

#### 4. KIRATA

*By Irrattakulangara Rama Varier (1801-1845)*

DURING the period that they were in exile in the forest, the Pandava brothers and Draupadi suffered many hardships. Early in their stay there Vyasa, the great sage, came to visit them and advised Arjuna to go to the Himalayas and perform penance to Siva in order to secure from him the divine arrow *pasupata* which would be necessary to help him in the forthcoming war with the Kauravas.

Siva and his consort Parvati disguised themselves as tribal hunters in order to test Arjuna's prowess and faith. He was defeated by them, but nevertheless continued to worship Siva who, turning into his true form, blessed Arjuna and presented him with the divine arrow.

##### Characters

Arjuna, third of the Pandavas	<i>Paccha</i>
KIRATA, a hunter (Siva in disguise)	<i>Karutta Tadi</i> (Black Beard)
Bhutas (imps)	<i>Special</i>
Kiratastree (Parvati in disguise)	<i>Special</i>
Siva, a god	<i>Pazhuppu</i>
Parvati, wife of Siva	<i>Minukku</i>

*Note:* Kirata and Kiratastree are, in Kathakali parlance, also known as Kattalan and Kattalathi.

*Scene 1. Arjuna.* Arjuna sets out towards the Himalayas to do penance to propitiate god Siva. He sees Mount Kailasa, the home of Siva, and is enraptured by it. He is soon engrossed in deep meditation.

*Scene 2. Kirata, Kiratastree and Bhutas.* Siva is pleased with Arjuna's *tapas* (meditation combined with self-mortification carried out with the object of propitiating a god in order to obtain a boon from him) but he wants to test him before granting him his wish. Having disguised himself as a hunter (Kirata) he sets out with his wife Parvati, disguised as a huntress, accompanied by a few impish *bhutas*. After they have admired each other's disguise, the hunter tells the huntress of his plan to fight Arjuna in order to test his skill and his valour. The huntress objects, and wants Arjuna to be granted his wish without delay. The hunter then tells her that he has a purpose in his plan to fight Arjuna—to subdue his pride. She agrees to the idea, and they proceed to the place where Arjuna is doing *tapas*.

*Scene 3. Arjuna, Kirata and Kiratastree.* Arjuna is engrossed in penance. A boar, which is in fact a demon deputed by Duryodhana (the eldest of the Kauravas) to kill Arjuna, attacks him, but at that moment the hunter and huntress appear on the scene. Arjuna sees the boar coming and shoots an arrow at it: the hunter also shoots an arrow at the same time. The boar is killed, but the hunter is provided with an opportunity to pick a quarrel with Arjuna for shooting the animal he was after.

The wordy duel soon leads to a fight with bows and arrows. The huntress tries to intervene and stop the fight, but when Arjuna does not heed her words she curses him that his arrows will be turned into flowers. Despite this, Arjuna still persists, so the huntress curses him that there be no more arrows in his quiver. Seeing that his quiver is empty, Arjuna tries to beat up the hunter with his bow, but the goddess Ganga (who resides in Siva's hair) snatches the bow away from him. Frustrated, Arjuna tries to fight the hunter with his bare fists, but the hunter easily overcomes him and he is thrown to the ground.

The hunter and his wife, pleased with Arjuna's performance, move away. Arjuna slowly recovers from the blows and begins to worship Siva again, offering whatever flowers and leaves he can find. Suddenly he discovers that the hunter's hair was decorated with the very flowers with which he was then worshipping Siva, and he realises with whom he has been fighting. He asks the hunter to pardon him.

The hunter and huntress disappear, and in their place stand Siva and Parvati. Siva presents Arjuna with the divine arrow *pasupata*. Parvati hands to Arjuna the bow which goddess Ganga had taken away in the fight. They both bless him.

*Note:* *Pasupata* was not a material arrow. It came under the class of *mantrastras* where the user who had acquired it by *tapas* simply used his will-power and meditated on the lord of the weapon with a *mantra* (incantation) whereupon the enemy was destroyed. In the Mahabharata battles many such divine weapons were used—*Narayanastra*, *Brahmastra*, *Varunastra*, *Nagastra*, etc. If the person against whom the weapon was used was capable, he might use a counteracting weapon, but no weapon on earth could withstand *Brahmastra*.