

COMRADE KUMBHAKARNA*

Written by Ramu Ramanathan

For the freedom of Arun Ferieira, Shridhar Srinivasan; Vernon Gonsalves and K D Rao.

SCENE 1.

An opening scene from a play.

Music.

Cast enters. They ring bells. They prostate before the audience.
And then they hold up the curtain.

CHORUS: Shake the curtain.
Fan the flame.
Grind the teeth.
Stamp your feet.
Cease your coughings. Your sneezings.
Your shiftings. Your whisperings.
O audience, we welcome thee.
To the Shubh Muhurat of Act-III.
Yes, it's true. In fact it is a matter of fact.
This play does not have a First or Second Act.

Little song and dance.

This is the beginning of our special show.
We're on the move. We're on the go.
Comrade Kumbhakarna is what it will be called.
The title is unoriginal, nonetheless give it a thought.
No star-cast. No financial expenditure.
From start to finish, it is Kumbhakarna Sir.

Conch, etc.

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SCENE 2.

The “play within play performance” goes on.

The actor speaks.

A beat.

Actor: My father is dead.

That’s my father’s body down there.

They are exhuming his body.

They say there’s evidence about him. That he was a revolutionary.

I don’t know what revolutionary means. But father’s body is stinking.

My twin sister (who committed suicide) gives me a mogra. I smell the flower.

The stink from father’s body disappears.

When I was young - my twin sister (who committed suicide) - and I used to plant seeds into the ground. She said to me: "Let's grow money and save ourselves from poverty."

Whenever possible, she planted 10-paise coins in the ground.

Next morning we used to wake up and run outside, but we never became rich.

Father said: "You'll never become rich. The Aryans will never allow you to become rich."

Mother said, "Don't feed the boy's brains with Aryan rubbish."

Father said: "It's better he learns the truth. Instead of dancing and prancing on your stage."

Mother said: "What is wrong with my stage?"

Father said: "There are more lights in your play - than in our life. You put halogens on stage - but there's darkness in the slums. Pah. That's what is wrong with your plays."

On cue, Mother started to beat father.

Whenever mother used to beat father, he used to run away.

It was a pattern.

One day, I followed him.

He climbed a staircase and went up to a terrace. There was a printing press on the ground floor. Father would carry printed copies to the nearby railway station where it would be sold for a few annas.

I started to help father.

He said: "This is better than being an actor? No?"

I said: "Ok".

He said: "One day, you should be able to write books like this, no?"

I said: "Ok".

He said: "Do you know what is the name of this book?"

I said: "No."

He said: "It's *Ravana Kaviyam* – a great poem written by Pulavar Kuzhandai."

I said: "Ok."

He said: "A follower of Periyar Saar."

I said: "Ok."

He said: "You know Periyar Saar?"

I said: "No."

He said: "Pah. Then you know nothing. Periya Saar was the greatest man in this country."

I said: "Ok."

He said: "Don't worry. One day, you must become like Periyar Saar."

I said: "Ok."

He said: "For that you must learn to read and write."

I said: "Ok."

The next day, there was a function.

I attended it.

Thousands of people in black shirts.

A big saar on stage sang a song.

It was a song about Lord Ravana - the straightforward and right thinking and noble.

Everyone sang along with the big saar.

I was called on stage.

I was gifted a black shirt.

Saar told me to go to school.

I bowed to a photograph of Lord Ravana.

When I did so.

I was very happy.

For the first time in my life I was wearing a shirt.

Father and I reached the market. It was crowded.

So we climbed into a lorry which was full of cabbages; and travelled home.

When we reached home, mother was angry.

Mother said: "Why is my son wearing a black shirt?"

Father said: "It is a gift."

Mother said: "Don't corrupt his mind with politics."

Father said: "Woman, this is not politics, its self-respect."

Mother said: "Why does he smell of cabbage?"

Father said: "That's because he ate a lot of cabbage, today."

My mother said: "Is that so?"

And then she boxed my father on his head. Father's brains popped out. My mother shouted, "Shove your brains into your head! Screw them in. You're on planet earth; where even the stupid ones need their brains. Forget all this politics and all. It's not going to take you

anywhere. We need food in our stomach. Not ideas in your head."

Saying so mother stepped into the next room. She returned with a stolen chicken and told father and me to skin it. We were hungry. She said: "Shall I cook you some chicken and hot soup?"

That was the last meal all of us had.

I remember the day.

It was the death anniversary of my Taatha.

Father made a speech.

He said: "Today is the day Anna Saar died. 15 million people attended his funeral. Your Taatha too. He was travelling on the roof-top of the Janata Express. That's when your Taatha was crushed to death."

I miss my father.

My twin sister (who committed suicide), said to me: "Don't miss him. It's pointless to miss anybody, these days."

My twin sister (who committed suicide), also said: "In any case, how do you know he was your father?"

I said: "What?"

My twin sister (who committed suicide) said "Don't you know. There are some people in our theatre company who are their own fathers. Did you know that?"

When I grew older I was anxious because I thought my life was a fast-forward phenomenon. That is, I would quadruple my age. My twin sister (who committed suicide), said: "If this goes on, by the time you're five, you'll be 1,364 years old."

That's old na?

My twin sister (who committed suicide), said: "No one would marry their daughters to you."

Whenever I get nostalgic about the past, it brings back memories.

Ha!

Our mother says: "Everyone in this country has a photographic memory. Some just don't have film. They have stopped manufacturing film, you know."

My plan is to live forever - so far, I've managed.

I am more than one lakh years old. (Laughs)

Last night some drunks came. They wanted to screw mother and some of our actresses. When I woke up, the men were shouting. They said, "You, swines of the earth, you're a travelling theatre company, aren't you?" I said, "Yes". They said: "How come you're not travelling." I said, "Sometimes we perform too!"

They said we are liars. That all actors are liars.

If I were a liar, I'd be a writer. Because writers tell the most beautiful lies.

I want to have a large collection of lies, which I shall scatter on the roads when we travel, here and there.

Once we were travelling.

That was the time, my twin sister committed suicide.

She drank the diesel from the barrels which was meant for the truck.

She left a suicide note - in invisible ink.

The manager treated us to a grand meal. He wanted us to overcome our grief. He prepared rice. Because he said you can have 3,425 rice grains. As opposed to? As opposed to two pieces of rotis. Two versus 3,425.

Rice won. And so, all of us had rice.

That night we travelled in the darkness.

I asked mother, what's the speed of darkness?

She sang a ballad for me.

Hmm.

Mother is losing her voice.

While she was singing, we crossed a river. That's when the police asked, "Do you have any guns with you?" Someone from the group shouted: "Why? Did they steal your gun?"

A mistake.

But as they say, no one is listening until you make a mistake.

We were arrested. We were beaten.

It was a small clean prison, but I wouldn't want to live in it. But that's where we lived for three months.

There was no food.

They told us, the food is not healthy.

Mother told them: "You rich people have got so much food - you're allergic to food. *Allergic* to *food*! Hungry people aren't even allergic to shit."

My mother was a real street fighter. She never re-paid anyone their money.

She said: "I earn money the hard way, and I'm not sharing it. If someone wants money, then they better ask for it a hundred times."

Her life philosophy was: "I prefer money, to shame."

She had tried to educate my twin sister too.

She said: "Men want three things from a woman. Food, sex and silence. So feed them, fuck them and then shaddup and sit under a tree and chew tobacco."

My twin sister disagreed. She said: "That is an awful way to spend your life."

Sigh.

They have forgotten my twin sister.

