

KAMBARAMAYANA

– A comparative study with the Original –
D. GNANASUNDARAM

A study, profound and penetrative, of the Kambaramayana will surely make the reader understand the genius of Kamban, 'the Emperor of the Realm of Poesy' of Tamilnadu. Some may be reluctant to subscribe to the plain fact that his work has excelled even the original, the Ramayana of Valmiki. Yet it is a fact to be conceded for Kamban has not merely translated the Ramayana of Valmiki but has only taken the frame of the story and rendered it absolutely in his own way so as to make it an entirely original work. "On going through the poem of Kamban", says V.V.S.Aiyar, "one is constrained to exclaim, 'Here is a building which is built on the same plan no doubt, and with the same materials, but which possesses a striking individuality of its own" [1]. The treatment of the story, the additions and omissions he has made, the careful delineation of the characters, the rich morals embedded in the incidents of the story, the befitting dialogues of the characters, the similes, the metaphors and the choicest diction of his poem have given a new dimension to his epic. It can rightly challenge comparison even with any of the world epics. Let us make a humble attempt to study the various changes he has made in his epic alone in this paper.

When he launched on the stupendous task of composing an epic poem on Rama, Kamban knew very well that the story of Rama was very popular among the masses of Tamilnadu. Many are the references to the story of Rama in the Cankam Tamil classics, the twin epics namely the Cilappathikaram and the Manikekalai, and very many in the hymns of Nayanmars and Alwars of the later period. Some of the episodes found in these earlier literature like Indra coming out of the hermitage of Gautama in the guise of a cat [2], Rama silencing the chorus of the birds sitting above the banyan when he was in assembly under it with his friends discussing plans to attack Lanka [3] etc. suggest that different versions of the Ramayana were prevalent then. In the days of Kamban, Rama was worshipped as one of the incarnations of the Almighty Lord Vishnu. Rama and Krishna were synonyms for Vishnu. The idylls of Rama, Sita and Lakshman and Hanauman had been installed in the temples of Tamilnadu.

Kamban who wanted to write an epic poem must have read various legends of the Lord Vishnu to select the theme before finally fixing on the story of Rama as Milton, the English epic poet, of the later period spent more than twenty years in Arthurian legends before selecting the story of the fall of the man from the Bible as the theme of his epic. The cultural background of his land did not permit him to simply retell the story of Rama as depicted, long past, by the sage Valmiki for some of the incidents ran counter to it. The artist in Kamban thought that changes are necessary to make the epic grander. These compulsions he willingly obliged and made changes in such a way as to suit to the culture and literary taste of the populace of the soil. The deft hand of Kamban is explicit in the changes he has effected and they not only add radiance to the epic but also elevate the story and the characters to great heights of veneration.

Let us first take some of the changes he has made out of cultural compulsions and study their merits. Sita was abducted and imprisoned in the Ashoka Park by Ravana. In spite of the fact that there was the curse that the heads of Ravana would go to pieces if he touched any reluctant woman, Valmiki writes that Ravana lifted Sita by her locks of hair and placed her on his lap and drove the aerial chariot to Lanka.

Adyaprabhruti yaam anyaam balaath naareem gamishyasi |

Tada tee shatadhaa muurdhaa phalishyati na samshaya: || [4]

These are the words of Ravana to Mahaparsvan. The curse was mentioned by Ravana himself.

One wonders what happened to the curse when Ravana lifted the unwilling Sita and brought her to Lanka. This makes the curse superfluous. Touching the locks of hair of a lady, according to the convention of the Tamils, is the sole right of her lover or husband. As Kamban knows it very well, he makes a change and states that Ravana without touching Sita uprooted the hermitage that she was in and placed it on his vehicle and flew to Lanka [5]. He further states that most of the time she was staying in it without touching the hostile soil during her weary days of confinement in Lanka [6]. Kamban has effected the change in tune with the curse that Valmiki himself has stated and saves Sita from the manhandling of Ravana.

The pen of Kamban has portrayed the character of Akalya so adroitly that she wins our wholehearted sympathy and admiration unlike that of Valmiki. Akalya was the wife of the sage Gautama. They lived happily spending days in meditation. She had given birth to a son by name Sadananda too. Indra, the lord of the celestials, uncontrollable as was his lust for Akalya, one day entered her cottage impersonating the sage with unholy desire and urged her for urgent solicitation. She was not deceived by the impersonation. She very well identified that it was Indra in the garb of the sage. Yet she succumbed to the lustful temptation and obliged. She even thanked him for fulfilling her desire. Artful as she was, she implored him to maintain secrecy of it and go away. As fate would have it, the untimely return of the sage Gautama from the Ganges made things public and both were cursed. The lord of the celestials became a eunuch and she was turned into a stone lifeless and hard. The ignominious Indra repaired to his place and got back his manliness by the help of the celestial beings. Poor Akalya after long years of penance was freed from the curse on the arrival of Rama in her hermitage. Having regained her beauty and made pure by penance, she shone like the moon emerging from the clouds. Rama and Lakshmana touched her feet. She received them with all the customary rites of hospitality. The sage who returned to his hermitage then took Akalya, penitent and chastised by penance, as his wife [7].

