

Bhāravi's Kirātārjunīya and Sculptures in the Lokeśvara Temple

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Situated on the banks of Malaprabhā, Paṭṭaḍakal was one of the three capitals of Calukya kings of Bādāmi who were the sovereigns of Karnataka between 6th and 8th centuries. A good number of temples have been built on the site in different styles of Indian architecture, namely, Nāgara, Vesara and Drāviḍa. Paṭṭaḍakal is like a site museum. Totally there are about twelve temples of a considerable size but the Lokeśvara, now known as Virupaksha, surpasses all.

Vikramāditya II was the last but one king of the Calukya dynasty and ruled over the realm between CE 735 and CE 745 approximately. According to the inscriptions engraved on the door jambs of the Lokeśvara Temple, King Vikramāditya II conquered the Pallava kings of Kanchipuram thrice. During this short rule of a decade, his two queens Lokamahādevī and Trailokyamahādevī of Haihaya stock built temples, one each, and installed a *Liṅga* named after their own names. The *Liṅga* installed by Lokamahādevī goes by the name of Lokeśvara while the one by Trailokyamahādevī – Trailokyeśvara. Although both shrines look alike in style, the Lokeśvara is certainly bigger than the Trailokyeśvara. It is worthy of note that both shrines are in south Indian style and we may not be wrong if we say that these two temples are the first perfect examples of Dravidian style of temples.

Each temple is composed of *garbhagrha* (cella), *śukanāsī* (an antechamber) and a *raṅgamaṇḍapa* (the stage hall), hall for cultural activities such as dance, music, etc. during the main rituals of the deity. There are eighteen pillars in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa*, with three entrances, one in each direction, *viz.* east, north and south to facilitate the smooth execution of the rituals. Eighteen pillars are divided into a group of nine on each side leaving a passage in the centre to have an easy access to the sanctum. Each pillar is square in shape and the top portion

of it is decorated with some scenes based on Indian mythologies, while a few others manifest the influence of the Sanskrit classics such as Kālidāsa's *Śākuntala*, his *Kumārasambhava* and Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya*.

There are documents next to nothing with regard to the date and life history of our poets. On the basis of one inscription issued during the times of Calukya King Pulikeśin II, historians have arrived at the conclusion that both Bhāravi and Kālidāsa lived before CE 635. In this year the charter was issued and the composer of the text of the charter Ravikīrti proudly proclaims that his composition is not less charming than those of Kālidāsa's and Bhāravi's. His undoubted declaration comes very much handy to the historians to fix up the last limit of the date of the two poets that is not later than CE 635. On the basis of the iconography in the Bādāmī caves we can go one step ahead to take back the date of Kālidāsa earlier than CE 578.

Bādāmī is famous for its caves excavated in the times of Calukya kings. The first one is dedicated to Śiva, the other two to Viṣṇu and the last one to Jaina monks. Of the four caves, the third cave is of much interest to the historians. The inscription engraved there says that this cave temple is the work of Maṅgaleśa for the good of his brother and the ruling monarch Kīrtivarman I. The inscription is dated CE 573. If the primary importance is given to images of Viṣṇu in this cave, statues of Śiva and other couples adorn the consoles of pillars.

On one of the consoles there is an image of a divine couple, identifiable with Śiva and his consort Pārvatī. She is completely intoxicated and falling by losing her balance. Śiva holds her tenderly in his arms with all his love and affection. There is no *purāṇic* text to help us to identify the story behind this scene. The *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa sheds light on it.¹

Śiva and Pārvatī are married and are on the mount Gandhamādana for their honey-moon. Savitādevī, the forest goddess comes to give them the elixir of *kalpadruma*. With full affection Śiva takes Pārvatī in his arms and makes her drink the elixir. No sooner she drinks it, she becomes drunk and is about to fall down. Śiva takes her gently in his arms, carries and makes her lie down on a crystal bed. This is the gist of the eighth *sarga* of the *Kumārasambhava* by Kālidāsa.

In our opinion, the artist was fully aware of this portion of the *kāvya* and

has caught it in stone without harming the *rasa* and *bhāva* of the original work. Moreover, there are other sequences also from the *Kumārasambhava* depicted on pillars in the same cave. For example, Savitādevī giving the pot of elixir to Śiva who takes it to his consort with full of affection and makes her consume it. On the basis of these small, yet strong, evidences we are of the opinion that the *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa was well known to artists in Karnataka, particularly amongst the residents of the Calukyan capitals before CE 573.