Right now, everyone is rehearsing, for a new show.

The manager tells me: "Son --- Plan to be spontaneous tomorrow."

How?

Half the actors are below average.

Hmm.

Theatre gives art such a bad name.

Every country has the same two kinds of theatre: the one the people go to; and the other the people used to go to.

The only acting I ever saw was when my twin sister spurned the manager's lustiness. She was grinning.

I said: "If you smile like that on stage, just think about the money they will throw onto the stage, sister!"

She scoffed at me: "Money is cheap."

Those were my twin sister's last words.

My father did not have any last words.

I know.

Since I was present when he died.

That day, I accompanied him to the printing press.

We climbed to the terrace.

There were some books on the terrace.

I thought it was to be taken to the bus stand.

Father said: "No. We have to burn them."

I asked: "Why?"

Father said: "Saar, said so."

I said: "Ok."

We took the books to the Picket Ground.

Saar came.

He made a speech. He told us to spurn god; and focus on humanity. He said, that's the only way to self respect.

Then, one by one, the books were thrown into the bonfire.

Manusmitri.

Puranam.

Sillapaddikaram.

Ramayana.

It was great fun.

Everybody was wearing black shirts.

Everybody was shouting slogans.

Then suddenly, father jumped into the bonfire.

To this day, I don't know why father did that.

No one does.

Mother said: "Stupidity! What can one do with stupidity?"

That's when they wrapped father's body in a blue coloured plastic sheet and took it away.

Perhaps mother was right.

That was the day, I became an actor.

My twin sister (who committed suicide) said: You were doomed. You had no other choice.

Conch, etc.

A flurry of action.

SCENE 3.

A rainy, lonely night.

Twin Sister: It's a rainy night, a lonely night. It is the first death anniversary of the night our father died. I am young, very young. But I understand the fundamental incompleteness of things. All of us think we understand what is going on in the world.

Mother says: "Our theatre company will re-live the good times."

I don't know how mother can say that. There's been so much of violence in Thamiaraparani and Kalapatti and Kodyankulam and Malevalulu. They poisoned the water in our borewell.

Mother says: "But they have even renamed the district in the name of one of our leaders no?"

I warn her: "Mother, you're looking into the rear-view mirror."

She tells me, "No, no. It's only a matter of days when the good times will come knocking on our door."

Aha.

But history doesn't work that way. It hops and jumps. It never crawls, no?

Today, is one such day.

It may seem crazy to some of you, now.

Many years later, it will be acceptable.

Tonight is a crazy night when history will fast forward.

A beat.

Mother, how did you meet father, I ask?

Mother says: At a play performance. It was my debut performance as Goddess Sita. I was waiting for my father to come.

Instead my father appeared.

Mother says: "Your father had bad news. My father had been arrested.

Why, I asked mother. Was grandfather a bad man?

Mother replied: "I don't know. I don't understand politics."



Me: Mummy, mummy, I am very hungry
Is there something I can put in my tummy?

Twin Sister: I learnt the truth later. The police accused father of inciting violence and propagating the Asura ideology of 'power through violence, through a bow and arrow and a Kalashnikov.'

Me: (overlapping) Mummy, mummy, I am very hungry
Is there something I can put in my tummy?

Twin Sister: While grandfather was being transferred to the jail, a mob attacked him. 14 bullets were fired. One remained in grandfather's heart. They could not extract it because of medical complications.

Me: Mummy, mummy, I am very hungry
Can I eat these bullets?

Twin Sister: Mother snatched the 13 bullets. Mother said: "These are my bullets. The only memory of my dead father and my dead husband."

In their first meeting, my father presented my mother with 13 bullets that were removed from grandfather's body. This was one minute before she was going on stage as Maate Sita.

Mother giggled: "That was our first meeting. It was my first performance as Goddess Sita. And I did the entire show with 13 bullets in my fist."

Thunder and storm.

Me: Mummy, mummy, I am very hungry
Is there something I can put in my tummy?

Mother: Silence.
Listen, you and your twin sister, today is a sad day.
So let me lift your spirit, do hear what I've to say
Today, we'll cancel our visit to the temple of Lord Rama
Because of this thunder and lightning, please stay calm!!!

Twin Sister: So what we do, now, mother?
Do perform a story, for me and my twin brother

Mother: Umm.
Let me tell you a tale from the Ramayana
Like your great grand-mother told me - through naach
and gaana
Let's begin now and here, with a chapter that you want
to hear
Please whisper what you want to be told into my left
ear

Twin Sister: We don't want to hear the Ramayana

We want to hear the story of Kumbhakarna.

Mother: Kumbhakarna? The sleepy headed Asura? Why him?
Surely there are better persons to whom I can sing a hymn?

Twin Sister: My brother here is impressed by the Asura.
He wants to master the bhavas and rasas of the Rakshasa.

Clears throat, etc.

Mother: Hmm.
Ok.
To begin at the beginning.
Let's dedicate a dance to the Shiv Ling.

A bit of music, etc.

Mother: The philosophical elements of the Puranas.
Can be seen in the Ramayana.
The work begins with a story.
Which is neither funny, nor gory.
A certain Brahman went to sage Agastya.
And asked him the direct cause of Moksha and of Sadhana.

Twin Sister: Then did Agastya reply?
Or did he fly a kite?

Mother: Agastya, the sage.
Spoke of another tale.
In which Karunya Agnivesya sings ...
Of Apsaras, Indra and a king

Twin Sister: Oh no!

Mother: O yes, because it so transpired.
That King Aristanemi was quite tired.
So he gave his kingdom to his son.
And took to Tapsaya under the sun.
Soon Indra wanted him in heaven.
He sent an Apsara, not one, but seven.
But the king wasn't to agree so easily.
He asked for an explanation of Heavenly Policy.

Twin Sister: Heavenly policy.
This, we don't quite see.

Mother: When the policy was told.
The king went cold.
Indra got perturbed, he fretted and fumed
There was nothing else he could do, he assumed,
Until he sent the king to Valmiki
Freeing himself from this acrimony.

Me: Mummy, mummy, I am very hungry
Is there some traditional food I can put in my tummy?

Mother: Sssh, there's much more to be said.
And time's running out, for she has to go to bed....
So let me see, where was I?

Ah, it was in Valmiki's cottage, in the night.
The king asked Valmiki about Moksha.
To which Valmiki interposed dialogues from the
Ramayana.

Now, Valmiki who had heard the deeds of Rama
From the foremost of saints, Narada.
Composed the first verse.

No one knows for (better or worse).
But since it was born out of his Shokha.
Valmiki, let it be known as Shloka.

Pause.



Mother: And then came Brahma-the four-headed. STOP.
He spoke, and I repeat "O thou best of the hermits.
STOP.
Thou hast? unconsciously madeth a verse. STOP.
Verses that shall henceforth be immortal. STOP.
So I, Brahma, ask thee Valmiki. STOP.
To celebrate the life and times of Shri Rama. STOP....

Twin Sister: Ah, I see it quite graphically. This is nothing but praise for Lord Rama. You remember how during last year's Dussera rally, they dropped his deity in the middle of the road and attacked us with thousands of soda bottles.

Mother: You incorrigible side-kick of a girl. How dare you interrupt me? Who do you think you are?

Twin Sister: I am his Twin Sister. And he is he is ... Kumbhakarna.

Quick transition into an over-dramatised performance.

Me: Yes. Mummy. I am your helpless devotee. I'm Kumbhakarna, vanquisher of Indra, and Death.

Mother: Ha-Ha-Ha. If you're Kumbhakarna. Then I'm Brahma.