The portrayal of Akalya in Valmiki Ramayana may be realistic but does not earn the esteem of the readers and truly she is not a model to be emulated. One gets the feeling that she had gone astray unable to check her voluptuous desire and ruined herself. But it is not so in Kambaramayana. She not only earns the sympathy of the readers but also the utmost respect and regard. They would give her without hesitation a place in the galaxy of virtuous ladies. According to Kamban, Indra who impersonated the sage cheated her and she did not know the truth before he spoiled her. No sooner she came to know that he was not her husband while she drank the cup of sexual pleasure along with him than she was totally perplexed and helplessly resigned herself to fate. The readers feel that the indignation of and the curse by the sage are too much as she was innocent and had been seduced by the cunning Indra. Valmiki's Akalya is a sinner deliberate but Kamban's is a victim unfortunate. Rama, as he was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Kamban is careful in each minute detail of the epic and has made the grateful Akalya to touch the feet of Rama instead of he touching her feet as depicted by Valmiki [8].

Remarkable are the differences between the Tara of Valmiki and that of Kamban. She was the wife of the valiant Vali, the king of Kishkinda. In a fit of rage, the adamant and ruthless Vali, without understanding what had happened when he was away fighting with Mayavi drove Sugriva, his younger brother and snatched away his wife, Rumi to his harem. Rama and Lakshmana who went in

search of Sita met Sugriva on their way and they became friends. Thanks to the sagacious Hanuman, the minister of Sugriva, they arrived at a pact of mutual help that Rama should help Sugriva in putting down Vali and ascending the throne of Kishkinda and in turn he would help Rama in locating Sita abducted by Ravana and there after her release. Accordingly Rama killed Vali by his unflinching arrow and made Sugriva the king of Kishkinda. Valmiki says that Tara after the death of Vali became the wife of his younger brother Sugriva and indulged in physical pleasure.

Drowned totally in the pleasure of drinks and damsels, Sugriva failed to keep his words and did not send the host of monkeys to help Rama in finding the whereabouts of Sita even after the expiry of the winter season. Rama was infuriated and sent Lakshmana to meet Sugriva. Both the poets say that Tara appeased the angry Lakshmana who advanced towards the palace but the way in which he was pacified is entirely different.

Valmiki says that straight from the bed of Sugriva, Tara proceeded towards Lakshmana with steps wavering, eyes intoxicated and golden waist girdle and waist thread sliding down. Unable to see the uncouth Tara, Lakshmana turned timid and looked down and thereby his anger disappeared. [9] Kamban's Tara is majestic even in her widowhood. She did not share the bed of Sugriva. Instead she was an honorable and noble counsel of Sugriva. She rushed to see Lakshmana as he was coming with fury. When he saw her pale face and the garb of a lady who lost his husband he was reminded of his mothers who would be in the same state of sorrow at Ayodhya and he stood there with tears welling up in his eyes. [10] The Tara of Valmiki is essentially a monkey, voluptuous and weak and changes husbands as a monkey leaps from one branch to another but the Tara of Kamban is the loving and virtuous wife of the mighty Vali and she lives a noble and venerable life even after his death. The aptness of the change made by Kamban in the character of Tara is very well confirmed when Angadha, the son of Vali, in Valmiki Ramayana speaks disapprovingly the act of Sugriva and scolds him senseless for having conjugal relationship with his brother's wife, Tara after his death. [11]

The changes made by Kamban have elevated the characters and more so the women characters like Sita, Akalya and Tara and they earn greater respect and adoration than that of Valmiki.

Kamban has made yet another change, definitely out of cultural compulsion, in the way of life of persons of high echelon. He has made a distinction even in the food habits of the good and the bad. On the day when Rama and Lakshmana along with Sita entered the woods crossing the Ganges the two brothers, according to Valmiki, hunted four big animals, a ram and three deers of different variety for their supper. [12] During their stay at Chitrkut, Rama, sitting on the foot of the hill, made Sita happy by making her enjoy the idyllic beauty of the river Mandagini and feeding her with meat saying that they were baked well and delicious. [13] Further Kabanda who guides Rama and Lakshmana to Kishkinda says that fatty birds that taste like ghee and a variety of fish are available at Pampha. [14] In Valmiki, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are portrayed only as non-vegetarians but they are not so in the Kambaramayana. [15]

Thiruvalluvar has emphasized long back that taking meat is a sin and advised people to refrain from eating it. He proclaimed that abstention of meat is the hall mark of culture. Kamban who holds Thiruvalluvar in high esteem and enriches his work freely borrowing his ideas, words and phrases, takes the clue from him and makes his noble characters adhere to vegetarianism. In the Kambaramayana the three are eating only edible roots and green vegetables

throughout their stay in the forests and only the Rakshasas and such preternatural beings are portrayed as meat-eaters.

