From Purāṇic to Folk: the ‘Kirāṭarjunīyam Ballade’ and Visuals

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Abstract. The present article aims to examine a folk literary motif from the ‘Kirāṭarjunīyam’. Kirāta (hunter-Śiva) and Arjuna once needed to clash with each other during the forest life of the Pāṇḍavas. Arjuna wanted to obtain the coveted pāśupatāstra from Śiva that could only be awarded to a soldier of mettle to wield the missile efficiently. Arjuna undertook hazardous tapas pleased with which Śiva tested Arjuna and finally awarded the astra. This myth appears in the Mahābhārata dated sometime in the fifth century BCE and its folk origin may get back to the immoral past. This story was retold in a classical work by the poet Sanskrit Bhāravi in eighteen cantos. The article examines a key motif relating to the Penance of Arjuna (cf. the Māmallapuram bas relief) from the Kirāṭarjunīyam episode, called paṇcāñītapa and how the Penance of Arjuna is retold in the ballad understudy? Several folk motifs of kuṟavaṉ-kuṟatti of Kuṟṟālakkuṟavañci are illustrated in a later phase of the art in Tamilnadu (e.g., the Thousand-Pillared Hall of the Great Maturai Temple of the Nāyaka period). Kirāṭarjunīyam was a popular motif in sculptural art though the ages.

Keywords: Myth; Folk; Classical; Visuals; Performance; Tamil Redactions.

1. Introduction

Classical literature may have their roots in bardic poems of immemorial origin. Similarly, ithāśic-purāṇic episodes are likely to be based on ballads, e.g., the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki supposed to have been derived from the popular recitals of the sutas-Kuśīlava. Clas-
sical poems in Sanskrit and Tamil (e.g., the several versions of ‘Kōvalan-katai’) came to be recast in folk forms that may be called ballad (sixteenth century and after). Ballad is a simple spirited narrative poem, root-
ed in French ballade meaning “a dancing song”; cf. Deutsch bal’lade, balladry bal’lade-dichtung. The aim of retelling popular mythologies in a language...
couched in folk literary style was intended to enact these dance-dramas in-country theatres, called *terukkāttu* when cinema was unknown. Several hundreds of such manuscripts may be found all over India in several languages, and oral traditions. The present article aims to examine a folk literary motif from the ‘Kirātārjunīyam’. Kirāta (hunter-Sīva) and Arjuna had to clash with each other during the forest life of the Pāṇḍavas. Arjuna wanted to obtain the coveted *pāṣupatāstra* from Śiva that could only be awarded to a soldier of mettle to wield the missile efficiently. Arjuna undertook hazardous *tapas* pleased with which Śiva tested Arjuna (leading to a *malla-yuddha* “dual”) and finally awarded the *astra* ‘missile’. This myth appears in the *Mahābhārata* (chap. 167, *Vana Parva*) dated sometime in the fifth century BCE and its folk origin may get back to the archaic time. This story was retold in a classical work by the poet Sanskrit Bhāravi in eighteen cantos (anterior to 634 CE). The myth was adapted to Tamil literary taste; e.g., Villiputtūrār *Pāratam* (14th century CE) and Kaccilaiyār *Makāpāraturacurukram* (18th century). During the *terukkāttu* saga of Tamil culture, a folk work called *Paṅca-Pāṇṭavar Vaṉavācam* (Forest Life of the Paṇḍava-Pāṇḍavas) was written to meet the need of country theatres. This succinct article examines a key motif relating to the Penance of Arjuna (cf. the Māmallapuram bas relief of the imperial Pallava period) from the *Kirāṭārjunīyam* episode. Called *paṅcagni-tapas*, how the Penance of Arjuna is retold in the ballad under study? Several folk motifs of *kuṟavan-kuṟatti* of *Kuṟāḷakkuṟavañci* are illustrated in a later phase of the art in Tamilnadu (e.g., the Thousand-Pillared Hall of the Great Maturai Temple of the Nāyaka period). *Kirāṭārjunīyam* was a popular motif in sculptural art though the ages.