Me: I salute you, Lord Brahma.

Mother: And I, Brahma have heard of thou, and of thy wrong doings. The untold damage thou has done to the Gandharvas and the Vidyadharas, and the gods and the Rishis. Yes, I remember, Kumbhakarna - the devourer of creatures so much so that creation will soon be devoid of the created beings that I so lovingly created.

Me: Lord, but that's not true. How can you believe it....

Mother: If I, Brahma, can believe that thou Kumbhakarna, on thy birth swallowed a 1,000 nurses and midwives then I can believe anything.

Me: O Creator of Mine. So what are you going to do now...

Mother: I Brahma, am going to give thee the honour to choose from three boons.

Me: Three boons... are you sure?

Mother: Yes, O Yes, I'm very sure. Now hear my clairvoyant call. Boon Number One: A transfer of citizenship from the Ramayana to any other epic of your choice. Boon Number Two: Access to a 30-second documentary of your killing 'who-dunnit'. Lord Rama with the Aindra, or Lakshman, with the Brahmastra. And finally Boon Number Three: Nityatwam.

Me: I accept it, Lord, I'll take boon number three.

Mother: Boon number Three.... which is?

Me: Er ... Nidratwam.

Mother: So be it, O Rakshasa. May you lie buried in sleep, and sleep the sleep of a dead man.

Me: (screams) Nooooo....

Mother: And as long as the mountains and the seas, birds and plants exist on this planet may my ways be known to all, and my praises be sung.

Me: Mummy, mummy, I am very hungry
Is there something I can put in my tummy?

Me falls asleep.

Mother and Twin Sister look at each other.

Mother: Thank Lord Rama. The boy is asleep.

Twin Sister: (Sighs) It's so tough to tell this story ... with each passing year.

Mother: Oh. Why so little one?

Twin Sister: You won't understand, mother. History is opaque. What you see is not always true.

Mother: Meaning ...

Twin Sister: You and I are merely seeing what comes out. Not what it will lead to. My brother's obsession with Kumbhakarna is not healthy. Like his father, and grand-father, he will die an untimely death.

Mother: Please don't talk rubbish.

Twin Sister: His death is foretold. It is written in his bhaagya. Look, at his forehead. Can't you read it?

Mother: Where? Show?

Twin Sister: It says: History abhors a vacuum. Beware of the two strangers with a neck tie --- who visit your town on a full moon day. They are ordinary, mediocre government officials, BUT they shall kill your first born. Death is a contagious disease in our family. Thatha on the train rooftop. Appa in a bonfire. And now, my brother. Mother, hold me tight!

Mother: Two strangers with a neck tie? On a full moon day? Where are they?

Cross fade.



SCENE 4.

Iyer and Nair enter.

They are wearing a neck-tie.

Kumbhakarna is dozing under a tree.

Iyer: Jai Om. Jai Shambu. Look at the full moon, it is so pretty. We've reached our destination. O' Nair, do you notice, nobody to receive us!

Nair: (huffing & puffing) It's so excessively hot. I'm sweating and stinking in this heat. *Ooof*. I would have preferred a round of golf, instead of all ... this.

Iyer: That's why we are here. Remember? You played eighteen holes with the director last Saturday. You kicked his backside. I told you, don't. Now he has sent us – here!

Nair: Don't be over-smart, O Iyer. If you took a fork to your mouth the way you swing a golf club back, you would starve to death. With me it's different. When it's breezy, golf is easy.

Iyer: Easy!!! Golf! What sort of a game is it that is spelt flog backwards.

Nair: That's because you don't know how to putt or when to use a seven-iron. The only time I've seen you wield an iron was when you used it to kill a bandicoot on the course.

Iyer: Bah. Gah. Pah.

Nair: Hmm. So remind me? Why are we here?

Iyer: Where?

Nair: Here. In the middle of wilderness. This back and beyond of nowhere.

Iyer: On Sunday, 16 policemen were killed in two separate incidents.

Nair: Who is to blame?

Iyer: The Asuras and the Rakshasas. They have control over 2,000 villages. Last month they started a water riot.

Nair: But we've built tanks and pipes na?

Iyer: So what? There's no water.

Nair: But according to this map ... there's a pond.

Iyer: Yes. But it seems that is being used by cattle, dogs and pigs, and the Aryans and landlords. When some of the locals tried to bathe, there was violence.

Nair: Oh no. What about the other pond beyond the mountain?

Iyer: That has been leased out because it is full of fish. And so you've an entire village which hasn't bathed for a year. That's why the stench.

Nair: Therefore last week's riot. What was the actual cause?

Iyer: A child died. Normally, the Asuras beat drums to announce the news. When they did it, the Aryans told them not to. Then next day, the body was disallowed to be carried through the fields.

Nair: Why?

Iyer: A complaint has been lodged that these people cut the sugar-cane fields.

Nair: What did the police do?

Iyer: Surrounded the village and bulldozed the homes. Ayyo. Such a big mess. Tit for tat. Now the policemen have been killed.

Nair: Don't worry Mr Iyer. Don't you recall what the CM has said. It's all a bad dream. Let us forget it, soon. Have a banana?

A beat.

Iyer: (Eating the banana) Not a soul. What sort of place is this? No welcome committee. Just a stupid looking fellow sleeping under a *badaam* tree.

Kumbhakarna is snoring.

Nair: What a strange looking chap? That's an unusual multicolour lungi? It's held up with a belt.

Iyer: Ha-Ha. It's a performer's costume. This is a handmade shawl made with 101 different types of threads. Look: Those are traditional anklets. That is a dolu (drum). The loaded rifle has given way to a lathi in the right hand.

Nair: Hmm. Look at his bag? A towel. A toothbrush. Some talcum powder. A black shirt belonging to a little boy. A bus ticket to Cuddalore. Pamphlets. Periyar's speech about Ambedkar. And Ambedkar's essay about Phule. And Phule's note on slavery. The Tyranny of the Brahmins. An unsigned letter about famine. A crayon sketch of a man jumping into a fire. 13 used bullets. A packet of beedies.

Iyer: 13 used bullets. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

Nair: The chap's dangerous!

Iyer: Can we be sure?

Nair: Hmm. We've invoked Section 41 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against persons like this. Two main groups – the Asura People Group and The Rashasha Army are listed as a terrorist organisation under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Iyer: So what do we do now?

Nair: Contact the Inspector General of the Greyhound Force and State's Director-General of Police. Call in the greyhounds force?

A beat.

Iyer & Nair: Hello, hello
All countrymen are my brothers and sisters.
We will save YOUR country, missus-and-mister,

We'll shoot you
We'll kill you,
We'll fake encounter you
We'll immunise you through and through

Iyer & Nair do their routine. Even as Kumbhakarna starts to speak
with dola and anklets; and lathi in hand.

SCENE 5.

Harsh light on face.

A beat.

Kumbharkarna: Last night, our theatre company returned home.

It was full moon.

We were greeted by the scent of a night-blooming jessamine.

I disembarked from the truck. We were surrounded by thousands of lepers. It was our premiere show for lepers.

How the times have changed na?

Earlier, we used to refuse such kind of shows. That was years ago. When the times favoured us.

Now we need the money.

Desperately. How the mighty have fallen. Ha!

Mother asks: "Will they be able to afford our tickets?"

I hush mother. I say: "They have paid us in advance. That too double."

Mother is pleased. The lepers cheer her during the rehearsals. They share beedies and toddy with her.

One of them tells me: "It must be tough to be an actor na? Even a beggar in our town earns more than you in one day?"