Kamban, the greatest artist, has made some of the incidences more attractive by elaborating some of the clues available in the Valmiki's Ramayana. Let us take the last rites of Dasharatha. Valmiki says that the last rites were performed by Bharata but Kamban has changed it. He has made Shatrughna to do them.

Bharata and Shatrughna were recalled from Kekaya by the council of ministers. On returning to Ayodhya, Bharata learned what had happened in his absence. He was filled with sorrows. He cursed his mother for the wrongs she had committed. Then he met Kausalya who had a suspicion that he might have known the evil design of the banishment of Rama. She was convinced of his innocence and felt that she was wrong when she heard the heart-rending sobs and swearing of Bharata. She further told him to perform the last rites of his father. The day ended. Next day Bharata went with Vashista and saw the dead body of his father. Unable to control his sorrow he fell down on the ground and wailed. The body of Dasharatha was taken to the river, Sarayu for cremation. The priests, after doing all the rites, placed the body on the bier and requested Bharata to do the obsequies for his father. No sooner did he proceed to do them than Vashista intervened and prevented him saying that Dasharatha infuriated by the demands of Kaikeyi disowned him declaring that he was not his son. Hearing that Bharata broke down and cursed himself for unable to do even the last rites of his father. Finally Shatrughna lit the pyre. [16]

The account of Valmiki about the funeral ceremony of Dasharatha is very casual and not absorbing. Kamban's account is arresting the attention of the readers. The intervention of Vashista is so dramatic that it arrests the attention of the readers and increases the pathos. The readers sympathize with the plight of Bharata.

Kamban has made the change by developing a clue available in Valmiki's Ramayana. According to Valmiki, Dasharatha told Kaikeyi who was firm in her demands, that Bharata would not be his son and should not do his last rites if he would think the banishment of Rama to the forest was proper. According to Valmiki, Dasharatha did not disown Bharata. The words of Dasharatha are below:

"priyam cet Bharatasya aethat raama pravraajam bhavaet I

maa sma mae Bharata: kaarshit praethakrityam gataayusha: II [17]

Kamban changed it a little bit and made Dasharatha, in a fit of anger, say to adamant Kaikeyi that Bharata was not his son and should not do his last rites. The small change has given a fine dramatic touch to the episode.

The scene of the meeting of Shurpanakha and Rama has also undergone a change in the hands of Kamban. Valmiki says that on seeing Rama she became mad after Rama and her lust knew no bounds. Further he elaborates that she was ugly with big belly and cruel eyes. Her hairs were reddish in color. She was sufficiently old. Her very appearance was frightening. She was full of bad intention and foul words. [18] She appeared before Rama in the form of a Rakshasi to win his heart. This description makes one think how Rama entertained jovial conversation with such an ugly Rakshasi. Kamban slightly deviates from the original and beautifully portrays the scene. Shurpanakha appeared in the form of a beautiful damsel and walked so gently and lovingly with the gait of a swan and a peacock with the sole intention of captivating the heart

of the handsome Rama. [19] Rama, for a moment, was wonderstruck on seeing such a bewitching beauty in the midst of the thick woods. Then their conversation took place and Rama understood that she was a Rakshasi who had approached him with foul intention. The rhythmic songs of Kamban describing this scene defy translation and anyone who tries to translate them will surely meet with failure. How Kamban changed Shurpanakha into a damsel? Was it his original creation or somebody's? Definitely he has had a clue in the original that prompted him to make the change. Valmiki says that Shurpanakha had the magic power to change her form as she wished. This is evident from the words of Kara. Mutilated Shurpanakha approached him in the forest and told him what all had happened to her. He was wonder struck and asked how it happened to her who was very strong, capable of taking any form she liked and wandering unhampered in the forest.

Balavikramasampannaa kaamakaa kaama ruupinee I

Emaam avsthaam neetaa tvam kaena antakasamaa mataa II [20]

Theses are the words of Kara. Nevertheless Valmiki has portrayed Shurpanakha appearing in front of Rama with her natural ugly form. But the elaboration of this clue by Kamban has transformed the whole scene into an unforgettable one.

Yet another subtle change made by Kamban taking the clue from Valmiki is the activity of Bharata on the day of the return of Rama after spending fourteenth years of exile. The day was about to end. Kamban portrays the event as follows: Bharata was waiting patiently all those days expecting the arrival of Rama. He was sitting there as the personification of affection. He ate, all those days, nothing but vegetables and fruits. He was looking at the southern direction with tears flowing down his cheeks like a river. The astrologers told him that Rama should return on that day. He did not see Rama returning and swooned. He doubted whether Rama stayed in the woods thinking that he would be fond of ruling the country. He called his younger brother Shatrughna and ordered him to take charge of the kingdom. The fire was lit. Shatrughna stood bewildered. Kausalya heard the news and rushed there to dissuade Bharata from burning himself to death. She tried to prevent him from immolation saying that he was superior to Rama by thousand times and his death would throw the worlds above and under into the unfathomable sea of sorrow. He did not pay heed to her words. He was circling around the fire. Dazed all stood with anguish not knowing what to do and how to prevent Bharata from it. He was about to fall into the fire. Then, at the last moment, there appeared the swift-flying Hanuman with the announcement that Rama was returning and put out the fire. [21] Relieved Bharata and he spent the whole night talking about the life of Rama in the woods. To their delight next day Rama arrived there.

