase of the temple building around 5th century CE in North-Central India and the Northern Deccan, these temples witnessed the depictions of some of the Puranaic as well as epic episodes for e.g. the *gajendra-moksha* panel at Deogarh (Agrawal 1968), Some of the Krishna-Lila as well as Ramayana scenes like Rama-Bharat meeting are noticed at Paunar (Deo and Dhavalikar 1968). The earliest depiction of Krishna-lila is noticed in the context of Hindu rock-cut caves at Dharashiva, near Osmanabad city in Maharashtra (Welankar 2009). Gradually, this mode of artistic expression seemed to have become very popular and integral part of temple monuments of all regional styles in their respective regions.

In Maharashtra, these narratives have appeared on the early Buddhist rock-cut vihara

at Bhaje. This vihara though having different speculations and observations about its dating can be tentatively dated in 2nd century BC (Nagaraju 1981). Later on, this Buddhist tradition of sculptural narrative continued at Pitalkhora (Nagaraju 1981) which can be dated to 1st century BC. It evolved in different stage of perfection at Ajanta in 5th century AD especially observed from the depiction of various *jatakas* in murals (Ghosh 1967). Apart from these, beginning of temple architecture had taken place in the Vakataka domain in eastern part of Maharashtra. From 7th century AD onwards the tradition of epic and Puranic narratives can be observed on architectural edifices of the Rashtrakutas, the Kailas monolith and other caves at Ellora being a fine example (Dhavalikar 2003). Similarly, there are some lesser known sites in Maharashtra having the representations of the epic and Puranaic narration mainly including Shiur (Dist. Hingoli) (Welankar 2009) and Kharosa (Dist. Latur) (Welankar 2009). In commencement of the developed temple architecture these narrative scenes got immense importance and popularity because of its strength of communication with the laity. After 11th century AD to 13th century AD the region was fully encompassed by a number of temples. These temples were patronized by the different dynasties that were fighting with each other to get political supremacy. This period had witnessed the number of ruling clans in which mainly includes the Yadavas, the Shilaharas, the Kalyani Chalukyas and the Hoyasalas. Their political feud can be observed in their highly eulogized inscriptions and copper plate grants. But it seems that it did not affect the contemporary activity of temple construction. Rather, it gave hype and inspiration to mobilize the different art and architectural idioms and styles to other regions and it is clearly evident from the temples of this period.

The Narratives at Loni-Bhapkar

The narrative under the discussion in present paper is on the temple of Mallikarjuna at Loni Bhapkar. This temple site is located 90 km to the south-east of Pune city, in Baramati Taluka (Fig. 1 Map). This temple is of the *Bhumija* style. However, it is having features which were not prevalent in the developed *Bhumija* style. The temple has a *mandapa* with an almost flat roof unlike the *Samvarna* roof of the earlier *Bhumija* temples. It also has four miniature *shikharas* on the four corners of the *mandapa* roof. The *shikhara* of the sanctum is made of brick. The *bhumis* are squarish in shape and the *latas* are not in proportion. In *surasenaka* also there is a stucco image of *ganda-bherunda*. All these point towards a later date for the temple, i.e. around early part of 14th century AD. The exterior of the temple is not ornamented; the mouldings of the *adhithana* do not follow the prescribed forms viz. *khura*, *kumbha*, *kalasha*, *kumud* and *kapotali*. The interior follows the plan of earlier simple *Bhumija* temples. The *mandapa* is enclosed and has three entrances. There is a small *antarala* before entering in the sanctum. On the lintel of the *garbhagriha* there is an image of Saraswati. These narrative scenes of Krishna Lila are displayed on the shaft of the square beams of the ceilings. This ceiling comes under the type of *samatala vitana* (Fig. 2 General View). The narrative panels are very well artistically carved. These panels though noticed before by some scholars (Sane 1997, Dandwate *et al.* 2005, Kulkarni 2009), their observations and identifications