He offers me tea.

I say, no.

Mother hisses: "Take it. He is offering it in a glass. Otherwise you have always had to drink it in a coconut shell."

Mother has her own tumbler from which she drinks water and arrack.

Mother tells me: "Country is going crazy. God knows what all they will ban."

Tea, water, air, funerals, arguments, a daily bath, cleans toilets – all banned.

Mother says: "No toilets here. Just a big hole in the ground. Imagine. And no water. Just pieces of newspapers. Stuck to the grass near the hole. I can't wipe myself with a newspaper. How can I rub the Prime Minister's face with my bums? Pah."

Or photos of Gods?

Mother says: "God and religion is very popular among our people. That's what I sell them."

Her shows are always houseful.

Everyone prays all the time.

I ask mother: "Why?"

Mother says: "It's one way to forget you're unemployed."

My Twin Sister (the one who commits suicide) says: "I think, whoring is a better opium than religion na?"

On cue, there are temple bells at Lord Rama's shrine.

There is no stone idol in the temple. But everyone sees him.

Some say HE is 1 millimetre. Others say HE is 1 kilometre in length.

Everyone worships in the main square.

My Twin Sister who will commit suicide says: "Our play is a guaranteed success."

I ask: "Why?"

She replies: "In these parts, everyone loves Lord Rama."

What about: "Kumbhakarna?"

My Twin Sister, shouts: "Please forget your foolish obsession with Kumbhakarna. They will kill you. Can't you see it? It's written on your forehead."

Then she starts to cry.

I enter the greenroom without windows to look at my forehead.

There is a sink but no water, and above all, no mirrors.

Mother says: "Son, next you should play Lord Rama. Your twin sister will stop crying. She has been crying non-stop for the past 31 days and nights. Her reservoir of tears will be exhausted, at this rate."

My Twin Sister looks at me.

I love her.

I love Kumbhakarna even more. Ever since I heard an audio tape which had Periyar's version of the Ramayana, I dislike Lord Rama.

That's why I feel as an actor I will not be able to do justice to Lord Rama.

It is showtime.

It is my first show.

I touch mother's feet.

The lepers arrive in a mini bus drawn by four donkeys.

The theatre is an old hospital. The maternity ward.

Mother jokes: "We are performing our play in an 'Operation Theatre'."

I watch from the wings.

Lord Rama makes an entry on the stage.

A conch blows.

There is a power cut.

Chaos.

One leper throws his broken arm on the stage.

The show stops.

The power cut goes on for seven days.

Nothing to do.

In this town, an enterprising husband and his wife operate a side business. Through word of mouth I learn that they rent out their extra bedroom on a nightly basis. They charge Rs 100 for two people for a night. One can take a shower in the upstairs kitchen, which is full of strange smells.

I go there.

I fall asleep.

I love to sleep.

I have a dream.

It is full moon.

Two strangers are staring at the moon.

Suddenly, the moon has acquired an orange hue.

And then, the moon catches fire.

Bits and pieces of the moon start to peel off.

They start to fall on planet earth.

The two strangers start to run.

I start to run.

Mother chases me with a broom: “Kumbhakarna, Kumbhakarna!!!”

I answer: “Being Kumbhakarna is good. Everyone sleeping, all the time. No one will have time to screw up this planet, our planet”.

My Twin Sister warns me about the two strange men in a neck-tie.

But I can’t understand.

Because a piece of moon falls on her; and she burns to death, again.

I weep.

Two strange men are staring at me.

I stare at their neckties.

A beat.



Iyer: Namaste. We are Mr Iyer and Mr Nair. Class I officers.

Nair: These are our identification cards. Attested. Gazetted. Laminated. We are planning to arrest you.

Pause.

Iyer and Nair: Who are you?

Pause.

Kumbhakarna: I ... er ... I am ... Kumbhakarna, you know!

Iyer and Nair: Kumbhakarna!!!

Iyer and Nair scream.

A beat.

Music.

Kumbhakarna: That's how I woke up from my dream. What a strange dream? What a strange room? What strange smell is that? Who were those two strange men?

Fade out.

SCENE 6.

Lone spotlight.

Even as Nair looks around, Iyer pulls out a steel transmitter. It beams lights and electronic sounds.

Iyer: Headquarters, this is Mr Iyer and Mr Nair reporting a crisis! I repeat, a crisis. Ok. Over and out. (to Nair) WOW!!!. They're deputing. Madame X, ASAP.

Just then a puff of smoke. And MADAME X's voice appears.

Iyer: Knock knock!

Madame X: Who's there?

Nair: If the first person you question, starts to cross-question you, then it must be a bureaucrat.

Iyer: Ssssh, we need her help.

A beat.

Madame X: And who're you. Adam and his madam?

Nair: No-No what a thought. Gosh!

Madame X: What seems the problem?

Iyer: Madame X, bad news, very tragic news for you.

Nair: As you know, *Brahma* creates. *Vishnu* nourishes. And *Rudra* destroys.

Madame X: Meaning what Mr Iyer and Mr Nair?

Iyer: We're in the midst of the deadliest of internal security problems. Strange things have been occurring in this town.

Madame X: Hmm. Sounds ominous! Please elucidate.

A beat.

Nair: (stage whisper) Iyer, why did we call this Madame X?

Iyer: (stage whisper) Nair, don't you recall the confabulation we had last night?

Flashback.

Nair: What do we do with this Kumbharkarna.

Iyer: He is a Rakshasha; and an Asura.

Nair: He is speaking against the people and our laws.

Iyer: And you know what would happen if our country became the Land of the Asuras?

Nair: Nothing for a while, and then there would be anarchy and chaos.

They laugh at their joke.

Iyer: Don't we do so much for the people in the country? If he spoke like this in China, he would be six feet under. Or six inches shorter? But this Comrade Kumbhakarna says, we are part of an Aryan conspiracy? Nothing has improved it seems for the Asuras! Don't the statistics speak in the Raskshasa favour.

Nair: (sighs) Lets finish him off. Let's squash his dissent.

Iyer: Hmm. How?

Nair: They say, in the management-by-crisis system, every worker knows that his value to the organisation is determined by the magnitude of crisis in his area.

Iyer: Oh, you and your modern management theses.

Nair: This is not modern. It's old, and it's gold. Have you heard of Malharrao Holkar? During the Third War of Panipat, Holkar, who was a war consultant, advised Dattotji Shinde not to destroy all the enemies, otherwise the Peshwas will not be of any use to us.

Iyer: What is it you propose to moot?

Nair: For starts, we must maintain the facade of having an enemy. We must eliminate this Kumbhakarna fellow. He says Hindi – our national language - is a conspiracy. Ummm. And that was how we contacted Madame X? Remember?

On cue, a sudden puff of smoke. Madame X's voice returns.

Madame X: This “internal security risk” had better be important.

Iyer: It is, believe me.

Nair: Believe me, it is. We've arrested Comrade Kumbharkarna.

Madame X: On what charges?

Iyer: We were distributing TV sets last week, as part of the PM's people-to-people-program. He said, don't do it. We asked him why?

Nair: He said the people do not need TV sets. His reason was ...

Iyer: ... TV causes mass hypnosis. The people have been numbed.

Madame X: This is a bit weak to arrest him no?

Iyer: When he was born, the local mid-wife said, instead of crying Waaaah- Waaaaah, he shouted Lal Salaam. Like this (demonstrates). The local toddy shop in this town has a communist logo painted on the main wall.

Nair: We suspect this is ... Comrade Kumbhakarna's handiwork.