2. **Kirāta in the Mahābhārata**

John Dowson, early authority (later 19th century) writing on Hindu mythologies enumerates the myth of Kirāta in a few words. Kirātas were “foresters and mountain-eaters living in the mountains east of Hindustan”.7 They are described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as “islanders, who eat raw flesh, live in the waters, and are man-eaters” (men below and tigers above). Their females are described as “gold-colored and pleasant to behold”, identified with “Cirrhadæae” on the Cōḻamaṇṭalam coast by classic writers.8 Kirātin “crowned with a diadem” is a title of Arjuna and his patriarch, Indra. An extract from the *Mahābhārata* would reveal when Yudhiṣṭhira lost his kingdom by gambling, and the Pāṇḍavas were exiled to the forest for thirteen years. Arjuna proceeded to the Himālayas to propitiate the gods and obtain celestials weapons. To obtain the powerful missile, *pāṣupatāstra* Arjuna undertook the *paṅcagni-tapas*, and once needed to fight with Śiva who came in disguise as Kirāta and obtained the coveted missile.8

The Kirātas seems to be an ancient aboriginal tribe famous since the *Mahābhārata* times (anterior to c. 500 BCE). Oral mythologies and ballads of the pre-CE are likely to have influenced in the interpolation of a myth relating to the confrontation between Śiva and Arjuna in the *Mahābhārata*. This folk idiom over centuries of telling and retelling reenters the folk circle when the need arose in the post-16th century Tamil literature, e.g., the *Paṅca-Pāṇṭavar Vaṉavācam*. The formula in this process of literary transaction is:9

The folk through itihasic is the root of the cultivation of classicism.

The *Mahābhārata* seems to have been retold in Tamil during the later Pallava period, e.g., the *Pāratam* of Peruntēvaṉār. This work is not extant but for 830 poems cited in other works10. The Tamil *bhakti* hymns of the Nāyāmār have codified a lot of material on the subject11. The *Pāratam* of Villiputtūrār (14th century CE) and *Makāpāraturacurukram* of Kaccilaiyār (18th century CE) are later works. These works have been cited in articles on the sculptures of *Kirāṭārjunīyam*12, unnoticed

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1. Indira V. Petersen, *Poems to Śiva, The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 3; Lidia Sudyka, “Kirāṭārjunīyam in Early Indian Art”, in *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology & Religions Geography-History-Literature* (Rupa: Calcutta, 1998), 22-23, 158.
2. John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology & Religious Geography-History-Literature* (Rupa: Calcutta, 1998), 158, fn. 421.
3. William Joseph Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2000), 158.
4. John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology & Religious Geography-History-Literature* (Rupa: Calcutta, 1998), 22-23, 158.
5. William Joseph Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2000), 158, fn. 421.
6. Raju Kalidos, “Stone Cars and Rathamanḍantas”, *East and West* 34, no. 1-3 (1984): fig. 5; Michael D. Rabe, *The Great Penance at Māmallapuram: Deciphering a Visual Text* (Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies, 2001), pl. 7; Hans Teve Bakker and Peter C. Bisschop, “The Quest for the Pāṇḍuata Weapon the Gateway of the Mahādeva Temple at Madhyamikā (Nagarjū)”, in *Holy Ground: Where Art and Text Meet*, edited by Hans Teve Bakker, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 251, fig. 38.
7. Vettam Mani, *Puruṭac Encyclopaedia* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 412.
8. Noted in an inscription dated in 634, Bhāravi is linked with the founder of the Eastern Calukya dynasty, Vīṣṇuvardhanī or Śrīnivāsa of the Kāñcī, and also the Gangā Durvinita; “but all this is very doubtful”: Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1971), 344; Indira Viswanath Petersen, *Design and Rhetoric in Sanskrit Court Epic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 23.
9. Arthur A. MacDonnell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1979), 240, date for the great Indian epic is “about the fifth century B.C.” John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), judgment is reserved (see Raju Kalidos Kesava Raju Kalidos, “Tamil Literary Traditions and their Relevance in the study of Indian Arts”, in *Cylinders of Indian History and Art Reflection on the Past, Perspectives for the Future*, eds. Tiziana Lorenzetti and Fabio Scalpi, (Rome: Sapienza University of Rome, 2012), 58.
10. Nainar Subrahmanian, *An Introduction to Tamil Literature* (Chennai: CLS, 1981), 32.
11. This data is earlier than the *Pāratam* of Peruntēvaṉār that is considered to be a contemporary of Nandivarman III (c. 846-69 CE).
12. Cf. the two articles of M. Nagarajan, “Kirāta in the Late Medieval Art of Tamilnādu”, *East and West* 43, no. 1-4 (1993): 295-300; Krishnamoorthi Kandan, “Kirāṭārjunīyam in Early Indian Art”, *Annales dell’Istituto Universitario Oriентale* 51, no. 4 (1991): 436-438.
by scholars working on literary criticism\textsuperscript{14}. The Tēvāram hymns providing vital idioms have not been considered by earlier scholars\textsuperscript{15}.

