

Om Sri Ramaya Namah! Om Sri Ramaya Namah! Om Sri Ramaya Namah!

A comparative study of some of the most prominent Ramayanams

Kamba Ramayanam

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Let me at the very beginning apologize to my readers that I did not have the opportunity yet to read Kamba Ramayanam originally in Tamil. But I considered myself blessed with the opportunity to read “Kamba Ramayana A Study” by V.V.S. Aiyar. There is no doubt that this is one of the most authentic interpretations about Kamba Ramayana. The authenticity of this book is such that many times I felt that I never had the need to read Kamba Ramayanam in original and then so many times I felt that Oh My God, had I got the opportunity to read the original along with this interpretation? Also, I depend to some extent on a Malayalam prose translation of Kamba Ramayanam by Smt. Jayashree Sivakumar.

The main story, of course, remains the same. But in the hands of Kamba each character of Ramayana stands out so tall such that we get an impression that each of them is a far superior character compared with the same character of other Ramayanams. This point would further be explained and established. Kamban has actually taken the story immortalized by Valmiki and created an entirely different grander poem.

Some of the observations of Kamba are very unique and very interesting and highly thought provoking. Let me just give one example that Kamba observed that Bharatha comes into such prominence because of the wicked activities of his mother, Kaikeyi. What a great thought-provoking statement!

Compared to other Ramayanams like Thulasi Ramayanam, Adhyatma Ramayanam Moolam, Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu, etc., Kamba Ramayanam is the oldest. But the poetic beauty of this Kamba Ramayanam is evergreen and ever fresh. At this point it is noteworthy and praiseworthy to describe the episode of Hiranyakasipu, one of the few additions Kamba has contributed to the story of Ramayana. The scholastic skill and supreme poetic wit and imagination are clearly evidenced by incorporating this episode in the most appropriate place. As I cannot afford to corrupt this episode in any way by my words let me quote the relevant portions from “Kamba Ramayanam A Study” by V.V.S. Aiyar:

“...For what place would be more natural and more fitting for this episode than the speech of Vibhishana in the war-council in which he attempts to advise his brother to make peace with Rama? Here was an Asura endowed with far greater strength and enjoying power than Ravana, and he was destroyed by an Avatar of Narayana who was now incarnated again as Rama to destroy the evil ones of this generation. Should not Ravana learn a lesson from the fate of Hiranya?”

“... We must say that his description of Hiranya’s physical proportions is marred by hyperbolic details of the worst type which defeat their own purpose; for they do not succeed in making an adequate and satisfying aesthetic impression on the mind. He says:”

“The seven oceans of the universe, whose depths it is impossible to sound even with the joined trunks of two of the great mammoths that support the universe, would only wet the feet of the great Asura when he walked in them. Where could he bathe? The waters of the rivers were too little for his colossal body: the waters of the seas were too bitter: the waters from the clouds he would not touch, for they were warm: he would therefore pierce the vault of the sky and bathe in the showers descending from the waters of the universe beyond. The hills of the rising and setting sun were jewels in his ear-rings. He tried the Mandhara mountain with which the Devas and Asuras had churned the Ocean of Milk to see if he could use it for a walking staff but finding it too light for him he threw it away.”

“He had combined the force of all the five elements of creation. He would rule the sun and the moon. He would depute in his whim the god of one element to perform the functions of another Drunk with power and pride, sometimes he would take the reins out of the hands of Vayu and rule the winds and storms; sometimes he would usurp the function of Varuna and direct the movements of the oceans; at other times he would do the work of Indra or Agni, Yama or Nirurthi, and even that of Ishana. At every tread on his, the heads would be crushed by thousand-headed Adisesha – the primeval Cobra that bears the earth on his shoulders. When he walked, his crown would graze the vault of the sky. The very element would dissolve and fly away when he strode along.”

“He ruled not this universe only that we see about us. The universe beyond also acknowledged his sovereignty and only his. Devas and Yogis, Rishis and even the Supreme Three – all were his vassals and would live only by passing and blessing his name. By intense tapas he had obtained this awful power, and the blessing that nothing that could even be conceived by the mind should be able to kill him. He has placed his throne on the Meru Mountain itself, and from that center he was ruling tyrannically over the universes without a second or a rival.”

“Many ages passed thus and at length a child was born to him whom he named Prahlada. While Prahlada was still in the womb, Narada the great Bhaktha, had taught his mother the truth that Narayana was the one supreme God and that love to Him was the only true salvation here and hereafter. The conscious child had stored the teaching in his heart, and from the moment of his birth he became a Bhaktha – a devotee of the Supreme one. He grew in love and devotion, and in his fifth year he was sent by his father to study under the royal guru.”

I think it is worth quoting the whole episode of Hiranyakasipu and therefore let me continue:

“The guru began teaching by asking the boy to pronounce the words ‘Worship to Hiranya’, for the tyrant in the pride of his heart had ordained that these words should be substituted for the words ‘Worship to the One Supreme God Narayana’, with which words alone all studies had always been begun before his time. But the child of wisdom closed his eyes, and with tears of joy flowing down his cheeks

cried out, 'Aum Namō Narayanaya' – Worship to the Supreme God Narayana. How could the cringing master tolerate such sedition? These words fell like thunder upon his ears, and he cried out:

'Thou hast brought ruin on me, O sinful wretch!'

Is not the thought of self and the preservation of their own position safe from the wrath of the tyrant the primary thought and concern of the slave-minded teachers of all ages and climes? Our guru then continued.

'And thou hast dug a grave for thy own self.