The twist and turn that we see in the portrayal of this event by Kamban are absent in that of Valmiki. In his work, Rama sent Hanuman to Bharata to study his mind through his body language on hearing about his (Roma's) arrival and to know whether he was ambitious to continue to rule the country for he thought that power would corrupt even noble persons. He further said that he was prepared to give up the throne to Bharata if he wished it. Hanuman went to the place where Bharata was, only with the intention of knowing his mind and come back to Rama to report it. Hanuman approached the hermitage near Auyodh and saw Bharata sitting there lusterless with matted hairs. He was wearing the clothes made out of the bark of the trees. He looked like a celestial sage and his thoughts were fixed on Rama and Rama alone. He was ruling the country as a regent of the footwear of Rama that he had placed there on a

pedestal. Ministers and army commanders were around him. He was pale and thin. Hanuman went near him and said that Rama was returning to Auyodh. Even a cursory reader will note how Kamban has made the event very poignant by making Bharata turn down the plea of Kausalya and about to fall into fire.

Here again Kamban has found the nucleus for this change in the Valmiki Ramayana. Bharata who was unsuccessful in convincing Rama to return to Auyodh said to him "Oh, Rama, the destroyer of enemies, if you do not return back to Auyodh after the completion of fourteen years, I will definitely fall into fire and end my life leaving the kingdom to the care of your chapels" Thus saying Bharata received the golden chapels which Rama stood on and returned to Auyodh. The verse of Valmiki is hereunder:

Tava paatukayo: nyasya raajyatantram parantapa I

Chadurdasae hi sampurnaevvarshae ahani raghuttamall

Na drakshyaami yadi tvaam tu pravaekshyaami hutaasanamI [22]

This clue definitely must have kindled the imagination of Kamban. He purposely delayed the arrival of Rama to make Bharata do all preparations to enter into fire and enhanced the beauty of the event by making it very dramatic and further exalted the character of Bharata to great heights by his deeds and by the words of Kausalya, the mother of Rama, who tried to dissuade him.

Kamban portrays some of the events in the same way as Valmiki has done but he has raised their importance and added glory by simply shifting their place. Let us study the placement of the revelation of the story of Sravana by Dasharatha to Kausalya, the introduction of the queens by Bharata to Guha and the resolve of Rama to save the sages who sought protection from the Rakshasas as samples.

The story of Sravana, the dutiful, son is very famous and popular. He was the son of a sage by name Salabhoja. His parents were total blind. Sravana looked after his parents very well and they did not feel their disablement. One early morning he went to a river to fetch a pail of water to his thirsty parents. It was dark then. As he immersed the vessel in the river to fill it with water there arose a sound. It was like the sound produced by the elephant while drinking the water. Dasharatha who was out on haunting mistook it as sound of the elephant and sent his arrow in the direction of the sound. Alas! It hit the son of the sage and he fell down crying. Dasharatha rushed there and found, to his dismay and grief, Sravana in a pool of blood. Dying Sravana told about his parents and asked him to go and inform them what had happened. On hearing the sad news, the sage cursed Dasharatha that he should also die of the separation of his son.

This story is found in both the works but in different places. In Valmiki Ramayana, the king Dasharatha has narrated this incidence at the time of his death. On the fifth day, after Rama went to the forest, Sumanthra returned from the banks of the Ganges to the capital. Kausalya learned from him that they have entered into the forest. Her grief became uncontrollable and she scolded Dasharatha for having sent Rama to the forest. She complained that he had ruined not only her but also Rama and the country. Dasharatha unable to tolerate her harsh words fainted. Then he requested her to forgive him for his mistake. Kausalya, the kind queen who was appeased, consoled him with soothing words and he slept. In the night of the succeeding day, Dasharatha recollected the curse of the sage and narrated it to her [23]. He said that the time had come for him to leave the world. Speaking the greatness and repeating the name of Rama often and often, Dasharatha passed away in midnight of the sixth day.