These arguments lead us to say that Kālidāsa lived somewhere before CE 500 to 550. But surprisingly there are no scenes of Kirātārjunīya in any of these grottos. The absence of Kirātārjunīya episodes in these caves make us to believe that probably Bhāravi might have composed the kāvya Kirātārjunīya after CE 573, but before the issuing of Aihole charter in CE 635 by Pulikeśin II. That may be the reason why the Kirātārjunīya scenes appear so prominently in the Lokeśvara and the Trailokyeśvara temples at Paṭṭaḍakal built during the rule of Vikramāditya II (CE 735-745).

As we have said earlier that there are no documents on the life of Bhāravi, but popular stories are abundant. One which is current amongst the Sanskrit scholars and that too of Karnataka is that Bhāravi was a born poet. Consequently he was good for nothing except composing poems. This character of the poet was not pleasing to his father. So the latter thought that marriage might make him aware of his responsibilities. So he found a girl and celebrated the marriage too. But there was no change in Bhāravi's life style. He was happy in his own world of poetry. Father's limits of patience came to an end. Annoyed with his son's attitude he sent him to his in-law's place thinking that his stay there might teach him a lesson. He was not mistaken. But the father-in-law's hard words were like pouring water on a stone. Bhāravi did not move out of his poetical world. At last the father-in-law was so fed up with Bhāravi that he gave him the most undignified job of taking the cattle to the grazing grounds at dawn and lead them back home at dusk.

For Bhāravi it was bliss in disguise. Happily he accepted to fulfil his duties. Early morning he would take cattle to the meadows for grazing and would sit in the nature to compose poems. One day while he was absorbed in his world of imagination suddenly a lady, frightened, came there shouting: "O! Help, O! Help". Bhāravi came out of his world of poetry and saw a lady in

distress. She was pursued by a cow. He chased the animal away and saved the lady's life. So she wished to honour him for his timely action.

But Bhāravi replied very humbly and with humility that he wants to buy an ornament for his wife. So he is in need of more money.

Then the lady questioned him: "What do you do in life?" After a long sigh Bhāravi replied: "I am a worthless fellow, good for nothing except writing poems. But that does not help me to nourish my family. Everyone insults me at home and outside. My father-in-law entrusted me this job of guarding the cows in the prairies from dawn to dusk."

To his surprise the lady was happy to hear that he is a poet. She, being a very cultured rich lady, asked him to write a poem for her. Immediately Bhāravi composed this verse on a leaf :

*sahasā vidhadhīta na kriyāṁ avivekaḥ paramāpadām padam /
vṛṇate hi vimṛśyakāriṇam guṇalubdhāḥ svayameva sampadaḥ //*

"Don't act in haste, indiscretion might lead to catastrophic results. To him who thinks before acting the prosperities go, owing to his good qualities."

She liked the poem immensely and rewarded him above his expectation. She also added that he may go to her with poems whenever he is in need of money. The lady after going back home tied that leaf with a thread and put it on her husband's portrait in the form of a garland.

One fine night, her husband who had been on a long voyage in far off countries for trade, returned home. The night watch at the door was pleased to see his master back home after a long absence. He prostrated at his master's feet. The master asked him about his well being. Then he questioned about the well being of his own wife, the mistress of the house. The night watch answered that she is fine and added that time to time a young and handsome poet comes to her. She enjoys his company.

The husband runs to the bedroom to see his beloved wife. But to his surprise he sees a young man also sleeping in the same bedroom. Without giving any place to a second thought, shrouded by jealousy, he takes out his sword to finish the lives of the two "culprits" in the chamber. But when he raises the sword to strike a blow on them, to his surprise he sees his portrait and the composition of Bhāravi adorning it in the form of a garland. He says to

himself very sarcastically: "this must be the master piece of that poet." He gave a blow to the thread and it fell down on the floor. Again, in rage, he raised the sword but again that leaf with the poem came to his glance as if it is mocking at him. Now in double mind and questions to himself: "why this piece of 'rubbish' comes to my sight as if mocking at me. There must be some meaning there". So he takes the leaf, reads the poem and gives a second thought to his actions: "May be there is some truth in this. To verify it let me wake up my beloved wife. If the man by her side is her paramour she will be caught red handed".

Thinking thus he woke her up. On seeing her husband she did not get disturbed or frightened, but blushed. The noise of the intruder in the room disturbs the deep sleep of the young man and wakes up and asks: "O! Mother, who is this intruder in our room"?

She replies: "Ask your father".

Now the merchant is flabbergasted with this conversation. In anger brandishing his sword he shouts at her to explain this drama.