And where is it didst learn'th despise words

Tha' e'en the gods repeat which with loyalty

And love, and to pronounce those cursed words

That thou didst utter even now?'

Prahlada replied.

'I uttered but the name of Him who is

The root wherefrom all Vedas spring. Wherein,

O master, have I sinned? The nama pronounced

Hath brought salvation to myself and thee

And even to my father and king.'

The master trembled and conjured the boy to begin with blessing his father's name. He said,

'Thy father, boy' is the sovereign liege of all:

And ev'n th' ancient one who made the gods

His homage pays to him. Thou must begin

*Therefore thy studies with holy name
Of Hiranya on thy lips. Art wiser than
Thy master? Ruin me to therefore, my boy,
By uttering one again the name that now
Thou utterdest!'*

The child could not tolerate this blasphemy, and proclaimed thus his faith:

*'I'll honour nought, my master, but the name
Of that Lord Supreme, He has illumed my mind
And taken possession of my heart: when He
The Infinite One thus dwells in me, can aught
Be hid from me? If such there be, I'll learn
From thee, so it is not opposed to truth
Who else is worthy worship but the One
Whose praises fill the Brahman's Ved, whose name
The knowing one and sages, even gods
Repeat t'escape the bonds of birth? I stand
Upon the rock to which the Vedas lead;
And jnan and sacrifice. What more is there
For me to know or learn? That bliss is mine
That's earned by those who meditate in caves
And forests, solitary, careless how
They eat or drink or dress. For what shall I*

*Endeavour more? Behold the men who serve
With loving heart the servants e'en of Him
Who measured with His feet the universe.
Though they should learning lack their lumined soul
Can pierce the secrets of the Ved: from
Their honeyed lips would flow ambrosial verse!
Now he has filled my heart, who is my Lord
And also thine, and Lord of all the worlds
And even Brahma's self: all knowledge sir,
Is therefore come to me: and for thee too,
O master mine, this is the highest good:
I pray thee, bow to Him!'*

The Brahman master trembled with the thought that Hiranya would attribute all these 'seditious' doctrines to his own teaching and put him to death. So he rushed to the Asura's presence like a scared man and thus addressed him with many a bow:

*'Thy humble servant prays to thee, my lord,
Give ear; thy son has uttered words that I
Cannot pronounce, e'en conceive in thought
Without endangering all my hope of earth
And heaven! And he has refused to read the Ved,
Saying he knows all that there is to know.'*

Hiranya could not understand what the teacher meant, and asked him to repeat the words uttered by his son. But the terrified guru only mystified him still further by saying,

*'If I those words before thee utter, lord,
Words mortal to the ear to hear as venom
Of cobras to the blood, my sinful tongue
Would sure to ashes burn, and the pit of Hell
Would open wide its mouth for me.'*

Hiranya then ordered his son to be brought before him, and when Prahlada stood before him saluting, he embraced him with tenderness and love and asked him what he had said to provoke the teacher to anger, Prahlada told him,

*'I only took the holy name of Him
Of Whom the Vedas witness bore when first
Was heard their sacred sound: and thereunto
I only added this: whoso shall think
Or speak or hear of Him, shall cross the sea
Of misery, and higher good than this
There's none in all the world.'*

The words used by the poet to convey the idea contained in the first three verses of Prahlada's reply could also be interpreted to mean,

*'I only took the holy name of Him
Who stands without a rival, with which name
The great begin the chanting of Ved:'*

And so Hiranya thought that there was nothing in his son's words for the Brahman to disapprove of. For it was with his name that according to his ordinance, the chanting of the Vedas was being begun in those days. Yet, thinking that it was better to have it made clear, he asked Prahlada to pronounce the name itself. Then to his great and rising indignation he heard these bold words which his saintly son spoke:

'Wouldst hear the words that fill all worldly wants?

Wouldst hear the words that open the gates of heaven?

Wouldst hear the words that give to sacrifice

Its virtue and the power to grant our wish?

List then, they'er Aum Namō Narayanaya –

I bow my head to Narayana, the Lord

Supreme.

Whe'r Brahma, Shiva, or man whoso forgets

This mantra has forgot his soul, 'Tis hard

To prove by signs: for they alone can know

Whose eyes see whole, whose heart is free from likes

And dislikes both. This mantra is the boat

That saves us from the eddying whirls of life,

And death, and endless pursuing deeds. It is

A jewel dear to all – the cream of all

There is to know in Ved. And so it is

*These words I uttered loud, my father, that
Thou may'st be saved, and I, and all the world
With us.'*

The amazed Asura could hold his patience no longer and thus burst out:

*'This sceptre stern, my boy, beneath whose sway
All worlds have lain in dread for ages past,
Would straight have burned the tongue that spoke and mind
That dared conceive these words seditious! Now speak:
Declare, and quick, which rebel uttered them
Or taught the same to thee? The sages, seers,
And gods that dwell in all the moving worlds
Do worship nought but those my feet – their vows
And prayers are e'er addressed lone to me,
Their lord. Who told thee he is God, who oft
Has come to try his strength with me, and who,
As oft defeated, has in panic fled,
Thanks to old Garuda's powerful wings, and now
Lies fast asleep somewhere I' the Sea of Milk?
Innumerable as the ocean sands
Are those our fathers who, before I came
To sovereign power, had been destroyed by him:
Can good e'er come to rats, perverse, if they*

Shall sing the praises of the hooded snake?