The rich data from the Tēvāram presents an interesting picture of the ‘Kirātārjunīyam’ mythology\textsuperscript{16}. The Tēvāram-[T] calls Kirāta ‘Vēṭaṉ’ (T 1.42.3, 1.43.3) and maṟavaṉ-[T] calls Kirāta ‘Vēṭaṉ’ (T 1.42.3, 1.43.3) and Tēvāram by earlier scholars\textsuperscript{15}. hymns providing vital idioms have not been considered by scholars working on literary criticism\textsuperscript{14}. The Tēvāram hymns if not considered the Tamil sources seriously\textsuperscript{19}. Raju Kalidos has examined the Tēvāram hymns from the iconographical point of view\textsuperscript{20}. The theme was popular in the visual and dance-drama arts of the subcontinent down to contemporary time (Figs. 9-10). I have illustrated twelve specimens (Figs. 1-12) that include folk motifs\textsuperscript{21}.

\textbf{Table 1. Process of literary transaction. Source: R.K.K. Rajarajan.}

| Sanskrit: | pre-Epic folk Mahābhārata Kirātārjunīya |
|----------|----------------------------------------|
| Tamil:   | Paṉca-Pāñṭavar-vāyavacam                |

\textbf{3. ‘Kirātārjunīyam’ in Paṉca-Pāñṭavar Vaṉavācam}

This ballad gives no clue to its authorship or from where the MS was procured at the time of publication (maybe in the 1950s)\textsuperscript{22}. The tenor of composition would suggest it was meant for terukkūttu performance which in those times was enacted late in the night beginning at Bhāravi’s epic. Therefore, when the ‘Kirātārjunīyam’ myth was retold in Tamil later in the post-16\textsuperscript{th} century the authors of these ballads must have been familiar with the Tēvāram hymns in addition to the pan-Indian epic, the Mahābhārata or its retelling in Tamil, e.g., Viliputtūr-Pāratam and Kaccilaiyār’s Makāpāratacču-rukkam (see Jegannathacharya 1985). Scholars writing on ‘Kirātārjunīyam’ in art and literature have not considered the Tamil sources seriously\textsuperscript{20}. Raju Kalidos has examined the Tēvāram hymns from the iconographical point of view\textsuperscript{20}. The theme was popular in the visual and dance-drama arts of the subcontinent down to contemporary time (Figs. 9-10). I have illustrated twelve specimens (Figs. 1-12) that include folk motifs\textsuperscript{21}.

\textsuperscript{15} S. Kumaran, “Quixotic Motifs in South Indian Pillar Sculptures”, QJMS 106, no. 1 (2015): 44-50.

\textsuperscript{16} See the works of Rabe, The Great Penance at Māmallapuram; Indira V. Peterson, Design and Rhetoric in Sanskrit Court Epic. The Kirāṭārjunīyā of Bhāravi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{18} Both the works Peterson, Poems to Śiva... has the English translator of select hymns from the Tēvāram but has not considered the Tēvāram hymns in the light of Kirāṭārjunīyā of Bhāravi.