Calmly, she narrates him a past event: "Remember, eighteen years ago, when you were in a hurry to leave for farther countries beyond oceans for trade, I was fully pregnant and ready to give birth to a child at any time. I was praying you, pleading you to stay for a day or two more, see the flower of our love and then proceed on your journey. But you were so impatient and in a great haste to leave the house to take the sea. You left me in distress in spite of my earnest requests. After your departure, in disappointment and depression I gave birth to a child just after two days. Now you see that child here."

The merchant is not satisfied with this reply. He thinks that it is a cooked up story. Still irked, he asks her: "Who is this poet who comes to see you often and entertains you."

She replies, with a smile on her face: "O! It is a big story. He is one of the unfortunate but talented poets. He can only compose poems. Nobody encourages him in his work. But I like his compositions. The poem that you are holding in your hand is not the only one that he has given to me. There are many more of his works on the table. You can see them there."

Believe it or not they were portions of the *Kirātārjunīya*.

The merchant's eyes were wide opened now, all his doubts cleared like

the mist disappearing after the sunrise. He explains to her that he was about to commit an irreparable error. By the grace of this poem hers and her son's lives are spared. Then he adds also that Bhāravi merits (*upamā kālidāsasya bhāraverartha gauravaṃ daṇḍinaḥ padalālityam māghesanti trayo guṇāḥ*) a real *arthagaurava*, and true to his words the poet received *arthagaurava* beyond his expectation.

Arthagaurava has double meaning; one is to honour a person with kind and cash; a second one is the profoundness of the meaning of words.

Bhāravi is known for *arthagaurava*, profoundness of meaning in his works. Especially, the 15th *sarga* of the *Kirātārjunīya* is known for it. It is full of intricate verses. If one verse is *ekākṣarapāda*, like :

*sa sāsīḥ sāsusūḥ sāso yeyāyeyāyayāyayaḥ /
lalau līlām lalo'lolāḥ śaśīśaśīśuśīḥ śaśaśan //* (15.5)

another one is monosyllabic, like:

na nonanunno nunnono nānā nānānanā nanu..... (15.14)

One *śloka* is in *gomūtrabandha*, another in *pratilomānulomapāda*, etc. Owing to such intricacies of verses and the profoundness of meanings, the scholars have to think twice before proceeding further in the work. That may be the reason why, compared to the works on Kālidāsa, there are very few research papers and books on Bhāravi. Whatever the case may be, the sculptors of Paṭṭadakal have done full justice to the work of Bhāravi while interpreting the story of *Kirātārjunīya* on temple pillars.

Although the base of the story is found in the *Mahābhārata*, the prominence is given to Bhāravi's work on the particular sequences of the *pāśupataśtraprāpti* (Arjuna obtaining the arm *Pāśupata* from Śiva). Why this episode has found such an important place in the temple instead of other sequences, such as 'Arjuna shooting an arrow in the eye of a fish' and other stories, like in Hoysala temples?

The first reason is that the Lakulīśa-Pāśupata Śaivism was just stretching its paths everywhere in Karnataka. For Pāśupata Śaivas, the worship of Śiva as the main deity and his twenty-five *līlās* (sports) or plays, are very important. The donation of the *Pāśupata* weapon to Arjuna is one of the twenty-five sports of Śiva. Secondly, the work of Bhāravi's *magnum opus* the *Kirātārjunīya* came in handy to the artists to freeze poetical pictures on pillars.

The theme of the *kāvya* is that the Pāṇḍava princes have lost all their fortune in dice play with their cousin Duryodhana, the eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra of Kaurava stock. Duryodhana exiled them for thirteen years in forests. One day, Dharmarāja took Arjuna by hand and spoke thus: “On our return to the kingdom after our exile, Duryodhana would not give us our share of the kingdom without warfare. At present, we have no mighty weapons. You are capable of praying to Śiva and obtaining the strongest missile *Pāśupatāstra* from him. For that purpose, you will have to go to Himālaya and undertake severe penance to please Śiva. When he is satisfied with your penance, you will obtain it. So, go to Himālaya, please Śiva and acquire *Pāśupatāstra*.”

Accordingly, Arjuna left for Himālaya and began his penance. His way of life of an ascetic with all his weapons at his hands' reach surprised other sages who were leading normal life. They went to Śiva to disclose this fact and learn about the origin and motive of this new *sanyāsin* installed in their peaceful environment.