My brother, who could, if he did please, devour

The fourteen worlds, this Vishnu gored to death,

Coming on him in shape a boar. Did I

Beget thee boy, to sing with joy the name

Of him the enemy of our race, whose hands

Are stained with our own blood? Seest thou not me

With power omnipotent endowed? Whence didst

Thou learn, thou luckless wretch, that sight denies

And every other sense, that there is one

Above us who creates, sustains, destroys?

There is no higher truth than this as Ved

Itself will witness, that our actions yield

Their proper fruit – the good deeds good, and ill

Their ill appropriate. Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva,

Who rose by their austerities too their

Dominions in their proper worlds, have now

By great efflux of time their places lost:

And by my proper tapas I am raised

To sovereign power unrivalled over all

The worlds: success despaired now none does wish

T' endeavour after it, and all have sought

Refuge from ill beneath my awesome throne!

I've banished from my realms all sacrifice,

And tapas, and all hankering after knowledge

Forbidden. Him whom these do falsely praise

Thou dost declare almighty. Who know not

Security themselves, can ev'r they save

Others? I pardon thee thy childhood's prattle:

But cease henceforth such senseless talk, and learn

In all humility, all that this sage

Will in his wisdom teach.'

Prahlada listened to the end with filial respect, though every word of his father's speech was a javelin to his heart. But when he had ended, he affirmed fearlessly, like Abdiel, the faith that was in his heart, and the truth as his intellect perceived it. He said,

'The seed is the parent of the tree... Can we measure His greatness who created all things within Himself, liveth Himself apart, and yet immanent shineth in all the work of His hands? He hath none before Him, and none there is after Him. Deathless is He!...

The mind cannot conceive Him – for the Upanishads declare He is beyond the logical intellect. Words cannot describe His nature as He is, nor's there another to whom or which we can compare Him. How then can those who sense Him not uncover His secret?

He is action and her fruit, and He is ordainer too thereof. Whose will know His greatness in his heart, will cross the sea of good and evil....

The cause He is that produces, and He is the effect also that is produced; but there is no organon (instrument) by which thou canst know that He is in Himself. The many see not His wonderful magic.

Behold, He is the scentless, seedless lotus, many-petalled and unique blossoming on the stalk studded with the fifty sounds – safely lying in the secret cave of all living kinds from the Supreme Brahma downwards....

He came as the single sound undifferentiated, and then evolved as sound triune, and then became the Word...

Time He is and Space. He is Cause and Instrument: He is also an effect also and its enjoyer! Virtue He is and the glories that virtue brings.

And behold his power. He contains all creations within Himself as the seed contains the banyan tree.

He is the artist, and the world is His Vina. Within He is, and without, and yet nothing touches Him. And it is He that gives the Vedas.

He is the life of the unique sound Aum. He is the Light of the Light of the Inner Light. ... He is the fire, and the worlds are the smoke.

He is the garland, and the religions and sects are the flowers thereof. But He is beyond the grasp of fanatics. He is the Ocean, and the sectarians are aware only of the wave. And yet He is the wave also!

And as I feared, father, that thy vast power, and life itself, might vanish by thy contempt for the Supreme Lord, I sang His praises that thy days may be long and thy power may be lasting.'

When Prahlada finished, Hiranya's rising rage burst into flame, throwing the very sun out of his sphere and the heavens out of their foundations. His eyes dropped blood. And, to the terror of all the worlds, he thundered out these words, fierce as the boiling poison of the sea:

'Have not I for enough in him who's sprung

To my misfortune out of my own loins'

And pays his worship and his love to him

Who is my foe of foes? Put him to death!'

The ministers of his vengeance rose at once and, taking Prahlada into the open, aimed their most deadly weapons against him. But all of them feel powerless to harm him who in the midst of that iron-storm forgot not the loving utterance of the name of the Lord. When Hiranya was informed of this, he ordered them to light a big fire and throw him into the flames. They obeyed him, but

'Even as the words of the chaste Sitha cooled the fire to Hanuman when we set fire to his tail, even so did the repetition of the holy name make the fire feel cool to his fair body up to the very marrow of his bones.'

When the executioners told Hiranya that fire did not burn his son, he ordered them to throw the God of Fire into a dungeon and the boy into a pit containing the eight venomous cobras. The cobras were, therefore, set on Prahlada, but in whatever part of the body they bit him, drops of ambrosia exuded from the bitten flesh; and it was the fangs of the cobras that fell off, while he remained scatheless, unforgetful of the holy name.

Hiranya next ordered that an elephant should be driven against him and made to trample him under foot. Indra himself, in fear, supplied his Airavatha, and the elephant came rushing on him in fury. As he came within earshot Prahlada addressed him thus:

'Remember, father Airavatha, He dwells

Within the lotus of my heart, who flew

To save thy kinsman struggling in the jaws

Of the fierce crocodile!'

When Airavatha heard these words, instead of knocking him down and trampling on him, he fell down on his knees and worshiped him. Hiranya ordered the elephant to be put to death for thus slighting his orders, and so in order to save himself he rose reluctantly and dashed against Prahlada. But lo, when the tusks touched his golden body, they broke to pieces and fell off even as if they were plantain stalks!

Hiranya then tried to drown Prahlada in the sea with a rock attached to his body, but the boy did not sink; he floated even as the Supreme One floats on the banyan leaf during the Great Deluge of the universe. Neither was the cup of poison that he gave him to drink, able to kill Prahlada who drank it as if it were very Amrit.

As nothing else appeared to have power over the child, Hiranya at last determined to kill him with his own hands. As he neared him wild with rage, the divine child fell at his feet and softly said,

'My life belongs to Him who made the worlds

And all that is therein: how canst thou hope,

My father, to destroy what's His?'