Madame X: Still pretty weak evidence na?

Iyer: His twin sister committed suicide.

Nair: Instead of the usual death rituals, they read out passages from the Das Kapital over the dead body.

Iyer: And finally, he says Hindi should be banned – and be replaced.

Madame X: Why so? Isn't it the single largest language in the country?

Nair: Yes, but Comrade Kumbhakarna says by that logic the national bird of the country should be the crow and not the peacock.

Iyer: Comrade Kumbhakarna says Hindi is a Brahmin weapon to suppress the Asuras.

Nair: Comrade Kumbhakarna says Hindi is Delhi's conspiracy to control the country.

Madame X: Hmm. So what do you suggest?

Iyer: Arre, the only way is, to arrest Comrade Kumbhakarna.

Nair: I feel we should take this Comrade Kumbhakarna in, before he poisons the minds of the others.
Mantradvastarah Na Tu Kartavah. For they are mere seers to mantra, not the makers.

Nair: Ah. The time is auspicious for some more Sanskrit. *Idam Sarvam khalu aham eva. Sanatanam anyad nasti.* All these are myself. Except me, there is nothing eternal.

Iyer: The end of morality is dogma. And the end of dogma is obscurity.

Nair: We discard the metaphors and come to the facts. What do you say Madame X?

Madame X: (cackling) I give a two thumbs-ups for your idea. The two of you are in line for a double promotion. Come on, Mr Iyer and Mr Nair don't just stand there and gawp. Let's have some song and dance.

Music. Iyer & Nair kiss. They sing.

Tringa-Tringa Politics
What a fucked up fate
Cause we're the only asylum
Run by its inmates!

End of scene.

SCENE 7.

Chorus enter.

They light one tiny diva (Symbolical!).

They break a coconut (Kaboom!).

They ring bells (Tring-Tring).

And simultaneously offer obeisance to a smallish idol of religious significance.

A little music followed by a little jig some dance and prance.

Chorus: This is the beginning of our new show.
We're on the move. We're on the go.
Comrade Kumbhakarna travelled from Erode to
Thanjavur.
He went to Erode to find out what was the people's sur.
In this ideological battle, he had no allies, no yaars
Other than the complete works of Annadurai and
Periyaar.

They arrested Comrade Kumbharkarna on Sunday at
two

The case number they allocated was 2010/UC/M-2.

They pulled out an old file and he was charge sheeted

His past was scrutinised and his good deeds
consecrated

They burnt his remand papers and they profiled him

They tried to obliterate his identity into a dustbin

Tomorrow is dark, the future is horribly bleak

Did you know -

Comrade Kumbhakarna hasn't been permitted a leak

Music.

Blackout.

SCENE 8.

Lights.

The stage resembles an interrogation room.

Iyer and Nair are seated.

A camera plus light is switched on to record proceedings.

Kumbhakarna enters. He is chained, etc.

Iyer: Ah, Comrade Kumbhakarna, you're here. For your knowledge, this trial is being conducted in a PWD guest house. Please-Please do be seated.

Nair: Welcome. Hope your stay has been comfortable? Food supply? Clean water? Medicine?

Iyer: Any complaints?

No response from Kumbhakarna.

Nair: Good. This is your FIR. Will you sign the NOC document?

No response from Kumbhakarna.

Iyer: Ah well (polite laugh). Dear Comrade Kumbhakarnaji would you like to say hello to our camera which is recording this interview?

Emphatic shaking of head from Kumbhakarna.

Nair: Oh, just as well.... As you know you were arrested on a Sunday. In the fish market. With a dangerous anti-national subversive document. It contains the formulae of how to build a bomb.

Kumbhakarna: Er ... it is my grocery shopping list.

Iyer: Arre-Arre. Comrade Kumbhakarna ... please cease your interruptions.

Kumbhakarna is forced to have a pill.

Nair: Comrade Kumbhakarna – just to remind you - we have 18 cases against you under 120 (B), 121(A), 124(A), 153 A& B of the IPC, and sec 38, 39 and 40 of the UAPA, 2004 ... Please nb: You will not receive bail for three years on charges of sedition, waging war against the state, conspiracy and supporting a banned Asura organisation.

The pill takes an effect on Kumbhakarna.

Iyer: Ssssh. Look he has fallen asleep. In fact he is snoring.

Nair: He truly and positively is. This is a complete and unmitigated disaster.

Iyer: Hush.... listen, Comrade Kumbhakarna is mumbling, he is rumbling ...

Nair: It sounds like gibberish to me. Perhaps he is dreaming his nightmares, eh... Ssssh. Silence.

Silence.

A transition.

Kumbhakarna: (Whispers deliriously, gradually increasing the decibel of his voice). Salutations, I salute the Cosmic Atom in Thee. I am son of Viswalyer, husband of Vajravaala, as huge as a mountain. My hair is like a porcupine's quill. My breath is a tornado. I may be as dark as a calleyrium dyed rain-cloud, but I'm learned and of great prowess. Look. Look at my golden armour. See how it shines. Look. Look into my eyes. What do you see - the Himalayas. Smell. Smell my sweat, what does it stink of, a thousand dead skunks. Ha-Ha do you recognise me? If not I curse ye to sleep my sleepy slumber for me....

Iyer: Sssh ... we begin now. Comrade Kumbharkarna, in your confession you speak of sleep. We believe it is a reference to a sleeping cell. Hope you know the term? Does this term still hold the same importance?

A typist will type out all of Kumbhakarna's answers.

Kumbhakarna: It's all dreams, wet-dreams and nightmares. O, how I yearn for ordinary day-dreams, saar.

Nair: And freedom?

Kumbhakarna: O how I yearn for that too. One day of sleep, six months of freedom, saar.

Iyer: Aah. How real is freedom for you?

Kumbhakarna: It's just a newer proper-noun for *Atma* and *Mana*, saar.

Nair: Have you visited the capital?

Kumbhakarna: Yes, mother was invited by the Rashtriya Dharam-Nirpeksha Lok Kala Samiti to perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. I accompanied her. During her show, I had to urinate. So I went to the bathroom. When I opened the door the President of India was inside. I was shocked. I ran away. Later I was told, the President's bathroom does not have a lock, saar.

Iyer: Did you meet the President again?

Kumbhakarna: No, saar.

Nair: Do you want to?

Kumbhakarna: No, saar.

Iyer: What do you want to do?

Kumbhakarna: I want to travel, saar?

Iyer: Where?

Kumbhakarna: Inside a book. A grand epic.

Nair: *The Ramayana*?

Kumbhakarna: Periyar's *Ramayana*? Perhaps.

Iyer: We can procure a copy ...

Kumbhakarna: I don't think they will permit you to.

Nair: Why so?

Kumbhakarna: Your country's laws do not tolerate dissent, anymore
saar.

Iyer: You say "your country". Is this not your country?

A beat.

Iyer: Should the question be repeated?

No response from Kumbhakarna.

Nair: Are you happy ... in prison?

Kumbhakarna: (laughs) Happiness!!! With six months of hibernation
and six months of aestivation, my habits are like a frog.
So much so, I've even begun to look like a frog, saar.

Iyer: Why don't you try, and change your face, and your fate?
Like Comrade Vibhishana, why don't you give us the
names of the other Asuras? Our national enemies?

Kumbhakarna: I can't, saar.

Nair: Why.....

Kumbhakarna: What can I, a single-solitary Rakshasa, do against
the might of the Aryan order?

Iyer: Ah, the return of the free-will.

