

Conflict Resolution in the Ramayanas of Valmiki and Kamban

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Abstract

Conflict is an integral aspect of human experience and often serves as a catalyst for growth, understanding, and transformation. This paper explores the theme of conflict resolution in the *Bāla Kāṇḍa* of the *Valmiki Ramayana* and the *Kamba Ramayanam*. Through a comparative study of selected episodes, including the Dasaratha–Vishvamitra encounter, the Tataka episode, the protection of the sacrifice, the Ahalya narrative, and the meeting of Rama and Sita, the paper identifies various forms of conflict such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, ethical, theological, and textual conflicts. It examines how these conflicts are resolved through adherence to dharma, obedience to higher authority, repentance, devotion, divine grace, and spiritual wisdom. Special attention is given to Kamban's poetic reinterpretations of Valmiki's narrative and their contribution to emotional and philosophical depth. The study demonstrates that conflict in the Ramayana tradition becomes a means for moral refinement, spiritual realization, and social harmony.

Key Words: Conflict Resolution, Valmiki Ramayana, Kamba Ramayana, Dasaratha – Vishvamitra episode, Tataka episode, Ahalya episode

Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of human interaction and occurs whenever individuals or groups have differences in opinions, interests, values, or goals. It can arise in personal relationships, workplaces, educational institutions, communities, and even between nations. While conflict is often viewed negatively, it is not always harmful. When managed effectively, conflict can lead to positive changes, improved understanding, stronger relationships, and better decision-making. The process of handling disagreements in a constructive and peaceful manner is known as conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution refers to the methods and strategies used to reduce, manage, or eliminate disputes between people or groups. The main objective is to reach a mutually acceptable solution while maintaining respect and cooperation among the parties involved. Effective conflict resolution encourages communication, understanding, empathy, and collaboration rather than aggression or avoidance.

There are several common causes of conflict, including misunderstandings, poor communication, competition for resources, cultural differences, and differences in values or expectations. If these



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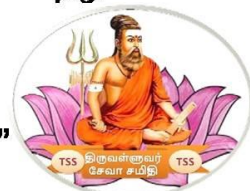
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issues are ignored, conflicts may intensify and negatively affect relationships and productivity. Therefore, it is important to identify conflicts early and address them appropriately.

Different approaches can be used to resolve conflicts. Some common methods include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and collaboration. Negotiation involves direct discussion between parties to find a solution acceptable to both sides. Mediation includes the help of a neutral third party who guides the discussion and encourages compromise. Arbitration involves a third party making a decision to settle the dispute. Collaboration focuses on working together to achieve a win-win outcome.

Good communication skills play a vital role in conflict resolution. Active listening, clear expression of thoughts, patience, empathy, and respect for others' viewpoints are essential for resolving disagreements peacefully. Emotional control is also important because anger and frustration can worsen conflicts instead of solving them.

By understanding the causes of conflict and applying effective resolution techniques, individuals and organizations can turn disagreements into opportunities for growth and positive change. The present paper deals with Conflict Resolution pertaining to the Ramayanas of Valmiki and Kamban (restricted to the First Book only – Bala Kanda).

Conflicts in the Ramayana

The first conflict we come across in the Ramayana is the one between King Dasaratha and Sage Vishvamitra, in the First Book. It begins when the king promises to fulfil the wish of the sage, whatever it be.

ब्रूहि यत् प्रार्थितं तुभ्यं कार्यमागमनं प्रति ॥ १-१८-५६
इच्छाम्यनुगृहीतोऽहं त्वदर्थं परिवृद्धये ।

bruuhi yat praarthitam tubhyam kaaryamaagamanam prati |

ichchamyanugrheeto'ham tvadartham paraivrdhdhaye ||

"You may tell me, entreating which work your arrival chanced here and I feel that I am indeed blessed and wish to make it happen to achieve results. [1-18-56b, 57a]

कार्यस्य न विमर्शं च गंतुमर्हसि सुव्रत ॥ १-१८-५७
कर्ता चाहमशेषेण दैवतं हि भवान् मम ।

Kaaryasya na vimarsham cha gantumarhasi svrata |

Kartaa chaahamashesheNa daivatam hi bhavaan mama ||

"Sir, please do not take the trouble of explaining the work to me or its pro and cons while I am



