

A Study on the Moral Reforms of Thiruvalluvar

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ABSTRACT

Man being the Supreme being amongst all other living beings, has forgotten how to live happily on this world. True to the observation of ancient poet Ouvaiyyar, it is a rarity to be born with the human form, when it comes to the physical build or the development of intelligence. Still human life faces confusion and suffering which is increasing by the day. Great thinkers and scholars during different ages and from different places have identified and shown ways that help people endure or alleviate their suffering. Those works of scholars which passed through research, clarity, practice and success are the ones that are likely to guide the life of man by giving the maximum benefit. Such books are revered to be the prime authoritative books or knowledge books (Vedas) and manual books (Shastras) or books based on life experiences. One such book is the Tirukkural.

Keywords: Tirukkural, Shastras, Ouvaiyyar and Vedas.

INTRODUCTION

Thiruvalluvar is tamil poet and philosopher believed to have lived around 4th century B.C., in Tamilnadu, India. His other names are Valluvar, Mudharpaavalar, Deivappulavar, Gnanavettiyaan, Maadhaanupangi, Naanmuganaar, Naayanaar, Poyyirpulavar, Dhevar, Perunaavalar. His contribution to the human community is the Tirukkural, a collection of couplets on ethics, political and economic matters and love. In a God conscious state, where the consciousness attained perfection and knowledge widened, very few books have been written based on lessons from life experiences, that speak of the righteous way of living. Among them one which shines with significance is Thirukkural written by Thiruvalluvar. This paper deals with the moral aspects suggested by Thiruvalluvar in his Thirukkural

1. The significance of Thirukkural
2. Aspects of morality
3. Morality and its meaning
4. Morality the highest ideal
5. Life based on morality
6. Worship of morality
7. Benefits of morality in family life
8. Acts of morality
9. Morality to refrain from killing
10. Three virtues
11. Conclusion

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIRUKKURAL

Thirukkural is not just a book that emphasizes morality. It is one which speaks of practicalities of life as well. Though it was written two thousand years ago, the contents are still relevant for the twenty first century's man.

Based on the fundamental truth that mankind is one, Tiruvalluvar has delivered his messages in the form of this treatise. He stresses that rather than wasting time with the differences arising from religion, caste, creed, race or morality, man should be viewed in the perspective of just being a man. He delivers this message throughout the book through varied angles. With 1330 couplets of wisdom in it, the Thirukkural is comprised of 133 chapters. Hence each chapter has 10 couplets. They are classified into three major divisions based on morality(aram), materialism(porul) and love(inbam) along with 8 sections. The division Aram has 38 chapters, Porul has 70 chapters and Inbam has 25 chapters in it.

2. ASPECTS OF MORALITY

This section emphasizes the need for morality. Since kindness and morality are essential for a complete life this section stresses the importance of morality. If there is something that can give unparalleled fame and abundance, it is morality. Hence when compared to morality, there is nothing else that is more important to life. In the same way if one ignores morality, it can attract great misery. Morality is that nature, where we don't lean towards the four undesirable traits which are jealousy, greed, wrath and harsh language.

3. MORALITY AND ITS MEANING

The meaning of morality is very wide in its scope. To put it briefly, it can be stated that all that is good is moral. Discipline, custom, legal, duty, charity, good karma, Godliness, religion has been eight ways of defining the word morality. There have been some other ways of defining it as well. It is noteworthy that Thiruvalluvar perceives it using the terms lawful, renunciation, meditation, Godliness, moral literature and noble deeds.

4. MORALITY THE HIGHEST IDEAL

During the era of Thiruvalluvar and during the years preceding his time people might have placed happiness as their highest ideal. They would have been willing to attain happiness at any cost. This perspective of a particular section of the ancient people becomes evident through a Kural which states it. Choosing to differ from this common perception, Thiruvalluvar played a major role in reversing the ideology by stating that morality deserves even more significance than happiness. He also stated that true happiness is one, which can be derived only through morality. He realized though happiness deserves importance in individual lives, when it comes to living as a society, morality deserves to be prioritised more and emphasized its importance.

5. LIFE BASED ON MORALITY

Human life should not be something that is limited, confined to a small circle. It should expand and be one with significance. To expand the minds of humanity and to create a society based on morality has been the goal of Thirukkural. "This is evident from Kural 34 which states what true morality is. Morality is when a person is guilt-free even in his mind. A mind which is clean free from impurities is said to be moral. Since the mind is the birthplace of thoughts, when the mind is pure, it reflects through the word and deed. When something is spoken or some deed is done while harbouring negative thoughts, it cannot be called true morality."