Kumbhakarna: You may call it that. It was a problem which was
philosophical in our times, now it is even worse, saar.

Nair: We know you act. But what do you do for a living?

Kumbhakarna: I sleep. Stupid question.

Iyer: And your wife and children?

Kumbhakarna: My wife Vrijaala, she sells sea shells on the sea shore.

Nair: How did that happen?

Kumbhakarna: She was born on International Woman's Day.

Iyer: Do you approve of it?

Kumbhakarna: Approve of what... her being born. Of course, I do.
After all everybody is born, saar.

Iyer: No-No, I meant, do you approve of her feminist spirit of enterprise.

Kumbhakarna: I do. A hungry-sleepy good for nothing does not have too many choices.

Iyer: Ah, and what do your children do for a living?

Kumbhakarna: They live. Stupid question.

Nair: Are you mocking us? Is this a joke?

Kumbhakarna: No, it is the cult of metaphysics. How else can I be Kumbhakarna, brother of the ten-headed Ravana?

Iyer: Ten-headed? But that's impossible na?

Nair: A biological aberration?

Kumbhakarna: Not according to Rachita's son Valmiki, who composed the 23,734 verses, saar.

Iyer: Is that all? What about your people, the hideous Rakshasa with their protruding tongues, distressing deformities, devious ideologies.

Kumbhakarna: Exaggerations, saar. Largely, the hyperbolic poetic embellishments of a creative imagination.

Nair: By Valmiki....

Kumbhakarna: Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Iyer: I fail to comprehend you.

Kumbhakarna: Have you heard of Kambar, saar?

Nair: Who?

Kumbhakarna: Ah, Kamban was a Tamil poet, and like most poets of his time, he was dissatisfied with the translation and adaptations of the various Northern-works that were made. And so, in the 9th century Kamban composed the *Ramayana*. Saar it is a poem which is still known, and greatly loved among the Tamils.

Iyer: Well....

Kumbhakarna: In Kamban's *Ramayana*, my brother Ravana frequently takes on the proportions of a heroic figure, and contrasts favourably with the rather weak and unimpressive Rama. Now what do you have to say to that, saar ...

Nair: Aha.

Kumbhakarna: What is that – Aha - supposed to mean, saar?

Iyer: The beginning of the end of the great divide. Western vs Eastern, Aryans vs Dravidians, Vaishnavites vs Saivites, Invaders vs Settlers. Indians vs Naxals. Wow vs Mao

Kumbhakarna: You're trivialising the issue.

Nair: I'm not.

Kumbhakarna: Pah. I mean consider this land. It was extensive in its hugeness and gorgeousness. Surrounded by a golden wall. Even the citizens and inhabitants of Ravan's land exhibited the same prosperity. Saar, it may be possible that our eating habits were slightly variant to the rest of the world, but our kingdom was, and will be, one of the most-well-governed nations of its time...

Iyer: OK, so what? The Asuras still didn't have a national anthem or a football team. Why, you never even participated in international beauty contests?

Kumbhakarna: That is not the point. The fact is, history has given us a raw deal. Of religion, I don't care much. But history, really character-assassinated my people for posterity's sake.

Nair: What else did you expect? I mean, have you ever heard of a historical account of the vanquished. Our world, like yours, yearns to hear only the victor's song.

Kumbhakarna: And what according to you is the victor's song, saar?

Cross-fade.

SCENE 9.

The victor song.

Chorus. Ladies and Gentlemen, you're here assembled.
To witness how politics will make this country tremble.
He *only* played the role of Comrade Kumbhakarna his
entire life
Hi wife warned him – that this approach will lead to
strife
But on cue, he bagged a theatre award - Wikipedia
uploaded his CV.
Comrade Kumbhakarna became a celebrity, he
appeared on TV

Kumbharana on TV.

Kumbhakarna (in false clipped tone) ... Suffering from sleepless
nights? ... Then you're a victim of Tension-Stress-Trauma.
If you want to be like me and sleep like me. Then pop
these pills.

A beat.

To sleep like Kumbhakarna, well-almost like
Kumbhakarna.

A beat.

Pop the one and only Kumbhakarna pills

A beat.

Kumbhakarna pills are the registered trademark of
Comrade Kumbhakarna.

A beat.

Ting tong.

A beat.

Chorus: The problem was -
When Comrade Kumbhakarna spoke about the Asura
race.
Pieces of wood were shoved into his fingernail and face.

He ranted and cursed, and it wasn't a lot of fun.
Rendezvous with justice - ALWAYS - makes us run.
Damned maybe the country - crucified the fucking
nation.
We have our per capita - our credits cards and ration.
The key to this conspiracy is Gvah-Gvah-Rakshasa.
Thus began the eternal damnation of Comrade
Kumbhakarnaaaaa!

Cross-fade.



SCENE 10.

Back to the room.

Kumbhakarna is battered.

Pause.

Iyer: Hmm. Continuing, with our series of questions on Kumbhakarna, I now ask Comrade Kumbhakarna - did you ever meet Shri Rama?

Kumbhakarna: Twice or maybe thrice, saar.

Nair: What sort of a person was he?

A beat.

Kumbhakarna: Seemed OK to me. Had a really good arm for archery. As regards his personal life, my brothers - either one of them will be able to give greater details.

Iyer: Did you regard Shri Rama as a ... God?

Kumbhakarna: No comments.

Nair: Well then.... do you as a Rakshasa and disciple of Brahma believe in God?

Kumbhakarna: No comments, saar.

Iyer: Hmm. We discovered this note when the police raided your home. You say: "Delhi and the Congress government in Delhi is expert in twisting words. They say anything and give meaning in whatever manner they think. It is clear that with general elections (round the corner), the Muslims and Hindus and Aryans and Dravidans will cause hardships to the Muslims and the Dravidians. Kindly excuse me for reminding you about our discussions in Mumbai relating to a separate state for Muslims and Dravidians." Unquote. What do you have to say to this letter? It's an act of secession; of treason.

Kumbhakarna: Er ... It is not my letter ... It's a letter by E V Ramaswami Naicker alias Periyar which he wrote to Mohammed Ali Jinnah in 1944.

Nair: I see. How do you have a copy of this letter?

Kumbhakarna: My father gave it to me, saar.

Iyer: And how did your father get it?

Kumbhakarna: Saar, my Taatha gave it to my father. On 7 January, Periyar delivered a speech at Dharavi in Mumbai. That's where he spoke about a separate Dravida Naidu.

Nair: How do you know this?

Kumbhakarna: My Taatha was present. He worked in Dharavi as a chikki maker. Some people from our family did that in Dharavi, chikki and embroidery. Did you know Periyar met Jinnah and Dr Ambedkar in Mumbai as part of a non-Brahman alliance. They discussed a plan for a Dravida Nadu which would have included, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Desa, Deccan, all the eastern coastline states of India. Plus the Dalit states and the Muslim states and we the Asuras and Rakshashas. This means, your India would have been a tiny country consisting of a few Hindi states and of course Gujarat.

Iyer: I see. And do you believe in this idea of a separate nation for your people, still?

Kumbhakarna: Periyar, Jinnah and Ambedkar are dead. Saar, even Annadurai lost hope in 1962.

Nair: What about you?

Silence.

Nair: Should the question be repeated?

Silence.

Iyer: Hmmm, supposing you and your people were not Asuras, do you think, you could be a ... God?

Kumbhakarna: May be. May be not. It depends, saar.

Nair: Can you explain? If your people succeed in overthrowing the Gods? Could you Asuras become today's rulers?

Kumbhakarna: No comments.