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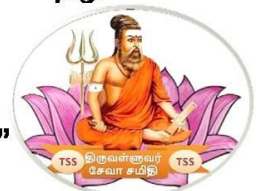
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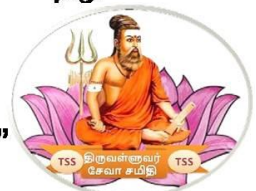


the fulfiller of it without any reminder, since you are god to me, indeed. [1-18-57b, 58a]
The lesson we learn here is that we should not promise anything to anybody without analysing what the request is. We should make a feasibility study and then only commit ourselves to it.
Buoyed by the promise of the king, the sage demands,
स्वपुत्रं राजशार्दूल रामं सत्यपराक्रमम् || १-१९-८
काकपक्षधरं शूरं ज्येष्ठं मे दातुमर्हसि |
Svaputram narashaardoolam raamam satyaparaakramam |
Kaakapakshadharam shooram jyeshtham me daatumarhasi ||
"As such, oh, tigerly king, it will be apt of you spare the services of that brave one whose valour itself is his truthfulness, that youngling whose hair locks are all the more jet black like crow wings on either side of his head, spare that eldest son of yours, namely Rama." [1-19-8b, 9a]
Dasharatha is shocked. Somehow he regains himself and replies,
ऊनषोडशवर्षो मे रामो राजीवलोचनः |
न युद्धयोग्यतामस्य पश्यामि सह राक्षसैः || १-२०-२
Unashodashavarsho me raamo raajeevalochanaH |
Na yuddhayogyataamasya pashyaami saha raakashasaiH ||
"Rama is not even 16. He is not trained in warfare yet. I cannot even guess that he can fight the demons."
The sage is angered by the reply of the king. How can a ruler go back on his words? He says,
पूर्वमर्थं प्रतिश्रुत्य प्रतिज्ञां हातुमिच्छसि |
राघवाणामयुक्तोऽयं कुलस्यास्य विपर्ययः || १-२१-२
Poorvamartham pratishrutya pratjinaam haatumicchasi |
raaghavaaNaamayukto'yam kulasyaasya viparyayaH ||
"On promising me to fulfil my object in the first instance you wish to repudiate it now, undeserving is this kind of deviation for the kings of Raghava dynasty." [1-21-2].
We may now see how Kamban explains this conflict situation.

" எண் அலா அருந்தவத்தோன் இயலிய சொல்
மருமத்தில் எறிவேல் பாய்ந்த
புண்ணில் ஆம் பெரும் புழையில் கனல் நுழைந்தா
லெனச் செவியில் புகுதலோடும்
உள் நிலாவிய துயரம் பிடித்து உந்த
ஆர் உயிர் நின்று ஊசலாட
கண் இலான் பெற்று இழந்தான் என உழந்தான்



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கடுத்துயரம் காணவேலான்”

Dasaratha is in the midst of a big conflict. He cannot say ‘no’ to the sage since he is ‘eN ilaa arum thavaththon,’ the performer of numerous penances. If his request is declined, he will curse the entire family. Moreover, the king will have to face the consequences of breach of promise. He feels that he is like a blind man getting back his vision only to lose it again completely after some time – ‘kaN ilaan petru izhanthaan ena’

Vishvamitra had said,

अहं वेद्मि महात्मानं रामं सत्यपराक्रमम् || १-१९-१४

वसिष्ठोऽपि महातेजा ये चेमे तपसि स्थिताः |

Ahamvedmi mahaatmaanam raamam satyaparaakramam |

Vasishtopi mahaatejaa ye cheme tapasi sthitaH ||

Sage Vishvamitra says, ‘I know about the greatness of Rama.’ We have a mini conflict here. How can the sage say, ‘I know Rama.’ Does it not reflect pride? The conflict is resolved in the next part of the sentence. ‘Not only me. Vasishta also knows.’ Again, there is another mini conflict. ‘Do only you two know the entire secret?’ This conflict also is resolved thus, ‘Not only we two. All those who have specialized in performing penance know the truth.’

Ultimately, sage Vasishta intervenes and asks Dasaratha to send his son along with the sage. On Vasishta’s words, the king agrees. Thus, the conflict is completely resolved.

The second conflict occurs in the course of the journey through the forest. On seeing the rampaging Taatakaa, Sage Vishvamitra asks Rama to kill her. Rama hesitates because there is a ‘kshatriya dharma’ that women should not be killed. But the conflict is resolved by the rule that the ‘sisya dharma’ that is, obeying the orders of the teacher implicitly without questioning, is greater than a particular dharma. Moreover ‘sacrificing’ your particular dharma is not wrong in the interests of public welfare. It is said -

Tyajedekam kulasyaartho graamasyaartho kulam tyajet/

Graamam janapadasyaartho, aatmaartham prthiveem tyajet //

‘A single individual can be sacrificed for the sake of safeguarding the entire family. An entire family can be sacrificed for the sake of the entire village. An entire village can be sacrificed for the sake of the entire nation. The entire earth can be sacrificed for the sake of attaining Self Realization.’