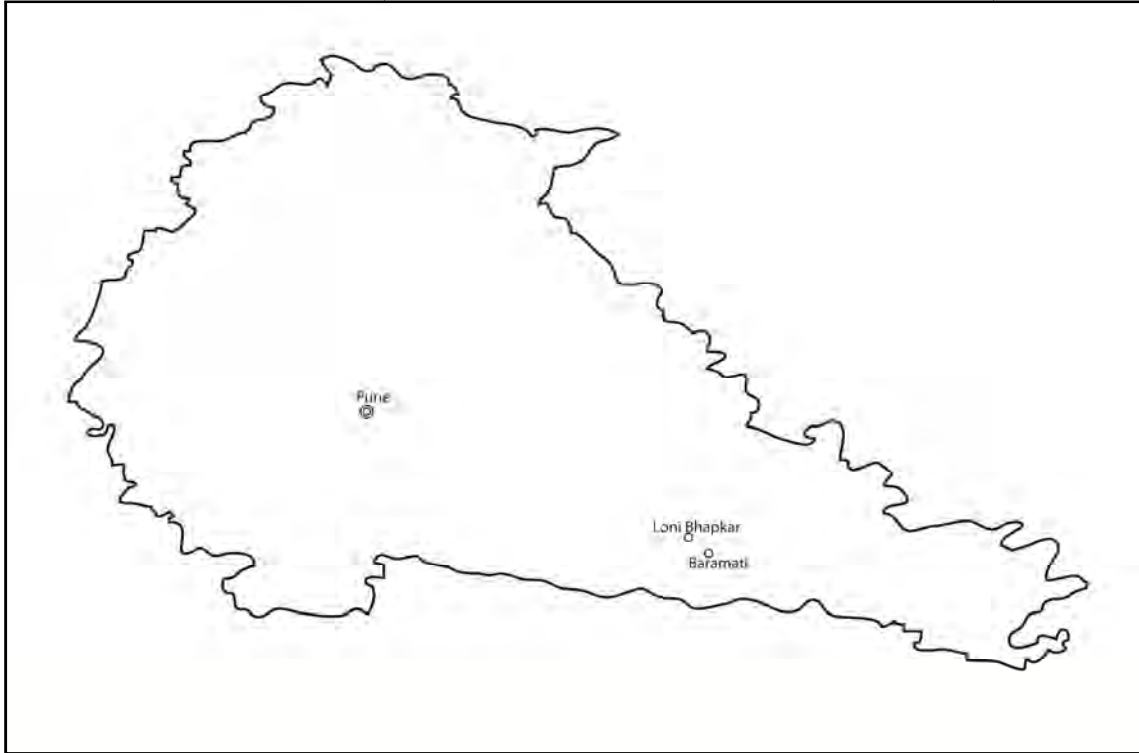


Figure 1: Map showing location of Loni Bhapkar



Figure 2: General view of Mallikarjun Temple

are either incomplete or inaccurate in some cases. The authors of the present paper have therefore revisited and re-examined these panels for their accurate identification and cultural study. The figures are in bold relief. The characters depicted in these narratives display identifiable characteristic features. This makes it easy to differentiate between main or central characters such as Krishna and Balarama and the subsidiary positions viz. the *gopas* or *chauri*-bearers. The narration begins from the north-facing panel and continues in sequence on the west-facing, south-facing and east-facing panels. The scenes depict the important incidents from the childhood of Sri Krishna. These are well described in texts like the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Harivamsha Purana*. The scenes are described below.

Panels Facing North (Fig. 3, Table 1)

This scene depicts the marriage scene of Vasudeva and Devaki. The marriage of Vasudeva and Devaki was the most awaited and rejoiced moment even by the celestial gods. This was since their eighth son, i.e. Krishna was going to kill Kamsa and free people of the earth from his oppression (*Bhagavat X: 1: 26-34, Harivamsha LVI: 13-20*). The depiction also shows this rejoice among the gods and humans equally.