Iyer: I see ... where were you on the full moon night? A landmine exploded. 27 deaths.

No response from Kumbhakarna.

Nair: 27 people dead.

No response from Kumbhakarna.

Iyer: Should we talk slower? Speak in some other language? Perhaps Tamil?

A beat.

Kumbhakarna: I fought death once, saar.

Nair: Hmm. And pain?

Kumbhakarna: There can be no pleasure without pain.

Iyer: Given a chance, would you live your life differently?

Kumbhakarna: No, saar.

Nair: Why?

Kumbhakarna: (Hesitates) Father said that Thatha said that Annadurai had a theory about paleomagnetism. You know, paleomagnetism, saar? Apparently, studies have revealed 171 magnetic field reversals on this planet, in the last 76 million years. That is, once every 4,50,000 years or so, the north magnetic pole becomes the south magnetic pole. And vice-versa.

Iyer: So?

Kumbhakarna: So, at the next reversal which should take place in a few centuries, we the Rakshasas have been promised a turn-around on the events.

Nair: Meaning....

Kumbhakarna: Meaning, the next time there is a war, we're bound to emerge victorious.

Iyer: The end of Kaliyug, and the beginning of a newer Yug. This is civil war!!!!

Kumbhakarna: Call it what you may, saar?

A beat.

Nair: Hmmm, we're told you wanted to read a book. We sent you a Tamil version of Homer's work. You tore off all the pages? Why?

Kumbhakarna: Yes. Very boring. Lulled me to sleep. Not that I need an excuse to sleep. (After-thought) Homer was blind. In fact sir ...

Iyer: What....

Kumbhakarna: Saar have you realised none of Homer's heroes ever had shrines built in their honour. In contrast, not one of the heroes in your *Ramayana* has lacked devotees. Except.....

Nair: Except...

Kumbhakarna: Me!

Iyer: You, but Comrade Kumbhakarna cannot have a shrine.

Kumbhakarna: Why not, saar?

Nair: To start with, it is the Ramayana. And the cause of the book is the moral welfare of society, and its people; by influencing them through the ideal conduct of its heroes. After all, isn't Shri Rama a personification of all that is expected of an ideal son, ideal brother, ideal husband, ideal commander, ideal king, and as you yourself know, an ideal warrior.

Kumbhakarna: Look, my argument is not about how good or bad Shri Rama is. All I'm saying is, why can't I have a shrine that I can call my own, saar???

Iyer: Why this sudden urge?

Kumbhakarna: Pah, what do you mean sudden.... For centuries, historians and sociologists have ignored me. So much so, when I ask for what is rightfully mine, it is made out to be a sudden demand.

Nair: That's what I'm wondering... why is it, after all these years of silence, you want a shrine now.

Kumbhakarna: My eyes have opened. The sleeping giant in me has awakened. Realization has dawned on my true and significant contribution to civilisation. (Pause). Why, come to think of it, even Ravana is worshipped, saar!!!

Iyer: He's different, he was a ruler.

Kumbhakarna: Ah, I see it, the first signs of a society prejudiced by class divisions, saar.

Nair: That's not true....moreover, what are these significant contributions to our society, which you mention.

Kumbhakarna: My unhindered, and sincere pacifism. As a matter of fact, I was the first pacifist of our times.

Iyer: (laughs) Comrade Kumbhakarna and pacifism ...

Kumbhakarna: Ha, do not dismiss my theory. It's not as transparent as it seems. Think, and try to remember. In spite of my fighting skills, and being anointed as the greatest warrior of my times, tell me, how many times am I mentioned in the *Ramayana*, in actual battle. Twice or at the most thrice. And even these battles were conducted only when I had exhausted all other alternatives or when I was unnecessarily provoked.

Nair: That's because for every six months, you were awake, only for a day.

Kumbhakarna: Brahma's curse. Yes, I remember that. But doesn't it seem odd to you, that a warrior who vanquished Yama-

the god of death in battle, couldn't overcome sleep.
Doesn't it strike you that may be I accepted Brahma's
curse, because it meant I wouldn't have to fight
Ravana's battles for him, saar.

Iyer: It is a matter of opinion.

Kumbhakarna: Even in the *Ramayana*, when I was finally awakened,
didn't anyone notice the delay I caused, whilst getting
up. Moreover, when I was asked to take on Shri Rama by
Ravana, don't you remember my words. They were the
words of a pacifist.

Nair: I don't remember anything...

Kumbhakarna: Ah, then let me tell you --- what my mother told me.

Blackout.

Cross-fade.

SCENE 11.

Music.

Fade in.

Mother and Twin Sister on a dark and lonely night (as in Scene 3).

Kumbhakarna (half-real / half play) faces them.



Mother: Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. What have they done to you, son?

Twin Sister: What is this, my brother?

Kumbhakarna: It's called pain, Twin Sister.

Twin Sister: ... it's so good to see you.

Kumbhakarna: Tell me mother. Why have you roused me from sleep? What cause of fear has arisen?

Mother: Oh my greatest of heroes. You were long buried in sleep, and so you could not know the cause of my fear. Their army has entered our lands with their AK-56 and

tanks, traversing the impassable ocean and jungles with their Greyhounds and Vanar Sena.

Kumbhakarna: (sighs) Our people are at war? Again?

Twin Sister: Yes, and that's not all. A great many of our Asuras have been killed. Some have disappeared underground. Those who stayed have been hung on the trees.

Kumbhakarna: And on their side....

Twin Sister: Not many losses, I'm afraid.

Kumbhakarna: So?

A play within a play emerges which has its antecedent in the original Ramayana.

Mother: O brave warrior, save us from this crisis. This is why, I've roused you from your slumber. You have to decimate their army commanders and airforce planes. Undertake this arduous task, and remove the sufferings and misery of your people. Please, I beckon, like I never before beckoned, to go out there, disintegrate the enemy and emerge victorious.

Kumbhakarna: (smiles) Aha. What we had apprehended has befallen us, and our people. Why? Why, because we neglected good counsel. Like, in fact, the sinner who is soon damned, so have our people to pay for their wicked deeds.

Mother: What are you saying, O brave warrior? This is the Rakshasa way. Your father was an Asura – and he married me through purchase. Your father said: Just as the Paisaca marries through seduction and rape, we the Rakshasa marry through capture. It is our Parampara. The Rakshasa Parampara. That's what Lord Ravana was doing when he abducted the Aryan queen.

Kumbhakarna: But our people should have realised that it is a Parampara that has outlived its purpose --- of propagating more and more Rakshasas into this world.

Mother: So, what do you want me to do? All of our shows have been cancelled. I've not been allowed to play the role of Goddess Sita for months.

Kumbhakarna: All this is very confusing! Are you my mother? Or Kumbhakarna's mother? Or brother? Are you Goddess Sita?

Mother: Ha Ha. I'm a woman of many parts. I'm all these and more.

Kumbhakarna: So what do you want me to do, mother?

Mother: I merely want to remind you, that which Mandodari and Vibhishana have said.

Kumbhakarna: Why? Because to me, Comrade Mandodri and Comrade Vibhisna's words appear good and beneficial. I beseech you to tell our people not to participate in this war. I ask you this, out of love and compassion, as a son and not as a warrior. After all don't the Shastras, in which you're so well-versed, say there is no such thing as a dishonourable peace. Now act in whatever way you like. For I'm your obedient slave.

Mother: You're a Rakshasa and your dharma is to war. Go vanquish our enemy.

Conches, etc.

Back to reality.

A beat.

Twin Sister: And then Kumbhakarna was killed.

