



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Kamban And The Poet Of The Rāmācharitam

Dr.Kamaraj S,

Junior Resource Person

LDCIL,

Central Institute of Indian Languages,

Mysore

### Abstract

To study a poet or his works, it is essential to understand the period in which he lived, along with the political and social conditions of that time. Every poet's literary creation reflects the age, politics, and society in which he lived. Kamban and Rāma are no exceptions to this rule.

Keywords: Kamban- Rāmāyaṇam – Rāmācharitam – **Seeraman** - Relationship

### Kamban and the Kamba Rāmāyaṇam

Exploring the history of Kamban and uncovering factual details about his life is not easy. Various legends about his life often hinder strict historical analysis. However, some information given by Dr. S. Ramakrishnan provides us with a few authentic details. According to him, there are only three definite historical facts about Kamban:

1. He was born in Thiruvazhundur, a fertile village on the banks of the river Kaveri, in Chola Nadu.
2. He was patronized by Sadaiyappa Vallal of Vennaṇallur.
3. He composed the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* out of devotion and love for the story of Rāma's incarnation.

### The Greatness of Kamban

Kamban possessed mastery in both Tamil and Sanskrit. Poet-laureate Kavimani Desigavinayagam Pillai praises this by saying:

*"One who understood Aryan (Sanskrit) well, and one who grasped the depth of Tamil equally."*

The *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* is a monumental work, rich in sweetness, simplicity, and profound depth. Kamban's poetic genius is celebrated in the traditional honorific phrases: *"The great one in learning, Kamban"*, *"Emperor of the tongue"*, and *"The generous patron of Chumpanadu"*.

## The Fame of the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam*

From the time of its composition until today, the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* has been admired and celebrated. Kamban was an unparalleled poet. He understood the flow of time, sensed the disposition of the people, embraced Tamil culture, and composed his epic accordingly. In the tradition of classical epics, the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* stands out as a great literary masterpiece that has captivated the hearts of the people from the very age in which it was created.

However, in the period when it first appeared, it did not receive recognition of equal measure from the contemporary scholars and learned men. There may have been various historical reasons for this. Yet, at present, it is impossible to determine them with certainty. As literature, the greatness of the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* is clearly revealed in the research studies and scholarly writings produced by modern scholars.

## The Period of Kamban

Scholars hold three different views regarding the period in which Kamban lived:

1. Some claim that he lived in the 9th century CE.
2. Others suggest the 10th century CE.
3. Yet others place him in the 12th century CE.

### 1. 9th Century CE

The date “*Saka year 807, Panguni, that day*” corresponds to February 23, 886 CE. Based on this, some scholars place Kamban’s period in the 9th century CE. Dr. S. Ramakrishnan accepts this view without objection. Professor Ku. Balasundara Mudaliar had earlier presented the same argument in his book *Sadaiyappa Vallalum Kambarum* (“Sadaiyappa Vallal and Kamban”).

### 2. 10th Century CE

Regarding the 10th century view, scholars such as C. Vai. Sadasivapandarar and T.P. Meenakshisundaran argue, based on certain songs and specifically songs numbered 47, 48, and 49 in the *Ulaviyar* collection, that Kamban lived in the first half of the 10th century CE.

### 3. 12th Century CE

The view that Kamban lived in the 12th century CE is based on linguistic and literary analysis, as presented by Professor Vaiyapuri Pillai. His reasoning includes:

- (a) Certain terms and expressions in Kamban’s works, such as *Sakabtham*, *Kambanadan*, *Kaviyarangu*, are considered to have appeared in later periods.
- (b) References such as “*Chennai Naal Theriyai Veeran Thyaga Mavinathan*” and “*Bhuvibugazh Chennipor Abayan Tholbugazh Kavigal Thammanaiyen Kankarasiyum*” point to Thyaga Vinothan, a figure of the 12th century, the third Kulothunga Chola.
- (c) The influence of works such as *Thandiyalangara Sevvaakam*, the *Pattial* texts, and minor literary works can also be observed in Kamban’s epic.
- (d) Scholars such as Dr. M. Ramasamy, Dr. M. Govindasamy, following Vaiyapuri Pillai’s analysis, support this view. Historical scholar K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, in his discussion of “*Kambanadu Udaya Vallal*”, interprets Kambanadu as the land granted by the Chola king to Suvignan. Therefore, the Chola king granting the land is identified as the third Kulothunga Chola.
- (e) Further support for placing Kamban in the 12th century comes from the study of the emergence of other Ramayana epics in South India. K. P. Bhukev’s book *Ramayana Parināmam* notes that Tamil *Kamba Ramayanam*, Malayalam *Rajaritam*, Kannada *Toruveeramayanam*, Telugu *Dvipada*

*Ramayanam*, and *Bhaskar Ramayanam* all emerged between the 12th and 15th centuries CE. These epics, created roughly in the same literary growth period, contributed significantly to the development of Vaishnavism.