\textsuperscript{19} For a brief account of the Kirāṭārjunīyam of Bhāravi see Raju Kalidos, Encyclopaedia of Hindu Iconography: Early Medieval (Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 2006), 2: 40-41.

\textsuperscript{20} Rajakalidoss Parthan, “Varāha’s Tusks Rejuvenation of Mother Earth”, Folio Orientalia 62 (2020): 471-490.

\textsuperscript{21} T. Narayanan Ramachandran, “Kirātārjunīyam in Indian Art”, Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art 18 (1950-1951): 1-110; Mrile Srinivasa Nagaraja Rao, Kirātārjunīyam in Indian Art (Delhi: Akam Kala Prakashan, 1979); Rabe, The Great Penance at Māmallapuram; Peterson, Design and Rhetoric in Sanskrit Court Epic.

\textsuperscript{22} S. Kumaran, “Kirāṭārjunīyam in Art and Literature in Tamil Literature” (Kolkata: Sagnik Books, 2018), 77; Kāraikkālammaiyār, Poems to Śiva... , eds. Sudipa Ray Bandyopadhyay and Swati Mondal Adhikari (Kolkata: Sagnik Books, 2018), 62.
10-11 and lasted till early in the morning. The ‘Kirāṭarjunīyam’ is the last “act” that includes several “scenes”; e.g., Shakespeare’s plays consisting of five acts and five or more scenes. That means the “Forest Life of the Paṅca-Pāṇḍavas” ends with Arjuna taking the paśupatāstra from Śiva. The text on the subject is in about 520 lines, each line consisting of 5-6 words. The chapter number is 12, named ‘Kāla-Pairava-Varaṁ’ (Forest of Kāla-Bhairava). That is to say, the scene is set in the Forest of Kāla-Bhairava.

4. The Myth

The Pāṇḍavas had completed eleven years of exile and finally arrived at the Kālapayiravavaṉam at the beginning of the twelfth year. The ṛṣis (sages) living in the forest meet them to say they were conducting penance for years together but had not yet got the darśana of Śiva. It is added they stood in the fire but could not find out the Lord; paṅcāgni-tapas is ear-marked (tiyiyi-nil-20). The Paṅḍavas were advised to visit the Kailāsa. Hearing these words, Arjuna moved to the Kailāsa and undertook a strenuous penance. The stage for his performance was set as follows placing one above the other (Fig. 1):

A kampam-33 [stambha] measuring seventy feet high - seven full coconuts [ilanir-34] - seven wood-apple fruits [vilā-35] - seven lime fruits [elumiccai-36] - areca-nuts [koṭṭippākku-37] - seven red seed of crab’s eye [kuṇrīmam-38] - seven mustards [kaṭuku-39] - seven needles [sici-40] - seven red-oleander [cevvalari-41]

Arjuna stood up on this stage lifting one leg and conducted the paṅcāgni-tapas (cf. Figs. 9-10); ak-kiṇi-Ṇaṭuvaṁtāṅ-48 (cf. Rajarajan 2012: fig. 36). He was undaunted when the sun was scorching, rain torrential and snowfall heavy. It was an aruntavam and aruntavavam (meticulous penance). Unable to bear the conflagration arising from the tapas, Śiva ordered his attendant to summon the presence of Māya-Viṣṇu, Mayilōṅ-Murukan, Piramaṉ-Brahmā, Piliḷaḷi-Ṣaṅgapaṭi, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Iṭi (God of Thunder) and Intiraṉ-Indra. Listening to the summoning, the gods arrived seated on their respective vehicles: Kariḷya-Māḷ (Black-Viṣṇu) on karuṭan-Garudha, Indra on āgai-Airāvata, Kanṭaṉ-Skanda on mayil-peacock, and Piliḷaḷi-Ṣaṅgapaṭi on peruccāli-.bandicoot. The muppattu-mukkōṭti-ṭēvar (thirty-three crores of gods) was present. Śiva spoke to Viṣṇu telling his solitude is disturbed and wanted to find out who is doing the fire-generating tapas [Tamil tapacu-360]. He was told it was the son of Pāṇḍu soliciting the Lord’s grace. Śiva pretended [nati-491 “act”] to say he could not grant boons to anyone.