Figure 3: Vasudeva-Devaki marriage scene

Table 1: Vasudeva-Devaki Vivaha Scene

Sl.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Male deity	Dvibhanga posture, left hand holding gada and right in abhaya mudra	Vivaha scene	subsidiary	Kubera?
2	Male deity	Dvibhanga, lotus buds in both hands, cow depicted behind him	Vivaha scene	subsidiary	Surya
3	Female figure	Tribhanga, holding whisk	Vivaha scene	attendant	Chauri-bearer
4	Male deity	Dancing, four handed, clockwise hands are having abhaya mudra, vajra, ankush and beejpuraka, elephant mount shown below	Vivaha scene	subsidiary	Indra
5	Male deity	Dvibhanga, four handed, two lower hands are broken,	Vivaha scene	important	Visnu

		upper two hands hold padma and Gada			
6	Male figure	Tribhanga, holding umbrella	Vivaha scene	attendant	Chatradhari
7	Male deity	Dvibhanga, four handed with one hand in varadamudra holding aksamala and others with sruha, book and kamadalu	Vivaha scene	important	Brahma
8	Male figure	lateral standing, long hair and strap headgear, bell on waist and hands are receiving girl in marriage	Vivaha scene	Central	Vasudeva ?
9	Female figure	lateral standing, matted hair and hands placed on the previos male figure's palms	Vivaha scene	Central	Devaki?
10	Male figure	lateral standing, jatamukuta, bearded and holding kumbha	Vivaha scene	important	Devaka
11	Female figure	lateral standing, one hand raised and other having fruits in it	Vivaha scene	important	Devaki's mother?
12	Female figure	lateral standing, holding whisk	Vivaha scene	attendant	Chauri-bearer
13	Male and Female dieties	seated on pedestal, in lalitasana, male holding beejpuraka, trishula and other hands not seen, female holding mirror in left hand and right hand resting on male dieties shoulder, mount nandi and godha (monitor lizard) seen below	Vivaha scene	important	Gauri-Hara
14	Female figure	lateral standing, holding whisk	Vivaha scene	attendant	Chauri-bearer
15	Female deity	Dvibhanga, four handed, two holding veena, one holding lotus and other holding book	Vivaha scene	important	Saraswati
16	Female figure	Dvibhanga, holding fruits and mala	Vivaha scene	attendant	Sevika
17	Male deity	Dancing Ganesha, holding broken tusk and beejpuraka	Vivaha scene	important	Ganapati

Panels Facing West

On the west-facing beam there are three scenes. Of these two scenes depict two different episodes whereas the third scene is the background of the scene on the next south-facing beam.

West Facing No. 1 (Fig. 4, Table 2)

Cow-herding was the basic occupation of the people in Gokul. Nanda, Krishna’s father was the chief of cowherds of Gokul. It is mentioned in texts that even small children were involved in cow-herding and Krishna is therefore known as Gopala. The scene depicts this incident in a very lively and natural way where Krishna is shown playing his flute and the other *gopas* (cowherds) and cows are bonded in this divine tune.



Figure 4: Cow-herding scene

Table 2: Cow herding Scene of Gokul

SI.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Male figure	Holding and playing a flute	Cowherding scene	subsidiary	Gopa
2	Male figure	Holding and playing a tutari	Cowherding scene	subsidiary	Gopa
3	Animals	Eight Cows reared	Cowherding scene	important	Krishna's cows
4	Male deity	Playing flute and in tribhanga	Cowherding scene	Central	Krishna
5	Male figure	Holding and playing a flute	Cowherding scene	subsidiary	Gopa

West Facing No. 2 (Fig. 5, Table 3)

The next scene is about the *raas-krida* of Krishna and the *Gopis*. *Raas-krida* is an important aspect of *Krishna-Charita*. It deals with the *madhura-bhakti* of the Lord. Cowherd folk were known for their peculiar dance. However, in the *Bhagavata* (X: XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII) it is seen that Krishna and the *Gopis* (cowherd women) are engaged in a divine dance in which the women folk forget their existence and get engulfed by the divine form of the Lord. It is in this way that Lord Krishna is shown as being revered by the *Gopis*.