Kamban describes the Tataka episode thus -

சொல் ஒக்கும் கடிய வேகச்சுடுசுரம் கரிய செம்மல்

அல் ஒக்கும் நிறத்தினாள் மேல் விடுதலும் வயிரக்குன்றக்

கல் ஒக்கும் நெஞ்சில் தங்காது அப்புறம் கழன்று கல்லாப்



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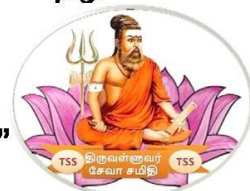
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புல்லர்க்கு நல்லோர் சொன்ன பொருள் எனப் போயிற்றன்றே

‘The arrow of Rama pierced the heart of Tataka and went through the other side. It was like the words of the wise not entering the mind of a wicked man and just going through the other ear.’

Describing the same scene, Kaalidasa says—

Yat cakaara vivaram shilaavane

Taatakopi sa raama saayakah

Apravishta vishayasya rakshasaam

Dvaarataam agamat antakasya tat.

The God of death could not operate against the demons on account of the order of Ravana. He could not put a date for their death. He was looking for a breach though which he can operate again and take the lives of the demons at the appropriate time. The hole created by Rama’s arrow on Tataka provided that breach for the God of death.

Kamban says -

“ஐயன் அது கேட்டு அறன் அல்லவும்

எய்தினால் அது செய்க என்று ஏவினால்

மெய்ய நின் உரை வேதம் எனக் கொடு

செய்கை அன்றோ அறம் செய்யும் ஆறு என்றான்.” (Bala Kandan, 388)

‘Even if it is not dharma, it will become one when ordered by the spiritual teacher.’

It is interesting to analyse the next conflict that comes up as the forest journey continues where Sage Vishvamitra treats Rama like a child. Sings lullaby and puts him to sleep. Then wakes him up by singing,

Kausalya suprajaa rama

Why should the Lord be awakened? He is always awake. So, there is a mini conflict. It is solved by the fact that the Lord obliges his devotees and allows himself to be treated like a child. The ‘vatsalya bhava’ of the devotee reigns supreme.

Rama and Lakshmana protect the sacrifice of the sage. Why should they do so? Sages have immense powers. They can guard themselves against the demons. So, here again we have a small conflict. The resolution is given in the form of the statement that the Lord is the sacrifice, he is the oblation, he is the performer, he is the enjoyer and everything. So, it is appropriate that the Lord protects the sacrifice. The Vishnusahasranama says,

Yajna ijyo mahejyascha kratuh satram sataam gatih 48

Mahaakratur mahaayajvaa mahaayajno mahaahaviih 72

The demons headed by Maricha and Subahu attack Rama and Lakshmana. Rama kills Subahu but Maricha escapes. We have a conflict here. Why did he not chase down Maricha and kill him?



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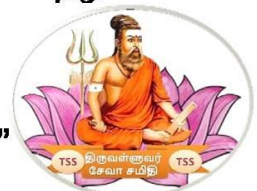
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We have the resolution that Marich had to be spared as he is going to play a vital role in the 'avatara karya' of Rama.

Rama wanted to go back to Ayodhya. Vishvamitra suggested to him that they might visit Mithila to attend the 'svayamvara' of Sita. His intention was to arrange for the wedding of Rama and Sita. As a sage he must be above the domestic ceremonies like a wedding. Why was he interested in the wedding of Rama and Sita? This conflict is solved by one of the commentaries. Sage Vishvamitra had separated a couple – Hsrishandra and his wife- earlier in his life. So he wanted to make amends by being instrumental for the wedding of Rama and Sita and uniting a couple thus.

The Ahalya episode takes place on the way to Mithila. There are a lot of conflicts in this episode. First one – Indra is a God or at least a semi God. Can he commit an offence like this? Resolution – It is a lesson for us. If even Gods can fall a prey to temptations of life, how about us? So it means that we should be extra careful about the temptations of the sense organs. We have to keep them under control and follow a righteous path. The second conflict – Ahalya was perhaps innocent, according some of the later versions of the Ramayana. Why should she be punished by the sage? Conflict Resolution – The punishment was only a pretext. It enabled Ahalya to have a darsan of the divinity. She attained emancipation through him. Third Conflict – Ahalya is the co-offender in this case. She does not deserve sympathy. Conflict Resolution – One time sinner is not an all time sinner. By devotion a sinner can get the sins absolved. Penance and sacrifice help one to climb up the spiritual ladder. Repentance can dissolve the sins. Kamban also justies this line of thinking.