The placement of the story in the Kambaramayana is very apt and it serves to make the reader feel for the death of Dasharatha that is arresting and sudden. Kamban narrates the event as follows: After giving orders to do all necessary things for the coronation ceremony of Rama, Dasharatha went to the palace of Kaikeyi with heart brimming with happiness. It was night then. Things took a different turn. All his calculations went wrong. The cunning Kaikeyi tutored by her servant, Manthra, stood steadfast and got the two boons from him. Next morning she sent for Rama. When he came she said that it was the order of the king that he should go to the forest and do penance for fourteen years before returning to the country and Bharata would be made king of Ayodhya. Rama accepted it willingly. He met his mother Kausalya and informed her his departure to the forest. She rushed to Kaikeyi's palace where the king was, with the intention of requesting him to intervene and dissuade Rama from going to the forest. She was startled to see the sad plight of the king. She mourned that Rama, her son, had already left her and asked whether the king also would leave her without anyone to fall back. Dasharatha, at that juncture narrated the curse of the sage [24]. Rama left for the forest accompanied by Lakshmana and Sita. The chariot reached the banks of the river Sarayu before dusk. The masses that followed Rama to the forest were fast asleep and Rama requested the charioteer, Sumanthra, to go back to the capital without waking anyone so that they would think that the three had returned home when they wake up in the morning. The charioteer took leave of them with a heavy heart and proceeded homeward.

Sumanthra reached the city within two hours after the dawn of the day. It was the second day morning. He went along with Vashista to the palace. Dasharatha asked him whether Rama had returned back. When Sumanthra informed him that Rama had entered into the forest along with Lakshmana and Sita, Dasharatha unable to withstand the grief, suddenly breathed his last. In Valmiki Ramayana he lives for a day even after hearing that Rama entered into the forest, but here in Kambaramayana his death is immediate. The message puts him in rude shock and hastens his end. The way in which he passes away shows how deep his affection towards Rama was. To make the death of Dasharatha very poignant, Kamban has made him to narrate the curse by the sage well in advance to Kausalya. The advancement of the narration of the curse speaks volumes of the ingenuity of Kamban. Further in Valmiki's work, Dasharatha dies after midnight on the sixth day after Rama left for the forest but in that of Kamban he dies in the morning of the second day. This change also makes the narration more effective.

We can note that a shift in the timing of the introduction of the three queens and the person, whom they were introduced to, makes a big difference in the two epics. In Valmiki Ramayana they were introduced to the sage Bharadvaja by Bharata when he took leave of him to go in search of Rama [25]. The whole army stayed there that night and the sage fed them well. Till the time of departure the queens were not introduced to him. When they were about to leave, the sage asked Bharata who they were and Bharata introduced them to him. Kamban shifts the scene of introduction to another place and the timing is also different. He avoided introducing them to the sage. He introduced them to Guha, the chieftain of the hunters and that too when they were crossing the Ganges in his boat. While the boat was on sail, Guha asked Bharata who those ladies were and he introduced them one by one. First he introduced Kausalya as the first queen of Dasharatha and the fortunate mother of Rama and then Sumitra as the youngest queen of the king and the mother of Lakshmana, the ever-accompanying brother of Rama. Finally he introduced Kaikeyi as his mother and the root cause of all the sorrows and sins of the world. Guha paid his obeisance to all of them. Then Kausalya told Bharata that they were fortunate to have another brother to them in Guha and blessed the five brothers to stand

united as one and rule the kingdom [26]. The change is apt for it is natural while they were crossing the river in boat to engage them in such conversation rather than sitting quiet.

Finally let us consider the resolve of Rama to protect the sages from the ignominious onslaughts of the Rakshasas. It is present in both the works. According to Valmiki Ramayana one day Rama met a sage by name Suthekshna on his way to Panchavati during their stay in the forest. The sage gave Rama and Lakshmana cases for arrows, bows and swords. Rama and Lakshmana accepted them and proceeded on their journey. Sita did not like Rama carrying weapons with him. She narrated the story of a sage who was spoiled by Indra who presented him a sword, which the sage misused and committed number of sins and ultimately went to hell. He reminded her the promise he had made to the sages who sought protection for them. He had assured them that he would save them at any cost. Rama declares to Sita, "oh, Sita, I am prepared to give up my life, Lakshmana and even you but not the words that I have given to the sages" [27].

In Kambaramayana, we do not see Sita speak disapprovingly of Rama carrying the arms. Kamban has omitted it but not the speech of Rama which shows his strong will to save the sages. He has improvised further and transported it to another place. Vibheshna seeks asylum at the feet of Rama. All his commanders and friends but Hanuman objected to it. Rama spoke to them at length the importance of protecting those who seek asylum and he said that was fighting not only to get back Sita but also to keep the assurance that he had given to the sages [28]. It is more apt to speak about his assurance to his friends than reminding it to Sita.

The deviations that Kamban has made with regard to the treatment of the time and duration of the events are too many. Even though the artistic touch of Kamban is clearly visible in his work in almost all the grandeur aspects of an epic poem, it is more apparent in the treatment of the time element of the story. He had his own time schedule of events.