### Period of the Emergence of *Virutham*

If we examine the period during which *virutham* (a classical Tamil poetic form) emerged, we find that both the songs and the poetic form flourished around the 12th century CE. The series “*Virutham ennum onpāvirku Uyar Kamban*” clearly indicates that Kamban lived in the 12th century. Similarly, in Malayalam, the poet Seeraman composed his epic using *virutham*-like stanzas, and he also created them as rhymed songs (*antādhippādal*).

### Kamban’s Historical and Cultural Context

In the *Pālagāṇḍam* edition of the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam*, Murray S. Rajam explains the circumstances that made it appropriate for Kamban to compose an epic like the *Rāmāyaṇa*:

“The village of Thiruvazhundur, where he was born, and the village of Sadaiyappa Vallal, who supported him, were flourishing along the Kaveri River in Chola Nadu. Thiruvazhundur was renowned historically, as evidenced in Sangam literature, the *Tolkappiyam*, and *Pazhamozhi Naanooru*. The local rulers, including Thirumangai Mannan (in his *Prabandham*, Periya Thirumozhi 7–8) and Thirugnanasambandar (in his *Tevaram*, 2.20), praised the village in various ways. From their writings, we know that the area was naturally fertile, that Shaivism and Vaishnavism flourished side by side, both Tamil and Sanskrit traditions were well-developed, and local festivals were celebrated with grandeur. Shaivism and Vaishnavism existed in a complementary, hierarchical harmony in this village.”

### Political Context During Kamban’s Time

1. During this period, the Chola Empire was ruled initially by Vijayalaya Chola, who defeated the Mutharaiyars and captured Tanjore. He was followed by Aditya I, Paranthaka I, Arinjaya, Paranthaka II, Raja Raja I, and Rajendra I, II, III, and Kulothunga I, II, III. These Chola kings extended their influence not only in Tamil Nadu but also periodically into northern, eastern, and southern parts of India.
2. Scholars suggest that Kamban likely lived during the reign of Kulothunga III, and possibly also during the rule of the second Rajadhiraja Chola, who waged two notable campaigns against Sri Lanka. This king earned the distinguished title “*Eelam Konda Rajakesari*”.
3. During Kulothunga III’s rule, the northern parts of the Chola kingdom faced disturbances: the Hoysalas in the Mysore region became aggressive and gained political influence. In response, the Chola king strengthened his army. In 1178 CE, a Chinese scholar documented the Chola army in his writings

## Chola Military and Cultural Context During Kamban's Time

(a) “The Chola government maintained a large army of 60,000 elephants. Each elephant stood 7 or 8 feet tall, and warriors rode atop them in battle, armed with swords, spears, and bows. The archers were skilled in long-range shooting, and victorious elephants were given special titles. High-quality war canopies were raised above them to signify their distinction. Every day, the king personally reviewed the elephant corps.”

(b) The king's inscriptions also record remarkable campaigns in southern regions:

1. Madurai
2. Pandya territories
3. Sri Lanka (Eelam)
4. Karur
5. Kanchi

(c) Many Shaiva and Vaishnava temple constructions took place during the reign of the second Kulothunga Chola. Notable examples include the mandapa work of the Thillai Nataraja Temple and the renovations of the Velur Thirumal Temple. The poet Kuntarur Sekkizhar composed the *Thiruththondar Purana* during this period. Dancers' performances (*kootar*) and hundreds of literary works (*parani texts*) also flourished in this era.

The Chola king was celebrated in literature with titles such as:

- “*Thandamizhkkup ponnae pozhiyum Kulothungan*” (“Kulothunga, who spreads gold over the land of Tamil”)
- “*Mugil ezhumenna ponpodha nalgum Kulothungan*” (“Kulothunga, who bestows prosperity like the seven-fold clouds”)

These accolades, along with Kamban's own praise of the Chola king in his epic, are highlighted by Dr. M. Ramasamy.

## Suitability of Kamban's Time for Composing the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam*

Considering all the above, it can be said that Kamban's era was particularly conducive for composing a grand epic like the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam*. The combination of:

- Kamban's scholarly excellence,
- the cultural richness of the temples (artistic environment suited for celebrating the incarnation of Rāma),
- the military prowess of the age (providing material for detailed war descriptions), and
- the harmonious coexistence of Shaivism and Vaishnavism made it an ideal period for the creation of a literary masterpiece of such magnitude.