We shall now continue the story in the words of the poet which rise henceforth from height to height of sublimity till the crescendo is reached in the last defiance of Hiranyakasipu.

'Hiranya heard: but still, though full of wrath,

He did not strike him, curious to see

If young Prahlada could show his God; and thus

Addressed to him: 'Thou talkest much, my boy;

Tell me, if canst, who made the worlds? Is it

The Three who live by praising loud my name?

Or else is it the Rishis? Or is it

The gods that have been crushed for once and all?

Prahlada replied: "tis Hari, father, who
Created all these worlds. Is it the worlds
Alone He made? 'Tis He that giveth life –
Our very souls are His. Why, like the scent
In flowers, and oil in ses'mum seed. He dwells
Immanent everywhere, I adore and so
He shows Himself to me. Thou lovest not,
Father, and hence thou seest not Him who killed
Thy golden-eyed brother. Three are His forms,
And three His qualities: His eyes are three,
The sun and the moon and the fire. His world are three,
And triune th' effulgence of His Self.
And He is witness argus-eyed, Who sees
Delighted, th' eternal dance of transient life.
And this is the final truth that Vedas teach.'

Hiranya smiled contemptuous, and said,
'Thou say'st though himself only one, he dwells
In every object seen in all this vast
Multiple universe. We'll test this first
And then decide what's best for us to do.
Now show me him if he is in this pile?

‘What of this column, father?’ said Prahlada:
‘Thou ‘lt find Him in a span of space; divide
An atom int’ an hundred parts, and thou
Wilt find my God in every one of them:
He is in Meru hill; thy very words,
I say, are filled with Him: and thou wilt find
‘Fore long my every word a solemn truth.’
‘Enough of words,’ Hiranya spoke in wrath,
Discover me him inside his pillar here,
Who, thou declar’st and rebel gods believe,
Pervades this universe; if thou dost fail
I’ll fall on thee as on the elephant does
The lion, and tearing thee to pieces, drink
Thy blood and eat thy flesh!’ The wise one thus
Softly replied: ‘Thou canst not kill me, Sire!
But this I vow: if at any spot at which
Thou place my hands, my blessed Lord Lost not
Reveal Himself, I’ll myself end my life!
For e’en when I address this solemn vow
To Him, if He would not respond to my prayer,
And even after that I cling to my life,
I shouldn’t deserve to see my God, for then

My love would not be perfect,' 'Be it so!'
Hiranya cried in wrath and with his arm,
The home of victory, he struck against
The massive column high a thundering blow.
The 'universal globe asunder burst,
And rumbling came the laugh of the Man-Lion fierce.
Tremendous, ominous! When Prahlada heard
Him laugh Whom even Brahma seeks in vain,
He danced for joy, his eyes with tears filled,
He chanted loud His holy name, and hands
In worship joined above his tender head....
Hiranya heard, and wild with rage exclaimed,
'Say, who art thou that daredst laugh? Art thou
The god of whom this boy doth prate? And nast
Thou found thy ocean small and refuge sought,
Thou despicable, within this pillar here?
Come forth if thou wouldst fight with me, Come forth!'
The pillar burst, the Lion stood self-revealed;
He grew and filled this universe, and those
Around, and who can know and tell of all
His wondrous doings in the great Beyond?
The globed vault did burst, and from the depths

Above to those below all space was torn

Sheer!.....'

Continues the poet:

Have any of the science to count the arms that the Man-Lion had? The Asura force of ten thousand of millions was annihilated by Him and His terrific form confronted every single Asura separately with one head and two arms and three fiery eyes.

But can evil ever come to the good? While he was tearing to pieces all the evil Asuras with His terrific claws, protected all good souls from harm by keeping them within Himself even as a mother does her infant.

He ate up alive the elephants and the horses of the fighting Asuras, and then drank up the oceans seven with all their myriad living beings and crunched between His teeth the very thunderbolts of heaven. Seeing His unquenchable rage Dharma herself trembled for safety!

Not one Asura left alive in all three worlds! Not even the fetus in the wombs of the Asura women were spared! And seeing no more Asura alive in this universe, behold, some arms of His were searching for them in the worlds Beyond!

Thus, before the mind could so much as realize what was happening, the world-pervading Man-Lion destroyed all the Asuras accepting alone Prahlada who was the staff of the Gods; and his father; now He strode towards the place where the great Asura was standing."

**The Episode of Hiranyakasipu from Kamba Ramayanam – A Study by V.V.S. Aiyar
... Continues...**

" ...

'And there he stood, vast like the Meru mount,

His diamond-studded sword unsheathed for fight,

His buckler hiding sheer the heavens from view.
At his thundering shout the Devas shuddered, and
The mountains trembled and the seven seas.
Prahlada saw his dauntless father stand
With firm-set lip prepared to meet the shock
Of the advancing Lion, and nearing him
He said, 'E'en after seeing the strength abnorm
Of the Lord Supreme, O father, why wouldst not
The truth perceive? 'E'en now thou canst submit
To Him: and when thou fallest at His feet,
He would forgive thy evil deeds of old.'
Hiranya frowned, and thus defiance hurled:
'Listen, ingrate! In sight of thee I will
Cut down the Man-Lion's branching arms and feet,
And then I'll give my sword thy blood to drink!
And when it shall have nobly done my hests,
I'll pay my homage to that matchless steel.
Hast ever seen this head obeisance make
To living being? Not e'en to soften heart
Of woman has it ever yet bowed, thou boy!'