Figure 5: Raas-Krida scene

Table 3: Raas-Krida Scene

SI.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Female figure	Standing in tribhanga	Raas-Krida	important	Gopi
2	Female figure	Standing in dvibhanga with chauri	Raas-Krida	important	Gopi
3	Male figure	Standing in <i>Dehuda-mudra</i> and playing flute	Raas-Krida	Central	Sri Krishna
4	Male figure	Standing and playing flute but is smaller than Krishna	Raas-Krida	subsidiary	Gopa
5	Female figure	Standing in dvibhanga with chauri	Raas-Krida	important	Gopi
6	Female figure	Standing in tribhanga	Raas-Krida	important	Gopi
7	Male figure	Standing and holding a flute	Raas-Krida	subsidiary	Gopa
8	Male figure	Standing and holding a stick	Raas-Krida	subsidiary	Gopa

West Facing No. 3 (Fig. 6, Table 4)

This scene is the background to the next scene. Children from Vrindavana are shown playing the game of ball, wherein the ball falls in Yamuna and Krishna goes to fetch it. Yamuna is at that time inhabited by a venomous serpent known as Kaliya, which was polluting and making the waters of Yamuna dangerous. Krishna fights with Kaliya and thereby gets Yamuna rid of Kaliya Naga. This incident is known as *Kaliya-mardana* and is described in detail in the *Bhagavata* (X: XVI: 1-67) and *Harivamsha* (LXVI: 10-27).



Figure 6: Prelude to Kaliya-Mardana

Table 4: Playing Scene

SI.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Male figure	In catching pose	Playing scene	subsidiary	Gopa
2	Male figure	In catching pose	Playing scene	subsidiary	Small Gopa
3	Male figure	In catching pose	Playing scene	subsidiary	Gopa
4	Male figure	In catching pose	Playing scene	subsidiary	Gopa
5	Male figure	In catching pose	Playing scene	subsidiary	Small Gopa
6	Male figure	In catching pose	Playing scene	subsidiary	Small Gopa
7	Male deity	In hitting ball pose	Playing scene	Central	Krishna



Figure 7: Kaliya-Mardana scene

Panels Facing South

South Facing No. 1 (Fig. 7) (Table No. 5):

This is the continuation and the climax of the famous scene of Kaliya-Mardana. Krishna destroyed the pride and terror of Kaliya by dancing on his hoods and blessed him in the form of Narayana. Kaliya and his wives prostrated and saluted the Lord seeking his forgiveness. Krishna orders Kaliya and his family to leave Yamuna and go to the sea (*Bhagavata X: XVI: 1-67, Harivamsha LXVII: 1-49*).

Table 5: Kaliya-Mardana Scene

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Serpent-human	Female serpent with folded hands prostrating	KaliyaMardana scene	subsidiary	Kaliyas wife
2	Serpent-human	Male Serpent with folded hands and prostrating	KaliyaMardana scene	important	Kaliya
3	Male deity	Four-handed, seating on the head of Kaliya as if trampling him, holding gada, chakra, shanka and padma and also in forgiving pose	KaliyaMardana scene	Central	Krishna in Narayana form
4	Male deity	Two handed, one hand akimbo and holding shankha and the other hand raised and holding playing ball		Central	Krishna



Figure 8: Chanura-Mushtika killing

South Facing No. 2 (Fig. 8, Table 6)

This scene depicts yet another act of Krishna-Balarama which deals with their fight with Chanura and Mushtika (*Bhagavata* X: XLIV: 1-26, *Harivamsha* LXXXV: 37-55). It has been first identified at this place by Sane (1998). Both Chanura and Mushtika were well known wrestlers in the court of Kamsa. He deployed them to kill Krishna and Balarama when they came to Mathura. Krishna killed Chanura and Balarama killed Mushtika. Krishna is called "...*Kamsa Chanuramardanam...*" due to this.

