

# ETHICS OF LOVE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AFFIRMATION IN THIRUVALLUVAR AND SHAKESPEARE

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Thiruvalluvar represents not only the quintessence of the Tamil mind but the culmination in the evolution of an Indian ethical perspective synthesizing several strata of the cultural history of India, through it represents the counter tradition to the Vedic ritualistic thought. Similarly, Shakespeare represents an important moment of synthesis and culmination in Western thought and his plays embody a philosophy of love and world affirmation as against the Greek concept of revenge and fate.

*Thirukkural* represents the dawn of modern consciousness in India, more particularly Tamil nadu, in so far as its centre is life on earth, here and now, and if the Sangam culture stood for reverence of life, both exotic and heroic (Akan & Puram) with an implied ethical consciousness underlying and embracing both, *Tirukkural* is the first to focus on ethics and in this process we see the impact of the Buddhist -Jain was but Thiruvalluvar turns it inside out by his emphasis on love and social life.

T.P.Meenashisundaran says that Dharma is the governing spirit of the three ways Aram, Porul and Inbam which include Moksha.(16) But Thiruvalluvar's concept of Moksha is only liberation from desire and attachment and not from life. If in this sense he is closer to the Buddhist-Jain way, in his emphasis on organic expansion of the self and the society into an orderly pattern based on nourishing and sublimation of human affections and ties, he is closer to the Sangam way. In fact *Thirukkural* represents a counter -reformation movement -it is a reaction to the reformation of Buddhism and Jainism as well as the casteism of the Hindu way but accepting the good in both, and avoiding the extreme intellectualism of the Hinduism on the one hand and the extreme asceticism of the reformation on the other. : As Albert Schweitzer puts it, Like the Buddha and the Bhagavad - Gita, the Kural desires inner freedom from the world and a mind free from hatred. Like them it stands for the commandment not to kill and not to damage. It has appropriated all the valuable ethical results of the thought of world and life negation; But in addition to this ethic of inwardness there appears in the Kural the living ethic of love (203).

Similarly Shakespeare's plays were written in the aftermath of the golden age of Elizabeth, an era of quest and conquest when the Englishman was out to conquer a brave new world on the uncharted seas of the world and imagination. But soon there was also a sense of reaction to the earlier intoxication with life and hence Shakespeare's plays, particularly histories and tragedies began to explore the mystery of suffering in relation to man's moral being and ask fundamental questions about life and death. But both in tragedies and the last plays there is an affirmation of life. Though he was influenced by the classical drama consequent on the Renaissance, his plays show that character is destiny and man can transcend tragedy and death through love. Hence this comparison between Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare both

representing a resurgent humanism, in spite of or even because of their acceptance of imperfections of life.

Though *Thirukkural* begins with a hymn to God, *Thirukkural* itself is a great hymn to life, and the concept of god is also anthropomorphic. Even the hymn to God can be seen only as , glorification of an ideal man. Kalaingar M. Karunanithi says that the attributes of god are also the attributes of man and the implication is that man must possess all, these qualities. He also links this chapter with couplet 55 and concludes that Thiruvalluvar only glorifies man in whose image he has created god(11). Even though the gods dwelling in heaven seem to be superior, this couplet can be deconstructed as glorification of those who live properly on earth and in the word 'uraiyum' there is a contempt for frozen immortality as opposed to living humanity.

Referring to the stage in which man gives his gods the form of human beings. Eric Fromm says, "It seems that this can happen only when he has become still more aware of himself, and when he has discovered man as the highest and most dignified 'thing' in the world"(52). He adds :

Man has faith in the principles which 'God' represents; he thinks truth, lives love and justice, and considers all of his life only valuable in as much as it gives him the chance to arrive at an ever fuller unfolding of his human powers - as the only reality that matters, only object of 'ultimate concern'(57)

Iqbal also defined god as the most perfect individual".

The entire ethical system enshrined in *Thirukkural* can be seen in this worldly or existential terms. It does not speak of Deliverance from life, and is an enunciation of a system in which man can achieve perfection here and now. According to Kulandaisamy *Thirukkural* portrays a possible ideal world(70).

It emphasizes virtue as an end in itself - and not as a passport to heaven and as Albert Schweitzer says, its value is not that it leads to reincarnation or liberation from rebirth and that it leads to better and fuller life(201).