Figure 1. Arjuna performing paṅcāgni-tapas. Source: Vijaya-Raghavan Vira-Visodhana.

Śiva invited Vāyu [Kāṭrara-206-“wind king”] and ordered him to ruin the tapas. Viṣṇu, called Māya/ Māyaṟ ran fast and informed of the brooding danger. He was advised to withstand the tempest with vigor. Vāyu could not shake Arjuna and was crest-fallen. Arjuna told Vāyu he wanted the pāśupatāstra-186 from Śiva otherwise he would “break his skull”, “cut the head”, “burn the body” and “embrace death”. Vāyu blessed him success in his endeavor and left giving his best āstra (vāyuvaṅśtra). The firmness of Arjuna was informed to Śiva. Vāyu said he was helpless.

Śiva then invited the God of Thunder, Iṭiyyara-vaṅsa, which was commanded to destroy Arjuna’s tapas. ‘Kōṭaiyipakavāṅ’-213 (God of mid-summer Thunder or “king of thunder”) was also defeated and returned offering the thunderbolt-āstra (Iṭiyyastra-234). An important dimension of the confrontation with “Thunder” was that Arjuna demanded a boon to the effect that the Thun-

23 See Śilpaśāstras, K. S. Subrahmanya ŚaŚtri ed. and transl. Śītattvaniṇdihi. (Tahcavūr: Sarasvati Mahal Library, 2001), 126-131 and Jeyapriya Rajarajan, Terrific Manifestations of Śiva: Virabhadra. (New Delhi: Sharda, 2009), 2-3 list aṣṭāṣṭa sixty-four Bhairavas brought under eight batches of eight (8 x 8 = 64).

24 The reference to the text is denoted by the line number following a word, e.g., Paṅcāvara-1 means the word Paṅcāvar (i.e., Paṅca-Pāṇḍavas) appears in line 1 of the 12th chapter on ‘Kālapayiravavaṉam’. Paṅcāvara also denotes the Pāṇḍyas of Maturu.

25 This is purely a folk ballade description. No illustration of this theme is yet detected in the plastic arts.

26 This invocation is purely a dramatic convention in terrukkūṭa performance. The plays being an invocation to Gaṅapatī and the multitude of gods: muntimunti-Viṇāyakarē-muppattu-mukkōṭti-ṭēvarkalē.

27 In this connection the names of the other four Pāṇḍavas are noted; Tarumar/Dharmarāja, Vīmar-Bhīma, Nakulaṉ-Nakula and Cakāṭēvaṅ-Sahadeva.

28 ‘Iṭiyyara-vaṅsa’ is King of Thunderbolt that denotes Indra. No god for Iṭi is known in Vedic-Sanskrit or Cankam-Tamil tradition. The folk are free to create new gods based on names of natural forces, e.g., miggal-aracaṅ “king of lightening”.

Figure 1. Arjuna performing paṅcāgni-tapas. Source: Vijaya-Raghavan Vira-Visodhana.
The noses of Kūḷis were cut and the poisonous beaks of eagles and wasps broken (ll. 450-451). All the efforts of Śiva to foil the penance of Arjuna proved futile. Arjuna was steadfast to obtain the divine missile from Śiva.

Purāṇam in Letters, Design and Thought (New Delhi: Sharada, 2013), 36) and kuḷavi are folk elements. Arjuna is popularly known as Dhanañjaya in the Pātāleśvaram Nākanātar Temple near Tiruvārūr, to get rid of the effects of thunder storm (Ramachandran, Kirātārjunīyam in Indian Art, 94).

Śiva sent a battalion of white-ants (cellukaḷ/kaṟai-yāṉ-374/389), Varuṇan-398, kaluku-Kūḷi-440 (eagles and ghosts), killing kuruvī-441 (tiny birds), and kuḷavi-442 (wasps). All these pernicious elements were annihilated. The noses of Kūḷis were cut and the poisonous beaks of eagles and wasps broken (ll. 450-451). All the efforts of Śiva to foil the penance of Arjuna proved futile. Arjuna was steadfast to obtain the divine missile from Śiva.