Table 6: Chanura-Mushtika Vadh Scene

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Wrestler	Seating on one knee and other bent and is held by the next figure (Balarama) by the hair	Chanura-Mushtika vadh	important	Mushtika
2	Male figure	Seating on knee and holding two wrestlers by both hands; one by hair and other by foot	Chanura-Mushtika vadh	Central	Balarama
3	Wrestler	inverted and lifted or held by Krishna	Chanura-Mushtika vadh	important	Chanura
4	Male figure	Standing, holding a flute in right hand whereas holding Chanura by his left hand	Chanura-Mushtika vadh	Central	Sri Krishna

**Figure 9: Vatsasur (calf-demon) killing scene**

South Facing No. 3 (Fig. 9, Table 7)

This scene shows the killing of Calf demon. This demon was a friend of Kamsa and he assumed the bull-form in order to get mixed in the cattle of Gokul. He wanted to attack Krishna. Krishna caught hold on him and a fight began. Krishna finally killed the demon thereby rescuing the cattle of Gokul (*Bhagavata X: XI: 41-44-*, *Harivamsha LXIV: 11-55*).

Table 7: Calf-demon Vadha Scene

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Male deity	Two handed and wearing vanamala	Calf-demon Vadha Scene	Central	Krishna
2	Inverted bull demon	Bull is held inverted and hit by gada of the next figure		Important	Calf-demon
3	Male deity	Two handed and hitting Pralamba with Gada	Calf-demon Vadha Scene	Central	Balarama

South Facing No. 4 (Fig. 10, Table 8): The scene represents the killing of Keshi by Krishna. Keshi was another ferocious demon who was an intimate friend of Kamsa. He used to assume the form of a horse and kill the enemies by trampling them. He attacked Krishna-Balarama in Mathura. Krishna held his hoofs and turned him upside down and killed him (*Bhagavata X: XXXVII: 1-9*, *Harivamsha LXXIX: 35-53*). The scene also depicts a small monkey which probably symbolizes the terrified animals by Keshi as it has been portrayed in the (*Harivamsha LXXIX: 5-14*).

**Figure 10: Keshi Vadha scene**

Table 8: Keshi Vadha Scene

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Horse-demon	Trying to fight with Person in front with two legs up	Keshi-Vadha	Important	Keshi
2	Monkey	Sitting as being terrified by Keshi	Keshi-Vadha	Important	Forest dweller animal
3	Male deity	Holding Chakra and hurling it towards Keshi to kill him	Keshi-Vadha	Central	Krishna

South Facing No. 5 (Fig. 11, Table No. 9)

The killing of Arishtasura by Krishna is the next scene. Arishta, taking the bull form attacked Krishna. It is mentioned in the *Bhagavata* (X: XXXVI: 1-15) as well as (*Harivamsha* LXXVI: 1-25) that Krishna held his horns when Arishta attacked towards Krishna's belly. Krishna's power made the bull-demon helpless and his mouth started foaming. Finally, the demon was killed. This description matches to a considerable extent with the description at Loni Bhapkar.

**Figure 11: Arishtasur killing scene****Table 9: Arishtasura Vadha Scene**

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Bull-demon	Attacking Krishna but blocked by his horns being held	Arishtasura vadha	Important	Arishtasura
2	Female figure	Calling Krishna	Arishtasura vadha	Subsidiary	Gopi/Yashoda ?
3	Male deity	Holding both the horns and pushing Arishta	Krishna	Central	Krishna
4	Male deity	Running towards Arishta	Krishna	Central	Krishna

Panels Facing East

East Facing No. 1 (Fig. 12, Table 10)

The next scene is *Govardhana-Dhari Lila* of Krishna. Krishna asked Nanda and other *gopas* to organize the worship of Govardhana. He said that the sacrifice for Indra is not needed since it was his duty to shower rains on the earth. This was done in order to crush the pride of Indra. Indra was enraged and he showered the heaviest rain through clouds of *Pralaya* time known as *Samvartaka* (*Bhagavata* XXV:2). It seemed that Gokul would be drowned. Then the almighty Lord Krishna lifted the Govardhana Mountain on his palm (*Bhagavata* X: XXV: 19) and sheltered the entire Gokul and the cattle and other animals and saved them from destruction. Indra begged forgiveness and Krishna blessed him. Here, Krishna is shown four-handed thus representing Narayana (*Bhagavata* X: XXIV-XXV, *Harivamsha* LXXIII: 30-66).