Read the reply of Śiva from Bhāravi's *lekhanī* :

Badarītapovanānīvāsanīratamavagāta mānyathā /
Dhāturudayanīnidhane jagatām naramaṁśamādīpuruṣasya gām gataṁ /
Dviṣataḥ parāsisīṣureṣa sakalabhuvanābhitāpinaḥ /
krāntakuliśakaravīryabalānmadupāsanam vihitavānamahattapaḥ // (12.33-34)

“Don't under estimate that *Nara* (man), who is residing in the Badarikāśrama, he is the *aṁśa* of Ādīpuruṣa (Viṣṇu) the creator and the destructor of the world. [33]

Being engaged in severe penance, he worships me to inflict defeat on the enemy army which possesses the energy of Indra, occupies the entire earth.” [34]

God Śiva assured the sages also that he will take care of the new *sanyāsin*'s penance at the right moment. The sages left for their residence.

In the same forest where Arjuna was indulged in his penance, there lived a demon called Mūkāsura. One day, he thought that Arjuna is doing penance to call Śiva to kill him. To take revenge upon this villainy intention of Arjuna, the demon metamorphosed himself into a wild boar and went to attack him (Arjuna) by making a lot of (*ghur-ghur*) grunting sound. Disturbed by this noisy

intruder, Arjuna stretched his bow and shot an arrow. The demon fell dead then and there only. But to his surprise when Arjuna went to take his forest game, he saw another arrow in the body of the same wild boar and a hunter face to face claiming that it is his master's. Arjuna's pride was hurt and in no time he invited the hunter to fight. No sooner the adversary sent his arms, that they were rendered futile by Arjuna. In reality, Śiva has come with a host of his Gaṇa who were clad in hunters' guise to face Arjuna. When they were defeated, they went and complained to Śiva: who is this *sanyāsin*? Is he demon?

Śiva answered :

Nāsuro'yaṁ na vā nāgo dharasamsthō na rākṣasaḥ /

Nā sukho'yaṁ navābhogo dharaṇisthō hi rājasah // (15.12)

“Neither is he demon nor a Nāga, nor a huge devil of mountain size. He is a man on the earth possessing principal *rajoguṇa*, the great heroism of easily vanquishing.”

Skanda, the son of Śiva himself also encourages them to continue to fight. But soon the army, notwithstanding the blows of Arjuna, turns its back. Then Śiva himself occupies the centre of the theatre. Now Arjuna's surprise knows no limits and bounds. Whatever weapon he experiments, it falls ineffective. The dexterity of the hunter stunned Arjuna. Now he stood without weapons face to face the hunter Śiva. Arjuna thought and said to himself that the force of a Kṣatriya lies not in external arms (weapons) but in his own arms. So he invites the hunter for *muṣṭāmuṣṭi* fight. There also, Arjuna's all blows become ineffective on the hunter. The effect of a blow by Śiva on Arjuna should be read in the words of Bhāravi to savour the humour:

Nipatite'dhiśirodharamāyate samamaratniyuge'yugacakṣuṣaḥ /

tricatureṣu padeṣu kirīṭinā lulitadrṣṭi madādiva caskhale // (18.6)

“When the person with odd number eyes gave one knock, then Arjuna went away swinging his head like a drunkard completely drunk.”

Their fight continues but at one point, according to the *Kirātārjunīya*, Arjuna holds the feet of Śiva when the latter jumps high in the sky. The *sarga* ends with this episode when Śiva's feet were caught by Arjuna, God is pleased with the hero's bravery and humility. He blesses him with what he ardently desired for. Then Arjuna too realizes who his opponent is and prostrates.

The sequences from the arrival of the demon Mūkāsura to the fight with the hunter, then with Śiva and obtaining of the *Pāśupata* by Arjuna are caught in the form of images on a pillar in the Lokeśvara temple.

Fig.1 : The register starts with (from left to right) Arjuna in the forest doing the penance. He is standing on one leg with hands raised above his head as described by Bhāravi in his work. Then in the next sequence Arjuna has shot an arrow on the demon Mūkāsura who came in the form of a wild boar and has fallen dead. Below the boar the original form of the demon is shown. The dead boar and the demon

are in the centre of the panel. There are two arrows, one at the level of the neck and the other near the hind part of the same dead boar. On the other side of the



Fig.1

boar's body is a *kirāta* who is also in the pose of shooting an arrow. But in the scene on the pillar, a personage clad like a hunter must be one of the Śivagaṇa dressed as a *kirāta*. To show that he is a hunter, a dog is standing in between him and the lady. She is with a child on her waist.