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30 Cellukaḷ, kaluku, Kūḷi (see Kaliṅkattupparāṇi, cf. Raju Kalidos Kesava Rajarajan and Jeyapriya-Rajarajan, Mnākṣi-Sundaresvara: Tiruvilaiyāṭagār Purāṇam, Episode 47; Raju Kalidos Kesava Rajarajan and Jeyapriya-Rajarajan, Mānākṣī-Sundaresvara: Tiruvilaiyāṭagār Purāṇam). All these pernicious elements were
Siva’s tiruviḷaiyāṭal-205 (sacred sport) was not complete. To confuse Arjuna, Siva sought shelter in secret maṇṭapam/manḍapa (pavilions) such as karpūra- (camphor), veṇṟy- (hot-water), vipūti- (sacred ash) and pōṭāla- (underground). Arjuna released effective astras to remove these illusions.

Kirātī is the celestial Gaṅgā33. They were fitted with the dress and ornaments of hunters such as leather-chapels, hides as garments and caps [kullā]34. They were followed by dogs, karunāy (black) and cennāy (brown). Siva negotiated with Arjuna35 to release the boar saying it was his property and that he needed it to feed his starving family. Arjuna talks of ahiṁsā and says it is not ethics to kill living creatures. Ultimately both engage in fisticuffs and roll-on earth36. Pārvati/Pārvatī was viewing this duel with wonder. Since Pārvatī viewed the scene, Arjuna got the name Pārtha “king”37. Pleased with the heroism of Arjuna, Siva offered the coveted pāśupatāstra38.

Finally, Siva decided to have a confrontation with Arjuna. He invited Ēmaṉ-493 (Yama) 31, converted him to remove these illusions.

Arjuna released effective pāṭāḷa-31 (underground). Arjuna released effective pāṭāḷa-31.

Figure 5. Śiva-Arjuna duel, Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebiḍu, Hoysala, 12th Century. Source: R.K.K. Rajarajan.

Figure 6. Śiva and Arjuna fisticuffs, Amṛtaspura Temple, Amṛtēśvara, Hoysala, 12th Century. Source: R.K.K. Rajarajan.
5. Visual Culture of Kirātārjunīyam

The largest relief sculpture of the story is the Arjuna’s tapas at Māmallapuram (Fig. 3). Similarly, the complete story is narrated in the ceiling murals of the natyamandapa, Virabhadra Temple, Lepākṣi (Fig. 11). Nowhere in Indian Art, the Kirātārjunīyam story received such an appreciation as in Lepākṣi. The treatment of Kirātārjunīyam myth in visual culture is as follows:

a. Most commonly the Arjuna and Kirāṭa is depicted in archery combat for the boar,
b. In the Hoysala art, they both are engaged in wrestling (Fig. 6),
c. Arjuna penance, standing with one leg is a common feature,
d. The boar as a common feature, in between the fighters,
e. Śiva as a warrior with bow and arrow is Tripurān-taka in Indian iconography, Kirāṭa is another form depicted with bow and arrow as a hunter,
f. Arjuna receives the Pāśupatāstra from the dwarf,
g. The dwarf as astradeva (see note 24),
h. Śiva gives the Pāśupatāstra to Arjuna.

The variety of Kirātārjunīyam depictions shows that there were regional variations in the myth and iconography. The visuals are regularly attributed to classical figuration and rarely with folk design (cf. Figs. 2, 10-13). Today the utsavaberas are adorned with folk attire, during the festivals (Fig. 10). In the pan-Indian typology, it is Kalyāṇasundaramūrti, while in Tamilnadu it is popularly Mīnākṣi-Sundareśvara Kalyāṇam. The former type at times may become a foreign term to the local populous.

6. Folk elements and ballade substance

An important clue to the date of the Pañca-Pāṇṭavar-vaṉavācam and its integral part ‘Kirātārjuna’s tapas at Māmallapuram (Fig. 3). Similarly, the complete story is narrated in the ceiling murals of the natyamandapa, Virabhadra Temple, Lepākṣi (Fig. 11). Nowhere in Indian Art, the Kirātārjunīyam story received such an appreciation as in Lepākṣi. The treatment of Kirātārjunīyam myth in visual culture is as follows:

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g. The dwarf as astradeva (see note 24),
h. Śiva gives the Pāśupatāstra to Arjuna.