Table 10: Govardhan-Dhari Scene

S.No	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Male figure	Holding and playing a flute	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	Subsidiary	Gopa
2	Animal Figure (Cows)	Sitting	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	Important	Krishna's and other cows of Vrajabhumi
3	Male figure	Hands folded and holding a staff	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopa
4	Female figure	Standing laterally and holding a banner probably	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
5	Female figure	Standing and holding a whisk	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
6	Female figure	Standing and holding a tutari	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
7	Female figure	Standing in tribhanga and holding a flute	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
8	Male deity	Standing in Krishna pose and mountain overhead, playing flute	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	Central	SriKrishna
9	Female figure	Standing in tribhanga and holding a flute	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
10	Female figure	Standing and holding a tutari	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
11	Female figure	Standing and holding a whisk	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi
12	Female figure	Standing straight and holding a sugarcane	Govaradhan-Dhari scene	important	Gopi



Figure 12: Govardhana-dhari scene

East Facing No. 2 (Fig. 13, Table 11)

Gopas inform Nanda about Krishna’s divine acts and Nanda tells them about him as heard from Sage Garga. He tells them that Rishi Garga had told him that Krishna is Narayana and his acts are of divine nature (*Bhagavata* X: XXVII: 13-23).

Table 11: Krishna-Lila Description Scene

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Male figure	Standing on one leg with folded hands	Krishna-Lila Description Scene	subsidiary	Gopa
2	Male figure	Only head and bust seen, but one hand is stretched towards the person in front as if telling something	Krishna-Lila Description Scene	subsidiary	Gopa
3	Male figure	Sitting on an asana with pedestal and hand stretched as if telling or commanding	Krishna-Lila Description Scene	Central	Nanda
4	Female figure	Sitting on an asana and adjusting hair by looking in a darpana	Krishna-Lila Description Scene	Important	Yashoda
5	Female figure	Standing behind the earlier figures and holding whisk	Krishna-Lila Description Scene	Subsidiary	Chauri-bearer

East Facing No. 3 (Fig. 14, Table 12)

This last scene is of Churning Butter and probably Yashoda is shown.

Table 12: Churning Butter

S.No.	Image	Description	Part of	Position	Identification
1	Female Figure	Standing, hands broken but probably churning butter and a buttermilk pot is in front	Churning Butter	Central	Yashoda



Figure 13: Gopas and Nanda scene



Figure 14: Yashoda churning butter

Discussion

The panels narrating the life-scenes or *lila* of Krishna at Loni Bhapkar are very peculiar since they depict some incidents which have not been shown or embellished frequently. The panels however, carry narrative scenes only from the childhood of Krishna's life. The narratives adhere to the description of the incidents in the *Bhagavat Purana* and the *Harivamsha Purana*. But the narratives do not follow the sequence of the incidents as they are mentioned in the texts. However, the sculptors have skillfully coordinated with details coming in the texts related to the incidents. This can be examined from almost all panels over here. For instance, in the panel of Keshi *vadha*, the sculptors have shown a small monkey below Keshi and touching Krishna's feet. This depiction is probably unique in Maharashtra. But the close study of *Harivamsha* (*Harivamsha* LXXIX: 5-14) describes the subjugation of all living beings in the forest of Vraja by Keshi and his eventual killing by Krishna. This description is shown in a very small and compact but easier way at Loni Bhapkar. This shows the influence of texts on the sculptors. The depiction of *raas-krida* at the site is also a summary of the textual description. The text *Bhagavata* (X: XXIX: 1-48) tells in detail the urge of *gopis* to serve Krishna and how Krishna tests their devotion by various arguments and also by at times disappearing from them. They run here and there on the banks of Yamuna searching him, acting like Putana, Trinavarta and Shaktasura at times, believing that by this at least the lord will come there again (*Bhagavata* XXX, XXXI). And the Lord satisfied by their devotion comes back and they revere him with great devotion. He asks them to serve their husbands, sons, fathers and mothers back home. They reply that if Krishna is the soul of all beings then why they should get involved in any manifestations which are leading to attachment. They will serve only Krishna in all means (*Bhagavata* XXXII). This entire incident is shown only as Krishna being worshipped and revered by the *gopis* here.