Let me emphasize one thing before studying in detail some of the deviations of Kamban in the treatment of the time element. Both Valmiki and Kamban have followed only the lunar calendar and not the solar calendar. It is well, nay, impossible to show correctly the time of events by the description of moon as some of the months, in the Solar calendar, have more than one full moon and new moon days. Whereas it is easy to indicate the time of events by the description of the moon for there is only one new moon and full moon day in a lunar month. The lunar month starts from the day after the new moon and ends with new moon. The days in between two new moon days are 29.5305. Further the mention of 'thethis' by both the poets is enough to know that they follow only lunar calendar.

There are some wrong notions about the age of Rama and Sita at the time of their marriage and the age at which Rama went to the forest. The commentators and the critics of Valmiki Ramayana say that Rama was 12 and Sita was 6 at the time of their marriage [29]. No valid evidence is found in it to establish their contention. Dasharatha told Visvamitra that Rama had not completed 16 when he insisted him to send Rama along with him to protect the sacrifice that he would be doing.

Unashoodashavarsha: mae raama: raajeevalooana: I [30]

This means that he had completed fifteen and sixteenth year was running then. The commentators and critics have given undue importance to the words of Maricha who says that the age of Rama was twelve when he guarded the sacrifice of the sage, Visvamisra [31] and that of Sita who says in the course of her conversation with Ravana who was in the guise of a sage that she lived in Auyodh after her marriage for twelve years and on the thirteenth year Rama was sent to the forest and his age then was five and twenty [32]. These verses are definitely interpolations as they contradict the statement of Dasharatha. It was a convention in those days to arrange marriage for a boy nearing sixteen with a girl nearing twelve. It has been followed both by Valmiki and Kamban and the critics had totally thrown it to winds when they calculated the age of Rama as twelve and that of Sita as six at the time of their marriage. In the Kambaramayana, Dasharatha has told Visvamisra that Rama was too young to fight against the giants and not his age. But the epithets like 'nambi', 'veran', 'semmal', 'iyyan' suggest that he was a lad of age. The description of the physical features of Sita very well shows that she too was a matured lady to enter into married life. Panguni Uttaram according to Astronomy always falls on a full moon day. As Kamban has given the same horoscope of Rama given by Valmiki, we can safely conclude that Rama was on the verge of completion of his 16th year when he went with the sage Visvamisra. Kamban says that the marriage took place on the full moon day of the month of Panguini. The days between the marriage and the ninth day (navami) after the new moon of the month of Chitra, the 16th birthday of Rama are just 24 days. If we deduct these days from 16 years then we will get the day of the marriage of Rama. As per this calculation, it is clear that Rama got married when he was 15 years, 11 months and 6 days old.

Almost all the critics and commentators of Valmiki and Kamban say that Dasharatha decided to adorn Rama with the imperial diadem twelve years after his marriage. This is also a false notion and there is no valid testimony either in the epic of Valmiki or Kamban to prove it. On the contrary the words of Kausalya to Rama at the time of his departure to the forest in the epic of Valmiki suggest that he was sent to forest when he was exactly seventeen years old. The grief-stricken Kausalya asks Rama, "Oh Rama, seventeen years after you were born passed on happily but at this advanced age how can I live peacefully without you?"

Dasha sapta ca varshani tava jatasya raaghava I

Aasihaani prakaanshantya mayaa dukkharikshayam II [33]

That was on a day with Punarpusa star in the month of Chirai. Chirai Punarpusam is the star in which Rama was born. It is strong evidence in Valmiki Ramayana, to establish that Rama was seventeen when he went to forest. In the Kambaramayana, Rama left for the forest on the fifth day (panchami) of the waxing moon and that means he went to forest some days after the completion of seventeen years. We can say with authority that there is no single evidence in the epic of Kamban to say that Rama went to the forest twelve years after his marriage.

Sufficient clues are available in the Kambaramayana to find out the exact day when Ravana abducted Sita and the day when Rama released her from her confinement. There is a slight variation in the period of confinement of Sita in Lanka between the two works. According to Valmiki, it is ten months but according to Kamban it is eleven months.

One evening Shurpanakha accidentally saw Rama and fell in love with him. Unsuccessful in her attempt to get Rama she returned to her place with uncontrollable passion for him. She was tortured by the radiant rays of the moon

that was almost round in shape and by the cold misty wind of the winter (Hemanta rthu) that was fast coming to a close.

Next morning she made yet another attempt to get Rama for her. Lakshmana mutilated her when she tried to abduct Sita. He immediately approached Kara to wreak vengeance on Rama and Lakshmana who were responsible for her mutilation. An encounter broke out between the mighty army of Kara consisting of fourteen thousand soldiers and the valiant but single-handed Rama. The battle was over within two hours. The whole army was routed and Rama returned victoriously. Shurpanakha flew swiftly like a hurricane and reached Lanka in the early night. She fell at the feet of Ravana who was witnessing a dance performance. She described the matchless beauty of Sita and said that she was subjected to disgrace by Rama and Lakshmana when she attempted to carry off Sita for him. Her description of Sita was so eloquent and effective as to make him very passionate for her and he thought of nothing but Sita. His lust for her knew no bounds. He was unable to bear the biting cold of the season and enquired what the season was. Kamban says that the cold season went off and the spring season set in [34]. That was a full moon day. It is clear from this description that one season ends with and another season begins from the full moon day.