Fig.2 : From left to right – In the first sequence, a hunter is fighting with Arjuna. This personage clad as a hunter may be identified with Skanda because his accoutrement is different from the previous panel. In the centre is Śiva and Arjuna fighting fist to fist (*muṣṭāmuṣṭi*). The one who is to the right is Śiva and according to Bhāravi, “Arjuna comes to face Śaśīśaśīśuḥ (the son of Śaśīśa), that



Fig.2

is, Skanda, because the lord of the moon (Śaśi) is Śiva. (*Sarga* 15, verse 5, 4th *pāda*). The bas-relief starts with the fight between Skanda (to the right) and Arjuna (to the left).

Hunter/fighter is with a pony tail which is in conformity with the description given by Bhāravi.² And Arjuna has a matted hair fashioned like a chignon. In the centre of the panel is the fist to fist fight between Śiva and Arjuna. Śiva's matted hair has the appearance of a tiara whereas Arjuna's is like that of an ascetic's chignon. Their blows, as Bhāravi says, were producing such deafening noise that it was like rocks cracking in caves. Instead of the translation, the force of blows is felt more in the words of Bhāravi:

*harapṛthāsutayor dhvanir utpatannamṛdusaṁvalitāṅgulipāṇijah /
sphuṭadanalpaśilāravadāruṇaḥ pratinanāda darīṣu darībṛtaḥ //* (18.2)

To express this abstract feeling in sculpture the ingenious artist has created the character of Pārvatī. [Presence of Pārvatī with Śiva during this episode finds mention in the *Mahābhārata* also. (Vana., 39.4) - Editors] She is standing behind Śiva and closes her ear by her hand. Owing to the lack of space the artist has shown only one hand on an ear.

Image of Śiva and Arjuna in the centre of the panel also suggests the union of *jīvātmā* with *paramātmā*.

With this Arjuna begins to think (Bhāravi gives a long description of it, but it is not possible to have it interpreted in sculpture). He realizes that his adversary is none but Śiva. And Śiva, being pleased with Arjuna's confidence in the might of his own arms, gives up the hunter's guise, appears to bless Arjuna with *Pāśupatāstra*, the deeply desired arm.

According to the iconographic convention, always the donor is to the right and the donee to the left. We can identify easily Śiva sitting to the extreme right of the scene with his consort behind him, Arjuna sitting face to face and receiving the weapon.

Another noteworthy point is that although there are fighting scenes between Arjuna and a hunter, Arjuna and Śiva, the body movements of these characters are so graceful that it looks as if they are dancing, enacting the drama in dance. In fact, Bhāravi writes at one point that Arjuna takes out the arrows from the quiver gently and shoots them smoothly as if provoking animals. Smoothness and gentleness of their actions are well translated in these images. That is why they look like dance movements. Like today, it is probable that the succession of actions must have been enacted in those days too. Another point to substantiate our argument is that encirclement of dog's tail. It is coiled like a

snake or a rope. It is possible only on the stage and not in reality. That enactment is reproduced in the form of sculptures on these pillars. There are inscriptions in the Lokeśvara temple mentioning the names of actors/dancers like Acalan and others. No wonder if these scenes were enacted on the stage and those scenes have found place on pillars of Lokeśvara.

The presence of these images is the proof of the popularity of the *Kirātārjunīya*, the work of Bhāravi and the date of the realisation of the *kāvya* must be somewhere in between CE 573 and 634. In Aihole, in the Cikkigudi also there is a small representation of the *Kirātārjunīya* but the temple belongs to the 9th century. In our opinion, the Temple of Lokeśvara and the Trailokyeśvara are the first to interpret and bring to light the *Kirātārjunīya* scenes, one of the sports of Śiva. In later temples the carvings on the theme of *Kirātārjunīya* are not so refined and detailed as in these two temples of Paṭṭaḍakal. The representations of these images help us to say that the *Kirātārjunīya* of Bhāravi had high esteem.

References

1. We have already published an article on this topic in the *Sudharmā*, 39^{tama} vārṣika viśeṣasañcikā in 2009.
2. *Vadanena puṣpatalatāntaniyamitavilambimaulinā /*
Bibhradarunaṇayanena rucam śikhipīcchalāñchitakapolabhittinā // 41 //
He (Śiva) tied up his hanging hair with the flowering creepers, decorated cheeks with peacock plumes, face dazzling with reddish eyes (assumed the role of a general of the hunter's army) [41]
Sarga 12, verses 41 and in the 43rd śloka Bhāravi says that his *gaṇapatibhiḥ* (the chiefs of Gaṇa) also assumed the forms of *kirāta* (hunters) by holding different weapons, such as trident, javeline, battle axe etc.
Kirātārjunīya by Bhāravi, trans. by Dr. P. S. Ramanujam, M. P. Birla Pratishthana, 2000, Bangaluru Centre, Bangaluru.