Universal Aspects Found in Thirukkural : A Critical Study

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Abstract

This paper is discusses about the Universal Aspects Found in Thirukkural. Tirukkural is praised for its universality across the globe. The ancient Tamil poet Avvaiyar observed, "thiruvalluvar pierced an atom and injected seven seas into it and compressed it into what we have today as Kural." The Russian Philosopher Alexander Piatigorsky called it chef d' oeuvre of both Indian and world literature "due not onlhy to the great artistic merits of the work, but also to the lofty humans ideas permeating it which are wqually precious to the people all over the world of all periods and countries

Keywords

Thirukkural; Universal Aspects; Seven Ideals; Tone of book

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Introduction

Valluvar is believed to have lived sometime between the 4th century BC and the 1st century BC. The Tami poet Mamulanar of the Sangam period mentioned that Thiruvalluvar was the greasted Tamil Scholar, contemporarily mentioning the Nanda Dynasty of northern region of India, which ruled during the 4th century BC, lasting between 345 and 321 BC. This estimate is based on linguistic analysis of his writings. However, there is no historical evience for when and where he lived. With the exact date still under debate, taking the latest of the estimated dates, the Tamil Nadu government is using 31BC as the year of Valluvar. In this essay we shall examine the universal aspects of Thirukkural as a classical masterpiece.

Truths for All Religions:

Thiruvalluvar is thought to have belonged to either Jainism or Hinduism. This can be observed in his treatment of the concept of ahimsa or non-violence, which is the principal concept of both the religions. Valluvar's treatment of the chapters on vegetarianism and non-killing reflects the Jain precepts, where these are stringently enforced. The three parts that the Tirukkural is divided into, namely, aram (Virtue), porul (Wealth) and inbam (love), aim at attaining veedu (ultimate salvation). They follow, respectively, the four foundations of Hinduism, namely, dharma, artha, kama and moksha. His mentioning of God Vishnu in couplets 610 and 1103 and Goddess Lakshmi in couplets 167,408,519,565,568,616 and 617 suggests the vaishnavite beliegs of valluvar. Other eastern beliefs of Valluvar found in the book include previous birth and re-birth, seven births, and some ancients Indian astrological concepts, among others. Despite using these contemporary religious concepts of his time, valluvar has limited the usage of these terms to a metaphorical sense to explicate the fundamental virtues and ethics, without enforcing any of these religious beliefs in practice. This chiefly has made the treatise earn the title Ulaga Podhu Marai (the universal scripture).

Universality

The Tirukkural is praised for its universality across the globe. The ancient Tamil poet Avvaiyar observed, "thiruvalluvar pierced an atom and injected seven seas into it and compressed it into what we

have today as Kural." The Russian Philosopher Alexander Piatigorsky called it chef d' oeuvre of both Indian and world literature "due not onlhy to the great artistic merits of the work, but also to the lofty humans ideas permeating it which are wqually precious to the people all over the world of all periods and countries." G.U. Pepe called him "a bard of universal man." According to Albert Schweitzer, "there hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much of lofty wisdom." Leo Tolstoy was inspired by the concept of non-violence found in Tirukkural when he read a german version of the book, who in turn instilled the concept in Mahatma Gandhi through his ' A letter to a Hindu' when young Gandhi sought his guidance. Mahatma Gandhi, who took to studying Tirukkural in prison, called it "a textbook of indispensable authority on moral life" and went on to say, "The maxims of valluvar have touched my soul. There is none who has given such a treasure of wisdom like him." Sir A.C. Grant said, "Humility, charity and forgiveness of injuries, being Christian qualities, are not described by Aristotle. Now these three are everywhere forcibly inculcated by the Tamil Moralist"

According to K.M. Munshi, "Thirukkural is a treatise par excellence on the art of living." Sri Aurobindo stated, "Tirukkural is gnomic poetry, the greatest in planned conception and force of execution ever written in this kind." Monsieur Ariel, who translated and published the third part of the Kural in French in 1848, called it " a masterpiece of Tamil literature, one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought." According to Rev. Emmons E.White, "Tirukkural is a synthesis of the best moral teachings of the world." Rajaji commented, "It is the gospel of love and a code of soul – luminous life. Than whole of human aspiration is epitomized in this immortal book, a book for all ages." Zakir Hussain, former president of India, said "Tirukkural is a treasure house of worldly knowledge, ethical guidance and spiritual wisdom"

The structure of the book

The Tirukkural is structured into 133 chapters, each containing 10 couplets (or Kurals), for a total of 1,330 couplets, the 133 chapters are grouped into three sections:

1. Aram (Tamil:… mwj;Jg;ghy;; Arattuppal?)(Dharma) dealing with virtue (Chapters 1-38)
2. Porul (Tamil:… nghUl;ghy Porutpal?) (Artha) Dealing with wealth or polity (Chapters 39-108)
3. Inbam (Tamil:.. fhkj;Jg;ghy Kamattuppal?)(Kama)dealing with love (Chapter 109-133)

Each kural or couplet contains exactly seven words, known as cirs, with four cirs on the first line and three on the second. A cir is a single or a combination of more than on Tamil word. For example, Tirukkural is a cir formed by combining the two words thiru and kural. The section on virtue (Aram) contains 380 verses, wealth (porul) has 700 and love (inbam) has 250.

Seven ideals

The overall organization of the kural text is based on seven ideals prescribed for a commoner besides observations of love

1. 40 couplets on God, rain ascetic, and virtue
2. 200 couplets on domestic virtue
3. 140 couplets on higher yet fundamental virtue based on grace, benevolence and compassion
4. 250 couplets on royalty
5. 100 couplets on ministers of state
6. 220 couplets on essential requirements of administration
7. 130 couplets on morality, both positive and negative
8. 250 couplets on human love and passion

Tone of the Book

As the book forms part of secular ethics, Tirukkural expounds a secular, moral and practical attitude towards life. Quite contrary to all the religious texts, tirukkural refrains from talking of hopes and promises of the other – worldly life. Instead, it preaches the ways of cultivating one's mind to gain the other wordly bliss in the present life itself. By occasionally referring to heavenly glory beyond the worldly life, valluvar balances what can be achieved in human life with what may be got thereafter. Only in a couple of introductory chapter (Chpaters 1 and 3) does Valluvar sound religious. Accordingly, he maintains a tone that could be acceptable to people of all faiths.

The critcs are of the opinion that valluvar composed every chapter in response to a plea to write ten best couplets on a particular subject. Still, he rarely

shows any concern as to what literary expressions he used earlier while writing on other subjects, in order to allow for some repetition and mild contradictions in ideas. Through he strikes the contradictory note from a purist point of view, valluvar employs this method to stress the importance of the give en code of ethic

Conclusion

Although it has been widely acknowledged that Thiruvalluvar was of Jain origin and the Tirukkural in its most part was inspired from Jain, Hindu and other ancient India philosophies, owing to its universality and non – denominational nature, almost every religious group in India and across the world, including Christianity, has claimed the work for itself. For example, G.U. Pope speaks of the book as an "echo of the Sermon on the Mount." In the introducation to his English translation of the Kural, Pope even claims, "I cannot feel any hesitation in saying that the Christian Scriptures were among the sources from which the poet derived his inspiration". However, the chapters on the ethics of vegetarianism (Chapter 26) and non-killing (Chapter 33), which the kural emphasizes unambiguously unlike religious texts, suggest that the ethics of the Kural is rather a reflection of the Jaina moral code that of Christian ethic.

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