As the spring season begins from the full moon in the month of Chitrai, we are made to understand that the day on which Shurpanakha met Rama is the last day of the cold season. Ravana went to the forest the next day i.e. the first day after the full moon, which was also the day of the commencement of the spring season and brought Sita to Lanka and imprisoned her in the Ashoka Park.

To put it in a nutshell, these things have happened in three successive days i.e. Shurpanakha met Rama a day before full moon (chaturdasi of bright half) and Ravana was tormented by the thoughts of Sita on the night of the full moon (Purnima) and Sita was imprisoned from the next day after the full moon (prathama of dark half). After eleven months of imprisonment, exactly on a full moon day she was released from prison by the efforts of Rama. When Hanuman met Sita in the Ashoka Park she said that she would live only for a month more and she should be freed within that period otherwise she would end her life at the expiry of the time limit. The description of the moon on the night when Hanuman met Sita by Kamban makes us understand beyond a shade of doubt that it was a full moon for he says that the moon was resplendent and round like the face of a damsel and umbrella of Indra, the head of the celestials [35].

After Sita was carried away by Ravana, Rama reached Malyavan Hills before the point of winter solstice, Dakshinaayanam [36] that starts from the first of the solar month of Aadi. He stayed there patiently till the rainy season, which lasted for four months, came to a close. The season ended on the full moon of the month of Maarkazhi. [37] After some days the fleet of monkeys arrived and Rama inspected them along with Lakshmana for twenty days i.e. till the new moon day of Thai. [38] Next day, four batches of monkeys were dispatched to all the four quarters of the world to search for and find out the whereabouts of Sita and report within a month i.e. before the next full moon day of Maasi. While the other batches returned unsuccessful, Hanuman, after much desperation, at last, located her in the Ashoka Park in Lanka on the full moon day and returned the next day. Immediately Rama along with the huge army of monkeys started to Lanka. According to Kamban, the army reached the shores of the southern seas on the twelfth day. [39] On the thirteenth day Vibheshna sought refuge at the feet of Rama. Rama went on fast for seven days starting from the fourteenth day seeking the favor of the God of Seas to cross the ocean. [40] On the advice of the Sea God, the causeway between the southern tip of India and Lanka was

constructed in just three days starting from the twenty-first day. [41] On the twenty fourth day the army and Rama reached the Suvela Hills and camped there. Standing on the top of the Suvela hills and on the city tower respectively Rama and Ravana assessed the size of the army of each other. The war broke out on the twenty sixth day and lasted for five days. Ravana was killed by Rama on the last day. As the day on which Hanuman met Sita is a full moon day, the thirtieth day from it must also be a full moon day. It was the full moon day of the month of Panguni. Thus Sita had spent according to Kamban exactly eleven months from the first day after the full moon in the month of Chitrai to the full moon day of Panguni. An analysis of the data available in the Valmiki Ramayana brings to light that Sita was abducted by Ravana on the first day of the month of Aani i.e. the day after the new moon of Vaikasi and was set free from the prison on the last day of the month of Panguni, new moon day. Thus, according to Valmiki, Sita had been in prison exactly for ten months.

There are differences between Valmiki and Kamban in the duration of certain events. According to Valmiki, Hanuman met Sita in the prison on the fourteenth day of the bright half and return back to Rama on the full moon; the army left for Lanka immediately and moved so swiftly and reached the shores of the southern sea the very next day; On that very day Vibheshna joined Rama and Rama commenced his penance towards the Sea God that lasted for three days; [42] the construction of the cause way started on the fourth day and went on for five days and the task was accomplished the eightieth day; [43] the army crossed the ocean the same day; the battle began on the ninth day and continued for seven days and ended on the fifteenth day i.e. the new moon day when Rama put an end to the life of Ravana.

Further a close analysis of both Valmiki and Kamban brings to light that the events after the destruction of Ravana till the release of Sita have taken place on the new moon day itself. But the commentators failing to note the coherence in the presentation of those events have said they all took place one by one in the successive days. This explanation needs to be corrected. The marked difference between Valmiki and Kamban is about the day of the annihilation of Ravana. Valmiki has shown that it had taken place on new moon day whereas Kamban says that was on full a moon day. All the events beginning from the meeting of Hanuman with Sita and ending with the destruction of Ravana have happened, in Valmiki, over a period of sixteen days whereas they all have taken place, in Kamban, exactly in a month. A comparative study of the two epics will reveal that the time schedule of Kamban and Valmiki are entirely different. [44]

The additions made by Kamban add new colour and elevate the grandeur of the epic. The fascinating story of Hiranya is fused into the epic at the appropriate place by an appropriate character. Vibheshna who admonished his elder brother not to think lightly of Rama, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu for even Hiranya who was stronger and mightier than him was ultimately killed by the Lord who came in the form of Narasimha. The meeting of Vibheshna and Kumbhakarna whom the former tried to convince and win him to the side of Rama is Kamban's creation and that brings the loyalty and deep affection that he had for Ravana out and delights very much the reader.