## Seeraman and the *Rāmasaritam*

Seeraman, considered the author of the Malayalam *Rāmasaritam*, and his work have been studied by several scholars. Researchers examine the text primarily through the lenses of literature and language. Even today, the period of its composition remains a matter of scholarly debate.

1. Scholars such as Dr. Hermann Gundert, the Malayalam scholar P. Govindapillai, A.R. Rajarajavarma, and the local historian Parameshwara Aiyari consider the *Rāmasaritam* to have been composed in the 12th–13th centuries CE. They provide the following reasons:

(a) Dr. Gundert notes in his Malayalam dictionary:

“The Malayalam language of this text shows usage that predates the arrival of the Portuguese in this region.”

In his work *Malayalam Grammar and Dictionary*, he cites examples from the *Rāmasaritam*. He points out that terms such as *azhuthal*, *aram*, *angi*, and *akarnu*—words not found in other Malayalam dialects of the region—appear only in this text, which serves as evidence of its antiquity.

(b) Historian P. Govindapillai describes it as “one of the oldest works in Malayalam.” He notes that the *Rāmasaritam* is referenced in classical grammatical texts such as *Malayālmā*, *Lilāthilakam*, and *Kerala Pāṇiniyam*. According to Govindapillai, Adityavarma, who ruled the central region of Thrivithangoor between 460–505 CE (Malayalam era), is considered by some to be the author of this text.

### Dating Seeraman and His Composition

Iyer explains further:

“Since the poet begins his work with the phrase ‘*Pogi Pogi Sayana...*’ and concludes it with ‘*Pogipoga Sayanan Sharanathaaranai Vare*’, it can be inferred that the author lived during the 12th century CE, the period when the Sree Padmanabha Temple arose.”

### Relationship with Kamban and Linguistic Evidence

(e) Dr. K.M. George concludes from linguistic analysis:

“The poet Seeraman, having read and studied Kamban’s poems, composed the *Rāmasaritam* in accordance with the cultural and social milieu of his time; hence, Seeraman must have lived after Kamban.”

This conclusion is supported by Kamban’s references, as well as the examples highlighted by Professor Kunjunpillai, who published the *Rāmasaritam*.

(u) Contrasting this view, linguistics scholar K. Unnikrishnavar, in his article ‘*Language in the Rāmasaritam*’, argues:

- Before Kamban, Kulasekhara Azhwar, in his *Thirumozhi*, already sang of the incarnation of Rāma. He writes:

“Kozhiyarkon Kudai Kulasekharan so said, under the auspices of Narayana, ten scholars in this Tamil garland”

Following this model, Seeraman composed each section of his work in ten or eleven stanzas, similar to the structure of Azhwar’s *Thirumozhi*. Furthermore, the text concludes with the phrase “*Pogipoga Sayanan Sharanathaaranai Vare*”, reflecting Azhwar’s stylistic influence. Therefore, some scholars identify Seeraman as a contemporary of the Azhwar period.

(ū) In dealing with the names of Ramayana characters, Seeraman, like Kamban, followed the practice of adapting them appropriately into Tamil, preserving their meaning in translation and context.



## Seeraman and Kamban: Literary Relationship and Period

It can be noted that the names of key characters indicate that Seeraman could not have composed such a Malayalam adaptation without reading Kamban's *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam*. To summarize the *Rāmasaritam*, Seeraman may have followed the style of the Azhwar *Thirumozhi*. Therefore, the argument proposed by Thiru Unnikrishnavar is not fully acceptable.

Considering the evidence cited above, Seeraman likely appeared slightly after Kamban, either in the later half of the 12th century or in the first half of the 13th century.

### Historical and Cultural Context of the *Rāmasaritam*

At the beginning of the Kollam era (825 CE), Seeraman Perumal passed away. By that time, the Tamil rulers' authority in the Chera country had ended. During the subsequent periods of rule, numerous temples were constructed across the region. Notable examples include the Kandyur Sivan Temple, which was built during the reign of Raja Sekharan in Chera Nadu, and the Thiruvanchikkulam Siva Temple, which flourished under Kulasekharan's administration.

During this period, Vaishnavism established itself in the Malabar region. Thirteen major Vaishnava temples (*tiruppathis*) were completed and became centers of cultural activity. With the arrival of the Aryans, interactions between North and South languages and cultures expanded, influencing the literature of southern languages. The resulting cultural and linguistic fusion also reflected in classical texts. The spread of Vaishnavism, promoted by saints like Kulasekhara Azhwar, contributed to the widespread dissemination of Ramayana stories throughout the Malabar region. The epics by Valmiki and Kamban were performed in Vaishnavite assemblies and temple festivals.