Mother: As you had predicted by the two strange men, who wore a neck tie!

A beat.

Twin Sister: Kumbhakarna was killed ... Er... was it Shri Rama with the Aindra, or was it Lakshman with the Brahmastra. Shri Rama or Lakshmana. Lakshmana or Shri Rama.

Aindra or Brahmastra. Brahmastra or Aindra... Death and Life. Life and Sleep. True or False. A judicial tribunal is looking into the matter. But will the truth be told? What a farce. What a farce. What a farce ...

Music.

Blackout.

SCENE 12.

In another part of the world - Iyer and Nair.

Iyer and Nair: All Heil you! All Heil us!

Madame X: Kudos! The mission is a triumph. It has been proclaimed as a national holiday. You're heroes, Mr Iyer and Mr Nair. Comrade Kumbhakarna has been exterminated!

Iyer: Madame X. What about our promotions? It's long overdue.

Nair: To be precise, a raise? 400 hectares of land in Comrade Kumbhakarna's village?

Madame X: Gentlemen, let's not cheapen things by reducing our work to currency. Ours is a fight for a cause. We may be in the business of production, but our production is a social activity. Our work must not be dictated by greed and personal profit. On the contrary, we must have common ideas, values, laws, habits of life. We must do what we do for our nation, for our religion, our economy, for our people. Right Mr Iyer and Mr Nair?

Iyer: Ok Madame X!

Nair: Yes Madame X!

Madame X: Mr Iyer and Mr Nair, one day, both of you will be Madame X, not to worry. You must be complimented for decimating the enemy.

Iyer and Nair: Thank you Madame X! Thank you very much Madame X!

Madame X: Mr Iyer and Mr Nair, a taxi is waiting for you. Ok, ready, steady, one-two-three and GO!

Iyer and Nair sprint and exit.

Madame X: I must get rid of these jokers, ASAP. They know too much. It's a very good thing, the human race prefers eating to reasoning, or else ...

Final dissolve.

SCENE 13.

The EPILOGUE.

The Twin Sister.



Twin Sister: (sits down and pens a letter)

My dear brother!

This is my suicide letter.

I remember your last words now.

You said: "Remember sister? Father used to work for the government. His job was to build iron grills to protect the statues of Ambedkar, Thevar and Immanuel Sekran."

I said, yes.

You said: "What sort of a fucked-up country is this? Where we've to imprison the statues of dead leaders?"

That was that.

Then you were dead and gone.

Our village destroyed. Nothing remains.

It's been a year since those horrible events. They put pesticides and insecticides in our water canals. The water doesn't taste normal – but we drink it. All the electrical equipment has been stolen. The local school has been locked up. Normally, the government takes care of widows and orphans. But there were no widows and orphans. Hence there was no issuing of honourable decrees nor public funerals.

The other good thing about your death was no one plunged into misery.

Our town remains a cheap and horrible neighbourhood.

You remember our home? One room?

Not one piece of decent furniture.

Everything broken, torn, tattered. Red dust on everything.

Mother's struggle makes living such a dangerous business.

The make-up, the shows, the box-office, the non-stop working, the creditors, the manager, the whoring ...

She no longer plays Goddess Sita. Says she got bored after doing it for 51 years.

These days, she plays Soorapnakha.

Father would be happy to hear that. Mother is relishing it.

In spite of the frequent attacks on the liver, breaking of boils, inflammation of eyes, hair loss.

Ah, how it ends, no?

No?

Recently, there is some talk about reviving the black shirts movement. They have put black flags all over our village. Even our house has a black flag. But the flag is tattered.

It's all symbolism. There's no self respect. For anyone.

Last week, I was questioned by the police. They abused me a lot. Kept touching my breasts. Offered me vibhuti when I left. They said the vibhuti will purify me.

That's all I remember.

Every fragment of my memory is suffering from amnesia. Whenever I'm asked questions, I remain silent. Or fall asleep.

That's the favourite pass-time.

Sleeping.

That's why a replica of your bed has been made into a memorial for our village.

It has been protected by iron grills.

The whole village loves sleeping.

Me too.

I sleep, shamelessly, for six months

Except - sometime - I've nightmares of rats and flies, of dirty, wrinkled vegetables and polluted water, and the stench of rot and decay.

There's so much more to say. But the sun has set and there is no light. My pencil is blunt. One day, I wish to tell my tale to you.

Perhaps differently.

Alas, time is too short. And it looks, as though, I've run out of paper ...

Bye bye Brother Kumbhakarna. Bye Bye Comrade Kumbhakarna.

Freeze Tableau.

THE END.

(1st draft --- 21st June 2010)
(2nd draft --- 25th October 2010)
(3rd draft --- 19th December 2010)

Comrade Kumbhakarna was first staged on May 5th, 2011 by NSD Repertory Company at Abhimanch, National School of Drama, New Delhi.

On Stage

Comrade Kumbhakaran: Naveen Singh Thakur
Chota Kumbhakaran: Ajit Singh Palawat
Twin Sisters: Rakhi Kumari, Anamika, Tina Bhatiya, Sunayana Shukla
Amma: Sajida
Appa: Punj Prakash
Man with black shirt: Sukumar Tudu
Performing Troupe: Sapana Khatana, Kanhiya Lal Kaithwas, Jaggannath Seth, Maisnam Joy Meetei, Emmanuel Singh, Ambrish Saxena
Manager: Sukumar Tudu
Men with Manager: Pramod Kumar, Sunil Upadhyay
Drunkards/Police: Sukumar Tudu, Pramod Kumar, Sunil Upadhyay, Manish Kumar
Ramashankar Tripathi: Anoop Trivedi
Atar Singh: Dwarika Dahiya
Madam X: Ipshita Chakraborty
Typist: Moti Lal Khare
Lepers: Pramod Kumar, Manish Kumar, Ambrish Saxena, Sunil Upadhyay, Palash Protim Mac, Punj Prakash, Sukumar Tudu

Off Stage

Production Co-ordinator: Kanhaiya Lal Kaithwas
Set Design: Ashish Mehta
Technical Incharge: Goutam Majumdar
Set In-charge: Abdul Kadir Saah Ambrish Saxena
Set Execution: Ramchandra, Ram Avatar, Meena, Dharam Singh
Light Design: Pradeep Vaidya
Asst. Light: Govind Singh Yadav
Light Execution: Md. Suleman, Pradeep Agrawal, Kiran Kumar
Costume Design: Mohit Takalkar
Costume Assistant: Ipshita, Sajida, Emmanuel Singh
Costume In-charge: C. S. Bhatiya
Assistant: Budhram

Make up: Punj Prakash
Asst.: Sapna Khatan, Jagganath Seth
Poster: Neerai Sahai
Brochure: Manish Kumar Mishra, Jagganath Seth
Brochure Translation & Editing: Amitabh Srivastava, Sonal Parmar
Music: Kajal Ghosh
Assistant: Naveen Singh Thakur, Anoop Trivedi
Rhythm: Gagan
Sound Operator: Mukesh Kumar
Photography: S. Thyagrajan
Assistant: Deepak Kumar
Exhibition: Prithvi Singh Negi
Publicity: Dharm Veer, Prithvi Singh Negi
Property: Moti Lal Khare
Assistant.: Manish Kumar, Sapna Khatana
Choreography: Abdul Kadir Shah
Assistant Director: Punj Prakash
Lyrics: Jitendra Joshi
Playwright: Ramu Ramanathan
Hindi Translation: Swantra Nigam
Design and Direction: Mohit Takalkar