The variety of Kirātārjunīyam depictions shows that there were regional variations in the myth and iconography. The visuals are regularly attributed to classical figuration and rarely with folk design (cf. Figs. 2, 10-13). Today the utsavaberas are adorned with folk attire, during the festivals (Fig. 10). In the pan-Indian typology, it is Kalyāṇasundaramūrti, while in Tamilnadu it is popularly Mīnākṣi-Sundareśvara Kalyāṇam. The former type at times may become a foreign term to the local populous.

An important clue to the date of the Pañca-Pāṇṭavar-vaṉavācam and its integral part ‘Kirātārjuna’s tapas at Māmallapuram (Fig. 3). Similarly, the complete story is narrated in the ceiling murals of the natyamandapa, Virabhadra Temple, Lepākṣi (Fig. 11). Nowhere in Indian Art, the Kirātārjunīyam story received such an appreciation as in Lepākṣi. The treatment of Kirātārjunīyam myth in visual culture is as follows:

a. Most commonly the Arjuna and Kirāṭa is depicted in archery combat for the boar,
b. In the Hoysala art, they both are engaged in wrestling (Fig. 6),
c. Arjuna penance, standing with one leg is a common feature,
d. The boar as a common feature, in between the fighters,
ka (1623-59 CE). This is to suggest the ballad under study may be dated in the 16th-17th century. Śiva taking shelter in various maṇḍapa would further attest the impact of Nāyaka culture. It was only during the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period that so many maṇḍapa were added in macro temples (e.g., Maturai, Śrīraṅgam) to enact festivities and for the accommodation of utsav-āberas (Fig. 11).

Arjuna preaching ahiṃsa to Śiva is an interesting theme. It recalls minding the Bhagavat Gītā where the Kṛṣṇa advocates dharma-yuddha to annihilate terrorism. Arjuna was unwilling to kill his pitāmaha (Bhīsma) and guru (Kṛpācārya and Droṇācārya). Ahiṃsa is not the subject-matter of the Gītā. It advocates war to protect the peace-makers, cf. the UNESCO’s dictum: “Let us fight for Peace”

Ahiṃsa was the breath-spell of Mahātma Gāndhi. This idea seems to have been propagated through the terukkūttus during the movement for independence in the history of Tamilnāḍu. Terukkūttu seems to have been an effective medium for the propagation of the ideals of freedom fighters, e.g., the popularization of the melodies of mahaṅkavi-Bhāratiyār in the movies and dramas down to 1947. In this medley, the Indians were Pāṇḍavas, the British Kauravas and the French Kṛṣṇa (e.g., Pāratiyār seeking shelter in Putuccēṟi).

Śiva is addressed with several folk Tamil names that are listed below. It is to suggest that Tamilization of Sanskrit idioms began with the ballads of the 16th century.

44 Rajarajan and Jeyapriya, Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara…, 1-20.
45 Rajarajan, Legend of Madurai in Arts and Festivities, 1-7.
46 Raju Kalidos Kesava Rajarajan, Art of the Vijayanagara-Nāyakas: Architecture and Iconography (New Delhi: Sharada, 2006), 192-198.
Several words in folk circulation are employed, e.g., cummāṭu -3-4 (load-pad for the head TL III, 1520); tuṟantōr -11 (those that had renounced mundane pleasures); piḷḷai-kuṭṭi -537 (children and small ones) and so on. This seems to be anti to Sanskritization. Long before the advent of the DK movement, the need for Tamilization had begun in the terukkūttu literature.