### Evidence from Local Inscriptions

(a) Local historian Parameshwara Aiyar notes:

"There is a tradition that the Chola-era Tamil poet Kamban, who lived in the 12th century CE, traveled through the Malabar region and recited his *Rāmāyaṇa* in poet assemblies. Two Tamil verses praising Pillai Perumal, son of Sadaiyappa Vallal, are inscribed in the Muvallur temple in the Thanjavur district. These inscriptions also mention the name Akilakalavallabhan Cheraman Perumal Vanchimarthandan, who ruled Venadu (Velnadu) from 1157 to 1195 CE."

This suggests that Seeraman may have read or listened to Kamban's compositions. Therefore, the political and cultural setting of Kamban's *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* likely influenced the narrative and diction in Seeraman's *Rāmasaritam*.

(b) After the reign of Seeraman Perumal, Chera Nadu was divided into several regions, with minor kings governing under the authority of the larger administration.

### Historical Context and Composition of the Epics

The Chera history notes that the region was divided into twelve parts at the beginning of the Kollam era, which historians place at 825 CE. Around this time, the Samothari Kozhikode fort also existed. To unify the fragmented country and establish a central empire, rulers like Veerakerala Varma and Sri Veer Udhayamarthanda Varma made efforts. Veerakerala, who ruled Vel Nadu, fought alongside Kulothunga Chola but was eventually compelled to submit to the Chola king. Sri Veer Parakramapandiyan renewed the Kottaru Rajendra Chozheeswara temple in Nanjil Nadu. Local historian Parameshwara Aiyar identifies Sri Veer Udhayamarthanda Varma, who opposed this Parakraman, as the ruler during whose reign Seeraman composed the *Rāmasaritam*.

## Military and Cultural Strategy of the Era

The ruler, attempting to establish a strong central empire in Chera Nadu, sought to instill a sense of martial spirit among the people. To inspire courage among commoners, he commissioned and disseminated the recitation of the *Ramayana*, especially its war episodes. The epic's narrative, centered on the events of Ravana's defeat, conveyed heroism and valor. The poet explicitly mentions that his purpose in composing the work was to awaken and nurture these qualities in his audience.

## Conclusion: Kamban and Seeraman in Historical Context

Kamban, born in the prosperous Chola region of Thiruvazhundur, was supported by Sadaiyappa Vallal and passionately composed the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam*. Many scholars have praised this masterpiece and studied it in comparison with other Ramayanas and classical texts to establish Kamban's literary excellence. Most researchers conclude that Kamban lived in the 12th century CE. His period coincided with the Cholas' expansion and consolidation of territory through warfare, providing the historical context for the *Yuddha Kāṇḍam*. The epic's purpose centers on the triumph of virtue over pride and the revelation of divine grace. Other regional Ramayana texts appeared in various languages from the 12th to the 15th centuries CE. Kamban composed his epic in the *virutham* meter.

The *Rāmasaritam* of Kerala likely appeared toward the end of the 12th century CE, during the rule of minor kings who aimed to consolidate their territories into a strong central power. The political and social conditions of the time were ideal for narrating the extended war episodes, making the country particularly conducive for the creation of this first Malayalam epic.

## References

1. Ramakrishnan, *SMu. Nū*, p. 38
2. Kavimani Desikavinayakam Pillai, *Malarum Mālayum* (1986), pp. 21–22
3. Mahakavi C. Subramania Bharati, *Mahakavi Bharatiyar Kavithaigal* (1957), p. 47
4. Ibid., p. 44
5. Daniyan, *On praising a work or author*
6. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamizh Chudar Manigal* (1952), pp. 127–149
7. Ramasamy Manickam, *Kamban Yaar?* (1958), p. 12
8. Fr. Camille Bulcke, *Ramagatha Parinamam* (1962), pp. 512–515
9. Daniyan, *Mu. Nū*
10. Murray S. Rajam (ed.), *Kamba Ramayanam, Balakandam, Introduction* (1968), pp. 5–7
11. Ramasamy Manickam, *Chola History, Volume 3* (1947), p. 81
12. Ibid., pp. 113–114
13. Hermann Gundert, *Gundert Dictionary, Introduction* (1975)
14. P. Govindapillai, *Malayalam Bhasha Saritham* (1980), p. 112
15. Seeraman, *Rāmasaritam*, Section 164, Verse 11
16. Parameshwara Aiyar, *Kerala Sahitya Saritham, Volume 1* (1974), p. 257
17. Unnikrishnavar, *Language in the Rāmasaritam*, Malayalam Bhasha Patalangal (1974), p. 112
18. Parameshwara Aiyar, S, *Mu*.