சரம் தரு சாபம் அல்லால் தடுப்ப அருஞ் சாபம் வல்ல
வரம் தரு முனிவன் எய்த வருதலும் வெருவி மாய
நிரந்தரம் உலகில் நிற்கும் நெடும் பழி பூண்டாள் நின்றாள்
புரந்தரன் நடுங்கி ஆங்கு ஓர் பூசை ஆய்ப் போகலுற்றான்” என்றார்.

The verse describes the scene of Indra trying to escape taking the form of a stealthy cat after committing the offence.

There is another verse of Kambar which connects Tataka episode and Ahalya episode. One is about the strength of his arms and other about the sacredness of his feet that brought redemption to Ahalya. Accordingly Sage Gautama had cursed Ahalya to become a stone. Rama stepped on the same stone and Ahalya came to life. This is in conflict with Valmiki according to whom she remained invisible. The stone episode has become popular even before Kalidasa's time as the



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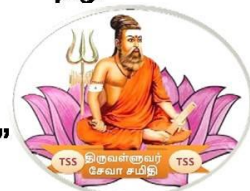
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poet refers to it.

இவ்வண்ணம் நிகழ்ந்த வண்ணம் இனி இந்த உலகுக்கெல்லாம்

உய்வண்ணம் அன்றி மற்றோர் துயர்வண்ணம் உறுவது உண்டோ

மை வண்ணத்து அரக்கி போரில் மழை வண்ணத்து அண்ணலே உன்

கை வண்ணம் அங்கு கண்டேன் கால் வண்ணம் இங்கு கண்டேன்.

The Valmiki version of the curse runs thus:

वायुभक्षा निराहारा तप्यन्ती भस्मशायिनी |

अदृश्या सर्वभूतानामाश्रमेऽस्मिन् निवत्स्यसि || १-४८-३०

Vaayubhakshaa niraahaaraa tapyantee bhasmashaayinee |

Adrshyaa sarvabhootaanaam aashrame asmin nivatsyasi ||

‘The sage cursed even his wife saying, ‘you shall tarry here for many thousands of years to come without food and consuming air alone, and unseen by all beings you shall live on in this hermitage while contritely recumbent in dust.’ [1-48-29, 30]

As Rama and Lakshmana arrive at Mithila. Kamban introduces a pleasing love scene here deviating a bit from Valmiki? Here too we can observe a conflict in the text. It can be resolved by the concept of poetic licence. Poets can make small deviations to introduce novelty and the enhance the rasa element. Rama and Sita have a chance to glance at each other. Did they speak to each other? No need of words there?

Kannodu kanninai nokku okkin

Vay sorkal enna payanumila – Tiruvalluvar

Are they looking at each other for the first time? The Lord and his consort are eternally united. A small break may happen now and then but they will unite again.

Pirindavar koodinal ketkavum vendumo?

annalum nokkinan, Avalum nokkinaal, says Kamban.

In the Wedding hall, the sage asks Rama to have a go at the bow.

Vatsa raama dhanuh pashya iti raamam abraveet. Here the commentators find small conflicts and resolutions.

Why Vatsa, child? Because children do not know fear.

Vatsa Rama, why Rama here? Let not Lakshmana come and take the bow.

Dhanuh pashya – Look at the bow. Why? Do not lose your concentration by looking at others.

Pashya – Look at the bow? Why? Focussing is necessary while handling the bow.

Raama dhanuh – Lovely bow, because it is going to fetch Sita for Rama.



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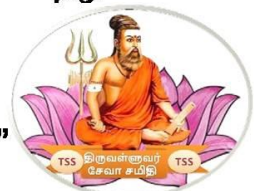
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Conclusion

Thus, the conflicts with respect to the Ramayanas of Valmiki and Kambar present different facets of the problems – inter-personal, intra-personal, text to text and so on. Together though they make an interesting study and story of virtues and greatness of Lord Rama.

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ஆருத்ரா கல்வி மற்றும் ஆராய்ச்சி நிறுவனம் & பிரணவ் ஆய்விதழ்
மாற்றும் திருவள்ளுவர் சேவா சமிதி
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இணையவழி கருத்தரங்கம்
“கம்பராமாயணம் - கம்பனின் காப்பிய நயம்”
Special Volume 4 Issue 4