So, saying Hiranya laughed a mighty laugh. A shudder ran through the worlds when they heard the laugh which they had ever known to be the forerunner to his terrible deeds of valor. As the Man-Lion approached him, Hiranya advanced to meet Him, and they closed, the Man-Lion with his uncountable arms and the Asura armed with his sword of victory. They rose above all the worlds into primeval space for freedom of movement! And what could we compare their forms to? The Asura resembled that vast Meru mountain, and the blessed Lord resembled – all else besides. The Lord of Illusion, with his arms rising tier on tier looking like waves on waves, and with his world-quaking roar resembled the Ocean of Milk, when it was being churned, and the Asura resembled the mountain which churned it.

But how long can the mortal hold against the Supreme Lord in his terrific form and fighting hand to hand? With one mighty hand, at length, the man-Lion took hold of Hiranya's feet and whirled him round and round. His crown and jewels struck against the circular walls of the universe and fell shattered to pieces; his ear-jewels called Kundalas fell one to the east and the other to the west, and remain to this day as the rocks of the rising and setting sun. And it is his jewels that give their brilliance to the sunrise and the sunset even now. At length, at the time of the twilight, which is neither day nor night, the Man-Lion sat at the gate of Hiranya's palace, laid him on his thighs and tore open his entrails with his spear-like claws, and freed the Devas from their thralldom.

... Kamban has perfectly succeeded in impressing us with the supreme pride and consciousness of the illimitable power of the great Asura. The gods were nothing to Hiranya. He alone was the undisputed master of the universe, and none deserved worship but himself. Even when he sees the terrific Man-Lion destroy his army in a trice, his heart does not shrink; on the contrary his words assume greater firmness and pride. And his end too is equally heroic, contending face to face with God, and requiring Omnipotence itself to destroy him.

The story of Hiranya in the Bhagawatha is more didactic than artistic in composition and purpose, though some of the highest flights of poetry are to be found in it. But Kamban, gifted as he is with a highly dramatic imagination, would

introduce his own changes in it in order to bring the dramatic into full play. Thus, while Shuka, narrator of the Bhagawatha stories, makes Prahlada speak his mind for the first time before his father who is made to casually ask him what he had learned, Kamban makes him repeat the holy name of Narayana before his master at the very commencement of the instruction. This gives our poet the opportunity of making the teacher tremble for his safety at hearing the banned words, and of extracting the full poetic value out of this circumstance. Again, according to the original, after this incident, the boy is sent away by the father, after a slight reprimand, to the masters to learn the proper doctrines. When, after some time had lapsed, Hiranya calls for him and again questions him, Prahlada replies in the same strain, and in his wrath Hiranya orders him to be tortured and killed. Prahlada, however, as in our story, escapes miraculously from all the cruel tortures to which he is subjected. After this, at the request of the teachers, Hiranya again sends the boy to them to learn the orthodox doctrines. This is against all poetic probability, for how could Hiranya or the teachers believe that Prahlada could be converted after all these cruel ties and miraculous escape? There at the school, instead of being converted to his father's view of the universe, himself converts his classmates to the love of Hari. The teachers, therefore, bring him back to Hiranya saying that his conversion is hopeless. The last scene before striking at the pillar too, is not so well developed by Shuka as by Kamban who brings out the contrast between the wrathful and the proud Asura and his calm and devotion-filled son in a few but intensely worked up stanzas. Kamban again would make the Man-Lion finish the Asura army before coming to the leader Hiranyakasipu, and thus keep the climax to the very end. The challenge of Hiranya to the Man-Lion in Kamban is again, more in character than the last words that Shuka puts into his mouth. The words that fall from the lips of Hiranya in the Bhagawatha after the appearance of the Man-Lion are only these:

'What? Most probably this Hari, with his great cunning, has assumed this powerful body with the intention of destroying me.'

And how feeble these words read when compared with the first challenge of the Asura in Kamban!

The last request of Kamban's Prahlada to his father to submit to the God makes him more lovable than Shuka's Prahlada who does not speak to his father after the Man-Lion had appeared: while the last reply of Kamban's Hiranya to his son makes him look grander than the Asura in the Bhagawatha.

...Kamban's imperial imagination needs to re-melt even the best minted coin of the other sovereigns in the realm of poetry and put its own impression and superscription on the re-minted gold. And so, in this episode, Hiranya expanded to even more colossal proportions, and a Prahlada more tender than the creations of Vyasa and Shuka."

I think this is one of the most effective pieces of advice Vibhishana could give to Ravana at that time. Ravana was well aware of the prowess, might, strength and power of Hiranyakasipu as he had personally experienced it. In one of the previous eons, he visited the palace of Bana Asura, the great grandson of Hiranyakasipu. There he noticed a huge shield like ornament made of gold embossed with multitudes of most valuable diamonds, emeralds and other precious stones. He really wanted to carry it to his palace in Lanka.

He very anxiously asked the details of the piece and Bana told him this is one of the small pieces of the Kundala or ear-jewels used to be worn by Hiranyakasipu and got shattered while fighting with Nara Simha or Man-Lion. Reading Ravana's mind, he also told him if he wishes he can take it home to Lanka. Ravana was thrilled and excited and very proudly tried to move the piece of Kundala. It was not only that Ravana was unable to move that piece of Kundala even for an inch his shoulder bones got crushed due to the heavy weight of that piece. Ravana got so ridiculously humiliated and went back home. As the ear stud was so heavy Ravana could have visualized the size and strength of Hiranyakasipu.