Here, the narrative begins from the marriage scene of Vasudeva and Devaki. Earlier the narrative has been identified as the marriage scene of Krishna and Rukmini (Dandwate *et al.* 2005). However, the narrative has some features which do not suit its previous identification. Firstly, according to the texts, Krishna abducted Rukmini. Therefore, the two persons standing behind the bride in this scene does not adhere to the texts, wherein Rukmini's father was not there to do *kanyadana*. The iconographic features of the groom depicted here do not match with those of Krishna as seen in other sculptures at the same place. Secondly, this incident comes in the later part of Krishna's life whereas at this site mostly the childhood scenes are depicted. Moreover, in the medieval period, the pattern of depicting Krishna's childhood is more common throughout India and the incident of Krishna-Rukmini marriage is almost absent. As identified above by the present authors, this panel also has the depiction of Vishnu along with other deities. It is very clear that Vishnu who himself incarnated in complete form as Krishna cannot be shown attending Krishna's marriage. In the entire Krishna *charita* there is only one instance where Krishna and Vishnu are both shown. It is when Krishna and Arjuna both go to Vaikuntha to fetch the dead children of a

Brahmana from Dwarka (*Bhagavata Purana* X: LXXXIX: 22-66). Thus, the earlier identification is doubtful. The present authors have tried to give an alternative explanation to this depiction by identifying it as Vasudeva-Devaki's marriage. This seems to be more appropriate to link it with the other childhood narratives of Krishna's life. The presence of deities like Indra, Kubera, Surya, Ganapati, Saraswati, Gauri-Hara, Brahma and Vishnu for the marriage clearly shows that the depiction is of prominent personalities. The *Bhagavata Purana* (26-34) tells about the grand wedding of Vasudeva-Devaki and the procession conducted. The gods were happy since from this union was to be born the avatar Krishna and it is also mentioned in the seventeenth century Marathi text '*Harivijaya*' (2:19-27). *Harivamsha* (LVI:13-20) states that Narada comes to Kamsa and informs him that the Gods had a meeting in which they were happy about Vasudeva-Devaki marriage and that Narayana will take birth as their eighth son to destroy Kamsa. Both these descriptions seem to have inspired the depiction at the site. Hence, here one can see the depiction of various Gods as if being a part of the wedding ceremony. Taking all these into consideration the new identification by the present authors holds much ground.

The narrative of the Govardhana scene shows Krishna holding the mountain with his left hand and the right hand is in *abhaya-mudra*, whereas other two hands hold the *venu*. The texts do not mention four-handed Krishna in this story. However, the texts tell us that after the Govardhana scene, Indra comes and bows to Krishna realizing that he is Narayana and also the Gopa-Gopis revered him. Now, this brings to forth the aspect of Narayana as being important for the artists at Loni-Bhapkar. Another depiction here stressing the same fact is the *Kaliya-mardana* scene. But in *Kaliya-mardana* the texts mention that Krishna assumes the form of Narayana and conquers Kaliya. However, the artists have shown him here in both forms. Thus again we can say that the artists are more influenced by the Narayana aspect of Krishna.

One important fact which was noticed by the authors was that the panels do not follow the exact sequence of the stories as they appear in the texts. This is very intriguing when it has been witnessed here that the sculptors have shown a close adherence to the narration in the texts. However, this might have been due to some other facts. When we look at the scenes, viz. Vasudeva-Devaki marriage, *Raas-Krida* and cowherding, killing of various demons or Govardhan scene, they all are specifically showing Krishna in his Narayana form. Probably the narratives here were intended to stress this key aspect about Krishna. Hence, it can be seen that Krishna is shown prominently in each scene for e.g. in *Kaliya-mardana*, in Govardhan (four-handed in both) and also the Vasudeva-Devaki marriage scene. Therefore, the sculptors might have not kept a close adherence to the sequential mode of depiction of the narratives. Thus in fact it can be said that the *bhakti* and its preaching was more important to the patrons of Loni-Bhapkar rather than the sequence of the stories in the Puranas. After observing the overall scenario of sculptural narrative at Loni-Bhapkar and elsewhere in Maharashtra it strongly reflects that in early medieval period it seems that the cult of Krishna was gaining immense popularity.

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