Not only the additions but also the omissions reveal the robust literary mind and critical sense of Kamban. The story of the marriage of Uma with Lord Shiva and the birth of Lord Muruga, the lineage of the king Sumati, the instruction of Aaditya hrudayam to Rama by the sage Agasthia and the like are safely omitted by Kamban and they definitely hinder the free flow of the story since they digress far from the main theme of the epic.

Kamban has added many lofty ideals and his mission was to propagate them and make the people live a just life with contentment and peace of mind. The central idea of the epic of Valmiki is that anyone, however strong he may be, who cherishes foul desire about other's wife and longs for her will ultimately be ruined. Kamban does not omit it. He hammers it into the minds of all in telling words. He preaches universal brotherhood through the epic. In Valmiki, Rama has treated Guha, Sugriva and Vibheshna, who helped when he was in adversity, only as his friends and not as his brothers. A reference is there in Valmiki Ramayana that says that Rama told Sugriva who took leave of him after attending the coronation ceremony that he considered him as their fourth brother
Tvasmaakam caturnaam tu bhraataa sugreeva panchama: I [45] says Rama to Sugriva.

Kamban has made Rama to take the three who became his friends in his forest life as his brothers. Thus Guha, the hunter-chieftain of the Ganges, Sugriva, the monkey king of Kishkinda and Vibheshna, the noble Rakshasa of Lanka became the dear brothers of Rama and the sons of Dasharatha, the King of kings of Ayodhya. [46] By this act of Rama, Kamban proclaims universal brotherhood. This is a contribution, special and unique, by Kamban to the world of literature. One wonders to note Kamban who lived in the 12th century B.C. stand in the world of Tamil literature holding aloft the flag of Universal Brotherhood.

Thus a comparative study of Kambaramayana and Valmiki Ramayana will surely make the readers understand the improvisations made by Kamban that enrich his epic and make it appear a different one from its original, though he accords a high place of esteem in his heart and pays his grateful obeisance to Valmiki, the great Indian sage of the hoary past. The understanding of the merits of the Kambaramayana will not, in my humble opinion, be complete with out going through the Valmiki Ramayana, its original.

[1] V.V.S.Aiyar, Kambaramayana Study 1965, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, page 37

[2] Paripaadal, 19: 50

[3] Akanaanuuru, 70

[4] Valmiki Ramayana, Yuddhakaandam 12: 14 (M.N.Ramaswamy Iyer memorial edition)

[5] Kambaramayana, 3390 (Kamban kazhagam Chennai edition)

[6] -Do- 6037

[7] Valmiki Ramayana, Balakaandam, chapter 48

[8] Kambaramayana, 452 – 479

[9] Valmiki Ramayana, Kishkinda kanda, chapter, 33

[10] Kambaramayana, 4319

[11] Valmiki Ramayana, Kishkinda kanda 55: 3,4

[12] Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya kanda, 52: 102

[13] -Do- 96: 1,2

[14] Valmiki Ramayana, Aranya kanda 73: 13

[15] Kambaramayana, 2026, 5083

[16] -Do- 2231

[17] Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya kanda 12: 94

[18] Valmiki Ramayana, Aranya kanda, 17: 1-11

[19] Kambaramayana, 2762 - 2764

[20] Aranya kanda 19: 5

[21] Kambaramayana, 10172 - 10189

[22] Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya kanda 112: 25

[23] Valmiki Ramayana Ayodhya kanda 63: 4

[24] Kambaramayana, 1677 -1692

[25] Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya kanda 92: 19 - 28

- [26] Kambaramayana, 2366 -2372
[27] Valmiki Ramayana, Aranya kanda 10:19
[28] Kambaramayana, 6479
[29] Agni vesya Ramayana sara , Sloka, 4
[30] Valmiki Ramayana, Bala kanda 20: 2
[31] Valmiki Ramayana, Aranya kanda 38: 1 - 30
[32] -Do- 47: 3,4,5&10
[33] -Do- 20: 45
[34] Kambaramayana, 3165
[35] -Do- 4887 - 4889
[36] -Do- 4148
[37] Kambaramayana, 4256
[38] -Do- 4439
[39] -Do- 6058
[40] -Do- 6593,6594
[41] -Do- 6739
[42] Valmiki Ramayana Yuddha kanda 21: 10
[43] -Do- 22: 73
[44] vide the book Kambanadar – Pudia veliccham by the author of this paper
[45] Valmiki Ramayana Yuddha kanda 130: 47
[46] Kambaramayana ,6507

D. Gnanasundaram, M.A., Ph.D., Dip in Sanskrit
Former Professor & Head
PG & Research Dept. Of Tamil
Pachaiyappa's College, Chennai- 600 030
Tamilnadu, India