If such a massive and colossal Hiranyakasipu could be defeated and killed by an incarnation of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu then what a folly if Ravana thinks that such a negligible Ravana cannot be defeated by another incarnation of Lord Sri Maha

Vishnu. Therefore, the logic applied, and the story narrated by Vibhishana was the most appropriate one for the circumstances. Here lies the talent of Kamba in choosing the story.

Also, there is another very interesting concept of this incarnation of Nara Simha or Man-Lion. Actually Hiranyakasipu thought that he was almost immortal as he was blessed with the boon by Brahma Deva that he cannot be killed by Devas, Danavas, Asuras, Humans, Animals, Birds or any other species and in short by any of the creations of Brahma Deva and again not in the day time, not in the night time, not on the earth, not on the sky, not on water and he made sure that he had no loopholes left out. So practically there was no chance for Hiranyakasipu to be defeated or killed. But see here what happened? The strongest part of a lion is its body or the paw and the head as the weakest as we do not believe the lion is a brainy animal. And the strongest part of man is his head compared to his body. Hiranyakasipu was killed at dusk, and he was held on the thigh of Narasimha who was sitting on the threshold of the palace door. And this Man-Lion was not a creation of Brahma Deva and was a self creation of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu and thus fulfilled all the requirements and demands placed by Hiranyakasipu in the incarnation of Narasimha or the Man-Lion. Therefore, this Narasimha or Man-Lion incarnation is also lesson to all that however smart and however mighty and however powerful and however thoughtful and however intelligent nobody at no time in no way can outsmart the Omnipotent and Omni Powerful and the Omniscient Lord Sri Maha Vishnu.

It is very unique for Kamba to provide us with many interesting and intelligent and logical dialogues between his characters. It is a special talent of Kamba to easily convert an anti-hero or a negative character also to the highest level with the halo of the superhero with these intelligent dialogues. Let me try to provide a couple of them here as evidence.

Let us now examine the conversation between Bali and Sri Rama after Bali was shot by Sri Rama hiding behind a tree. But before that let us examine the conversation between Bali and his wife, Tara, so that we can understand the true

devotion of Bali towards Sri Rama Deva. This happened when Bali was ready to accept the challenge and war call given by Sugreeva at the second time.

... But Tara's fears were not dispelled. She had heard too much from her servants to be satisfied with Bali's assurances. She therefore begins,

'My lord, I learn from trusty servants shrewd

That he has found a great ally in Ram

Who for his sake has sworn to end thy life

To-day.'

Bali or Vali had heard so much of Rama's nobility and chivalry and brotherly and filial love that he had come to look upon him as the ideal hero. So when Tara spoke of him as conspiring with Sugreeva to kill Vali, Vali could not at all believe it. Not merely that. He could not brook to hear the ideal of his heart vilified, as he thought he was, by these words of Tara. Hence, before she could say all that she had heard, he cut her speech short and spoke to her these angry words:

'What hast thou said, with that blaspheming tongue

Of thine, Tara? Know'st thou not Ram is born

To show the way of virtue to the world

That has forgotten Dharm, and crying loud

For a savior in vain, his helpless sunk

In dark despair? But that thou art a woman

And hast in ignorance erred, thou shouldst have died

For this blasphemy! How will he think on this,

Whose eye can see beyond this transient life?

Can Dharma falsify itself, that's born

To save all living kind? Though all the world
Lay at his feet, he gave his crown away
Smiling to his brother at the bidding cruel
Of his step mother. In lieu of blessing him
For the grandeur of his soul, do I now hear
Thee slander Rama? E'en should all the worlds
Come thronging on and rush on him at once.
Does he an ally need beside his bow
To battle by his side? Then thinkest thou
That he would hanker after alliance
With a worthless ape? He does his brothers love
Ev'en as his life: would he then aim his darts
At me, when I and my brother are engaged
In combat to decide on rights upon
The sword? Know he's a sea of mercy sweet!
Rest here a while therefore; within a trice
I'll best Sugriv, and send him to his doom,
And scattering all who came to his aid
I'll join thee: dispel thy fears!'

Bali did not even let Tara complete her sentence if she dared her tongue would have been uprooted by Bali. So Tara feared to say no more, and Vali dashed down

the hill to accept the challenge of his brother. This conversation between Bali and Tara is provided here to show the staunch and steadfast devotion Bali has towards Sri Rama Deva. With this in the background let us now examine the conversation between Bali and Sri Rama.

Bali after falling down looks to see who shot him to the direction where the arrow came. He sees Sri Rama who is the embodiment of beauty in blue black color. So, he says you are like a lotus flower blossomed on Mount Anjana (the word is a synonym for thick black). Your red eyes resemble a red lotus flower blossomed on your blue-black body. What offense did I commit to you for you to send that dart to open my heart with a hole and then to make the blood flow through that hole to the outside of my body and also to capture my life itself through that same dart mark? What type of moral justification can you provide for this deceptive approach? Only hunters are permitted to shoot by hiding from the target and that too only to satisfy their hunger and for survival. How can you receive any type of respect and veneration with this devilish deed? I am not surprised that at the time of the death of your father none of his children were nearby with him.

There are four types of morally righteous principles to be strictly observed and maintained by all Kshathriyas. They are *"Illaram"*, *"Villaram"*, *"Chollaram"* and *"Nallaram"*. *"Illaram"* is ruling the kingdom properly by protecting all the subjects. *"Villaram"* is learning all four stages of archery from a Preceptor and then adhering strictly to the norms prescribed therein. *"Chollaram"* is always speaking truthfully and acting honestly even at the cost of your life. And finally, *"Nallaram"* is maintaining all the thirty-two norms prescribed in the Vedas and administering and protecting the subjects of your nation. Bali continued with clarification that when you left your country you abandoned *"Illaram"* and when you placed the arrow on your bow hidden behind the tree without facing your target you abandoned *"Villaram"* and when you deviated from the words of your Preceptor that you should always act honestly and shot me hideously then you abandoned *"Chollaram"* and when you ate any food without maintaining those thirty-two principles of Vedas then you also abandoned *"Nallaram"*. Thus, you have definitely abandoned all these four rules.