6. WORSHIP OF MORALITY

The moral code of conduct as to what is morally acceptable behaviour and what is deemed unacceptable are also those devised by God only and nothing else. Hence following his command by adhering to such a code, is a form of worship that would please him immensely. When we ignore such a conduct and worship God in other ways, God would consider them unacceptable. This message has been conveyed by Thiruvalluvar through the Kural 6.

7. BENEFITS OF MORALITY IN FAMILY LIFE

“Thiruvalluvar calls morality to be the benefit of a good family life. Through the Kural 45, he states that kindness is the attribute of family life and morality is the fruit of family life. He also stresses that morality can be demonstrated by family life”. He states that when family life is run based on morality there cannot be a benefit which it does not yield. Family life itself is a boon. When it is based on morality, there cannot be a benefit equivalent to it, which even renunciation can offer.

8. ACTS OF MORALITY

It is important that one must do acts of morality whenever possible to the best of his abilities continuously as and when one finds the opportunity for it. “Thirukkural also insists that we must carry out acts of morality to the best of our abilities using our faculties of mind, speech and body by leading family life within material limits, doing physical acts of morality depending on the physique and maintaining consistent habit of thinking morally.”

Considering young age, many people tend to procrastinate acting morally. Instead of doing that, when we act morally in every instance, such acts will reap benefits that are sure to accompany us even in our deaths.

He states that it is important not to wait for material wealth in order to do acts of morality. When this impermanent life comes to an end, not doing such acts will become a great regret that will haunt us in our deaths. Instead of even thinking about doing it shortly, it is ideal to do it even as we think of it.

9. MORALITY TO REFRAIN FROM KILLING

A moral act is one which does not involve the killing any life form. The act of killing is likely to attract many other sinful deeds. This is much more significant than other acts of morality. “With what food one has been blessed with, the act of his sharing it with others and protecting the interests of other creatures too in the process can be considered as an act of morality which is superior to all other acts.” It had been customary, as part of a belief system to sacrifice the lives of animals including horses in the sacred fire to attain enlightenment. This practice should have prevailed even during the period of Thiruvalluvar. Hence he states that instead of sacrificing lives in the name of sacred fire and attaining numerous benefits it is better to live a good life, not forsaking even a single life.

10. THREE VIRTUES

To uplift the standard of living Thiruvalluvar outlines recommendations that calls to follow three virtues of life namely

1. Virtue of spirituality
2. Virtue of charity
3. Virtue of love

Virtue of spirituality

Considering God as “Intelligence, Potential and as the state that is beyond” along his line of thought Thiruvalluvar voices his concern for integrity of mankind and peace in society through Thirukkural. For every man who chooses violence in the name of God or in the name of Religion, Thirukkural is likely to bring about an inner transformation through the virtue of spirituality. His Kural believes in God. But that God isn't male or female. It is divine intelligence that is omniscient. It is pure intelligence. It is the height of character, the height of happiness, the embodiment of love and the identity of morality. This is in coherence with the observation of great scholars.

Virtue of Charity

“A virtue which is likely to make man more cultured is charity. It is the only virtue that is likely to elevate his nature. Thiruvalluvar states that charity is the only pay that we can give for our life Kural 231.” Charity and the public recognition of it are about the most worthwhile things in life. The term charity of Valluvar's conception would cover, I am sure, not only the giving of alms but also all of the modern concept of discriminatory social service, amounting to social justice. It is only the man, who gives of his wealth and efforts abundantly and unreservedly to his fellowmen, who will qualify to be described by Valluvar's term 'Anbudaiyar'.

Virtue of love

The section on virtue of love, explains morality based relationship of love. According to Kural 45- If the married life is filled with love and moral values, then your life would become disciplined and the purpose of life would be attained. Thiruvalluvar has put forth regulations for the relationship of love and relationship of man and woman. He has categorised stealth and chastity and detailed the way of attaining humanitarian characteristics as regulations for a good life.

11. CONCLUSION

In order to write books that comprehensively deal with all aspects of life, the author should have been a scholar with mystic experiences of the divine. Thirukkural is a book that details comprehensive regulations for a good life. Hence it can be inferred that Thiruvalluvar is a scholar with experiences of the divine. In order to lead a complete life, a book which has regulations on morality, materialism, love and enlightenment can only be considered as a reliable guide. Thirukkural has sections on all the four boons and hence is a comprehensive guidance book.

Morality, materialism and love are the three explicit sections in Thirukkural. One might think that the author has not dealt about enlightenment. But enlightenment is something which should be attained practically through meditation under the guidance of a spiritual master who has attained perfection of consciousness. By regulated practice, when immersing the mind on the soul, the consciousness evolves and then by immersing the soul with God one should experience divinity. Thus the importance of enlightenment has been described in the section of Morality. Hence let us try to succeed in completely adhering to these principles and thereby live fulfilling lives.

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