The question of why Śiva was treated a kirāta is relevant from the sociological point of view. Kirāta was also known as niṣāda (hunters of beasts or fishermen) and pāraśava that were anulomaṣas born to a father of higher varṇa and mother of lower varṇa.48 Śiva’s com-

These names of Śiva deserve a detailed examination vis-à-vis the Śivasahasranāma47; e.g.,

Arakārā-Civaṇ-52 (Hara-Hara Śiva); Aran-17 (Hara); Āti-civaṇ-57 (Ādiśiva); Attiyūruttaparaṇ-80 (Lord who flayed the elephant, Gajasamhūra); Civaṇ-16 (Śiva); Kayilācamalai-25 (Kaillāsparvata); Kayilācanāṭṭar-60 (Kailāsanātha); Karttan-46 (Karta “creator”); Ōm-Namacivāya-53 (Paṇcākṣara); Matilmūṇerittavaṇ-197 (Tripurāntaka); Nimalaṇ-47 (devoid of malas “impurities”); Paran-18 (Para, of the other world); Paramacivan-26 (Paramaśiva “Eternal Śiva”); Umāpati-191 and so on.

47 Raju Kalidos Kesava Rajarajan, “Śivasahasranāma in the Art Historical Context”, in Samāpti-Suprabhātam – Reflections on South Indian Bhakti Tradition in Literature and Art, eds. R.K.K. Rajarajan, Rajukalidoss Parthiban, and Raju Kalidos (New Delhi: Sharada, 2017), 307-320.

48 Vālmiki’s interaction with a niṣāda that hunted a kramhica bird leading to the origin of the Rāmāyaṇa (Cf. Raju Kalidos, “Historical Setting of Caste and Communism in India”, in Studies in Art History of India, eds. Raju Kalidos Kesava Rajarajan and Sethuraman Ganes-ghram (New Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 2010), 74-78.)
The conflict between the high-man (caste Hindu, Arjuna, ksatriya in the present study) and the under-dog (kīrāta, hunter treated lower in social hierarchy) is a perpetual problem in the history of nations. The ill-treatment meted out to a “black” finally resulted in the ousting of an American President in recent time. To set an example and lead humanity toward the righteous path, God Śiva himself appears a low-man in the ‘Kīrātārjuniya’ myth. Taking origin in the Mahābhārata (c. 5th century BCE) the theme continued to receive popular appreciation through the ages down to the 19th century. During India’s movement for independence kīrāta was identified with the unfriended India, and the high-minded British rāj, the pretending monk52 with the tapasvin Arjuna. The subject percolated to the realm of visual art since the Pallava to the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka time, which means societal sympathy was always on the side of the oppressed. In the delineation of artistic idiom, the folk element was dominant to emphasize the common man’s vital role.

Indirectly, the idea of the high-man (brāhmaṇa) and low-man (non-brāhmaṇa) was the main cause behind the formation of political parties in South India, during the later half of the 19th century that came to power toward the end of the 1960s and retains its hold over today. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Those political parties that came to power based on certain ideologies of human fraternity and equality have forgotten their fundamental philosophies, a brāhmaṇa heading the party leading to worse demoralization. The man at the lower rungs of the society is suffering more, confusion is worse confounded. We need another Kīrāta to appear on the stage to salvage the suffering nation. Perhaps, that may be the reason why the ‘Kīrātārjuniya’ myth was popular in Indian literature and visual art, including the theatre, through the ages.

7. Conclusions

The conflict between the high-man (caste Hindu, Arjuna, ksatriya in the present study) and the under-dog (kīrāta, hunter treated lower in social hierarchy) is a perpetual problem in the history of nations. The ill-treatment meted out to a “black” finally resulted in the ousting of an American President in recent time. Man was born free but everywhere he is in chains. To set an example and lead humanity toward the righteous path, God Śiva himself appears a low-man in the ‘Kīrātārjuniya’ myth. Taking origin in the Mahābhārata (c. 5th century BCE) the theme continued to receive popular appreciation through the ages down to the 19th century. During India’s movement for independence kīrāta was identified with the unfriended India, and the high-minded British rāj, the pretending monk52 with the tapasvin Arjuna. The subject percolated to the realm of visual art since the Pallava to the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka time, which means societal sympathy was always on the side of the oppressed. In the delineation of artistic idiom, the folk element was dominant to emphasize the common man’s vital role.

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