Bali's accusations continued ... and then he told him that he was absolutely not surprised because he is the son of Dasaratha who killed the son of a Seer hideously telling that he mistook the pot filling sound for that of mad elephant drinking water. You are someone who not only could protect your own chaste wife but also even let a demon take her away from you. And I am not even surprised because when I check your family history of your dynasty there was a Harichandra who even sold his own wife, Tharamathi, and son, Lohithaswan or Rohithaswan, to pay off his debt to a Brahmin.

Of course, Sri Rama Deva was able to provide appropriate responses and cut all the accusations raised against him by Bali. Now Sri Rama Deva accused him of keeping Sugreeva's wife, Ruma with him. The Vedas have prescribed that a brother's wife is to be considered as mother or daughter. So that is a crime and serious offense, and it is the duty of the king of the country to punish criminals appropriately. Therefore, Bali deserved to be killed. But Bali disputed it by claiming that Vanaras need not live according to the norms of Vedas. They are animals and "might is right" for them and they are permitted to flirt with any female counterpart according to their will and pleasure.

Of course, Bali was able to recognize and accept his wrongdoings. Kamba was able to elevate the position of Bali from a generally conceived negative character to a far superior heroic level. After reading Kamba Ramayanam not only that we will never have any type of negative feelings towards Bali but also will install an impression that Bali is nothing less than a superhero.

Let me conclude Kamba Ramayanam with some part of the conversation between Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna. This conversation took place in the battleground when Kumbhakarna had been ordered to go and destroy Sri Rama, Lakshmana and all the Vanaras by his brother, Ravana. The very introduction of Kumbhakarna into the battlefield by Kamba itself is worth commendable. Seeing the huge and colossal form of the Asura coming to the battlefield was questioned by Sri Rama to Vibhishana as Sri Rama had never before seen Kumbhakarna. First Sri Rama thought that this could be the magical trick of Ravana to deceive him. Sri Rama tells Vibhishana that in order to see his one shoulder to another he has to walk or

even run for days. When you look at the middle of two shoulders of that huge form it looks like two Mount Maha Merus were erected there. Sri Rama was sure that no mother on earth is capable of delivering a child who can grow in size like this. Vibhishana after a very long explanation told Sri Rama that is Kumbhakarna, the younger brother of Ravana and the elder brother of himself. He also narrated the strength and power and prowess of Kumbhakarna. Also, Vibhishana told him that he is a great devotee of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu. Vibhishana also narrated a number of stories pertaining to Kumbhakarna.

And then with the permission of Sri Rama, Vibhishana approached Kumbhakarna to greet and meet with him and then to persuade him to come to the side of Sri Rama.

Kumbhakarna hugged Vibhishana and exchanged greetings. And then Vibhishana told Kumbhakarna that Sri Rama Deva has asked Kumbhakarna not to fight for Ravana and to go to his side and if he does so Ravana would definitely surrender and Sitha Devi would be given back to Sri Rama Deva and thus this horrible and disastrous and destructive war can be stopped and the lives of so many Rakshasas and Vanaras can be saved.

Vibhishana also placed two conditions on Kumbhakarna to change the side. The first one was that Kumbhakarna will be crowned as the king of Lanka and second is to abandon Ravana and become a devotee of Sri Rama Deva. Kumbhakarna responded that as Vibhishana had already been crowned as the king of Lanka after the death of Ravana that cannot be changed or exchanged with another person as otherwise that would amount to breaking the commitment and agreement by Sri Rama which could never ever happen. And the second one is also not possible as this is the most crucial time in the life of Ravana, and he is in need of help. All throughout the life of Kumbhakarna has been protected, ruled and provided and met with all his needs by Ravana. And not only that as an elder brother more like a father, a Preceptor and as a Ruler he took care of Kumbhakarna hitherto. When that fatherly figure has declared war against his enemy not even an ordinary patriotic subject of the kingdom can work against the king. In that case how can a kid brother like Kumbhakarna be able to leave that

ruler who is also his own elder brother who is being treated and respected like a father? So, both the conditions put forth by Vibhishana were very logically rejected by Kumbhakarna.

But Vibhishana wanted to transgress the points raised by Kumbhakarna and so he tried. Vibhishana told Kumbhakarna that good and pure and virtuous people would not and should not look into the relationship or age of the person who commits a crime, and they will simply abandon and punish the criminal irrespective of their age and or personal relationship. Vibhishana quoted the story of king Mahipala of Kurukshethra kingdom and his son Chithraratha.

The story in short is: Chithraratha was the only son born to Mahipala at a very old age. Being the only son, Mahipala decided to crown Chithraratha at an auspicious time. But before the crowning ceremony, one day, when Chithraratha was going to visit the Shiva Temple the wheels of the chariot carrying him ran over a calf sleeping on the road and it was killed. Chithraratha was not aware of the incident. ... But according to the prevailing law of the country Mahipala had to kill Chithraratha by laying him on the road with his hands and legs tied up and passing the chariot wheel over his neck as stipulated by law and decided by his court. King Mahipala executed Chithraratha accordingly. Kumbhakarna agreed with Vibhishana in the genuineness of the story but clarified to him that a father has the right to punish the son if the son commits a crime. But in our case a younger brother has no right to punish his elder brother even if he commits a crime. Here Ravana is a father like elder brother and hence a Kumbhakarna has no right to punish Ravana and hence the logic of the story cannot be applied.

Vibhishana placed a counter argument with the story of Jamadagni and his son Parasurama. The story is that at the orders or request of Jamadagni, Parasurama killed his mother, Renuka Devi. Here Parasurama was fully justified as he had simply implemented the prescribed law of the land and complied with the orders of his father. And therefore, Kumbhakarna has the right and should punish Ravana without looking at the relationship and age. But Kumbhakarna again had a very valid point that what Parasurama did was simply to execute the orders given to him by his father. In this case Vibhishana is not elder to Kumbhakarna and hence

the orders or the suggestions provided by the younger brother should not be executed or implemented by an elder brother. Kumbhakarna also told Vibhishana that a younger brother does not have the right to order his elder brother.

Vibhishana was still hopeful, and this time presented a story describing the father being punished by son. Long time ago there was a dispute between Brahma Deva and Vishnu Bhagawan. Brahma was claiming that he is superior because he is the one who creates the universe and all the movables and immovable therein. But Vishnu claimed that though Brahma creates everything it is Vishnu who maintains and sustains everything and therefore he is definitely superior. Under the mediation of Devas, the matter was referred to Vedas. Vedas proclaimed it is neither Brahma Deva nor Vishnu Bhagawan, but Lord Parameswara is the supreme one among the Trinities as he is the one who is overseeing all the three functions of creation, sustenance and destruction. But Brahma Deva was not willing to accept the proclamation of Vedas because the very Vedas are only his own creations therefore, he does not have to accept the words of his sons. Then it was referred to Gayathri, the mother of Vedas. Gayathri also agreed with Vedas. But still then Brahma Deva was not willing to accept. Ultimately Brahma Deva challenged Vishnu Bhagawan or Narayana for a combat and the winner of the combat would be declared and accepted as the supreme of the Trios.

Again, Devas approached Parameswara and requested to ensure that such a major and destructive combat between Brahma Deva and Vishnu Bhagawan should not materialize. Parameswara stood as a huge mountain of fire between Brahma Deva and Vishnu Bhagawan. Brahma Deva told Parameswara that he is not going to give any consideration to Parameswara who is always dancing with the ghosts in the graveyards. Brahma Deva told him even if you are going to stand as a mountain of Vajra (the strongest weapon known to the three worlds with one thousand sharp edges and held by Devendra as his primary weapon. And this was the one Devendra used to kill Vrithra Asura) instead of the mountain of Fire he cannot be blocked from fighting with Vishnu. When Brahma Deva abused Shri Parameswara, Parameswara got wild, and he incarnated as Bhairava Murthy and cut off the topmost head of Brahma Deva with his fingernails. [The story is that until such time Brahma Deva used to have five heads, four at the same level and

the fifth one on the top the other four.] Vibhishana continued that here Parameswara was created by Brahma Deva and hence Parameswara is the son and Brahma Deva is the father. And we have seen the father was punished by the son. Therefore, it is the dutiful responsibility of Kumbhakarna to abandon and to punish Ravana who is clearly an offender. But here again though Kumbhakarna agreed with the fact of the story he told Vibhishana that in his case beyond all these there is a biological attachment with Ravana and Kumbhakarna, and he is obligated to respect that beyond all these logical and legal arguments and hence he is not able to abandon Ravana.

Vibhishana again pleaded with Kumbhakarna that when our physical body is infected with deadly cancer like disease and if that cancer is incurable by medication, then we have to undergo surgery and cut and remove that cancerous part away from our body. Here Ravana is the incurable cancer infected on you and you have no alternative other than to cut and separate it away from you and that is the only effective treatment. Now Kumbhakarna responded: Oh, Vibhishana I am now truly impressed by your intelligence, wit, logic and above all your oratory. But now listen to me very carefully. At this juncture if I change sides the world is going to accuse and to ridicule me as a pure opportunist. Also, the world is going to insult and brand me that I am a stupid coward. As a matter of fact, the world is going to laugh at and ridicule both of us and Ravana too. They will tell you to look at Ravana who was lucky to have two younger brothers and the youngest one abandoned him already and the next one boasted that he will go and kill Sri Rama and all the Vanaras and then at the most crucial and critical time he changed his side and stabbed him in the back. Think of what a pathetic and tragic condition that is for me and for Ravana, my elder brother. And now finally, Vibhishana, please hear me out. You are a staunch and steadfast devotee of Sri Rama Chandra Swamy you are assured of the most divine ultimate liberation by salvation at your death. Don't you know that I am also going to attain the same divine ultimate salvation if I am killed by the same Sri Rama Chandra Swamy in the combat? And my position is going to be far more illustrious than that of yours.

Though Kumbhakarna of all Ramayanams is a great character none of them are even close to the Kumbhakarna of Kamba. Kamba's Kumbhakarna excel among the portrayals in all other Ramayanams.

I have provided only two examples of Bali and Kumbhakarna to show the greatness of Kamba in elevating even the negative characters with the halo of heroism. There are many more such examples we can see in Kamba Ramayanam.

I should not conclude the study of Kamba Ramayanam without mentioning that both Sitha Devi and Sri Rama Chandra Swamy of Kamba also stand out at the top compared to the same characters of any other Ramayanams.

Om Sri Ramaya Namah! Om Sri Ramaya Namah! Om Sri Ramaya Namah!