Shakespeare's plays can also be divided into three groups -comedies, histories, tragedies including romances and all of them concentrate on here and now, the bank and shoalaime. His humanistic philosophy is summed up in Hamlet. 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!' (2.2 293) In the crucial soliloquy in *Hamlet* where Hamlet asks the question 'To be or not to be that is the question' he lists all the sorrows of life and the whips and scorns of time, but concludes that with all that the dread of the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns puzzles our will and makes us rather bear those ills. He is unable to act because of his conscience but after the grave diggers' scene, he becomes a detached spectator. If Fortinbras symbolizes pure action and Horatio, contemplation Hamlet moves through contemplation to detached action. James Howe relates this to Buddhist thought \*

Atlast, though, his honest questioning of himself and his situation leads to a change; he comes to accept his inevitable death, loses attachment to a "self" and becomes desireless, goal-less, without plan, beyond hope and fear and guilt,

untied either to past or future, fully "ready" in a present emptied of "self"-belief (25).

This is comparable to Thiruvalluvar's emphasis on action without a sense of self and selfishness and both emphasise on ethics without god.

But Thiruvalluvar emphasizes more a philosophy of action as V.S. P.Manickam has argued (35).

*King Lear* refers to gods, but they do not affect Lear's moral nature. In Shakespeare character is destiny, though there is also an element of inscrutable mystery. Macbeth talks of consequences in the here after but the character is evolved in human terms and he meets his destiny in earthly life.

Not only does Thiruvalluvar devote an entire book to erotic love and an entire chapter on love in the broader sense in the book of ethics but the edifice of his entire ethics and social government is love. Schweitzer himself quotes quite a few couplets on love. "The loveless man takes everything for himself; the man full of love gives even his own bones to others". "The life of a soul without love is like the sprouting of a dried - up tree on stony ground". "What help can all the outer limbs give, if the inner limb of the body, love, is wanting?" (209). According to Thiruvalluvar, that body along which is inspired with love, contains a living soul: if void of it, (the body) is bone overlaid with skin. His entire ethics is an elaboration of this philosophy of love (80).

T. P.Meenashisundaran elaborates on Valluvar's vision;

Thiruvalluvar seems to speak in terms of an ever-expanding love of man, becoming progressively one with his wife, children, friends, neighbours of the village and country, through hospitality, gratitude, justice, forbearance, sweet, words and good behaviour avoiding jealousy, idle talk, back-biting, evil deed, casting eyes on others' wives, and having no inordinate desire for wealth, till his sympathy makes him like the common reservoir storing water only for others, like the fruit-bearing tree inside a village, showering its fruits in time for all nearby, and like the medicinal plant yielding its every part to the good of others, near or far away, in a glorious spirit of self-sacrifice (17). He adds, In this process of expansion, the guiding principle is love or anbu, that overflowing of the heart to all those who are related to him in various ways of the world. This becomes as already stated the universal sympathy in the life of the house-holder. At this stage this love blossoms into charity or universal love - love and reverence for all the living things. The man of a family and a country becomes the coher of all living-beings (17).

The book of Aram gives importance to Aram and Arul as well as the power of love in family. In the book of Economics, love becomes the cementing factor and giving to others or ekai is elaborated as an end in itself; even if heaven is denied, 'Give to others'. If compassion or grace (Arul) is the culmination of ethical life, the knowledge of what is befitting a man's position becomes the culmination of social life.

Shakespeare also diagnoses the social ills in terms of absence of love and if the comedies speak of personal and social harmony of which love is a symbol, the tragedies deal with the social and political problems consequent on

the absence of love. *Othello* can be seen as a dramatic elaboration and illustration of the couplet: the ignorant say that love is an ally to virtue only, but it can also lead to violence. Conversely a student of *Othello* can appreciate the couplet better.

*Othello's* tragedy is only a negative offspring of love. Love is capable of not only good, but leads to violence and murder when it is not properly channelised. In fact *Othello's* killing Desdemona is an act of love and sacrifice; when he says, 'I kissed thee ere I killed thee?' (5.2 368) the alliteration shows a deeper identity between the act of love and the act of killing. *Iago* stands for baseness which to Thiruvalluvar is the worst degraded state of man and therefore he puts it at the end. The base resemble men perfectly (as regards form); and we have not seen such (exact) resemblance (among any other species) (1071).

Even *King Lear* is the tragedy of only mistaken love. But finally, *Lear* is reborn after having passed through the purgatorial fire of suffering and identifies himself with the wretched of the earth. Later he is reunited with *Cordelia*, but when death snatches her away, love triumphs and death becomes a stupid spectator. In the beginning *Cordelia* shows that love is speechless; at the end *Lear* realizes that love is deathless.

In *Macbeth* also the political theme is not so important as the personal theme and *Lady Macbeth* goads her husband to do evil only out of love. Again *Macbeth's* cruelty as a king has something to do only with his violating the basic human trust and bond. Like Thiruvalluvar, Shakespeare also gives importance to an organic world order of which the family is the nucleus and the child, the symbol. *Macbeth* abounds in child imagery, even though its plot is full of murders. If Thiruvalluvar devotes a chapter to the power of children's love and the humanizing power of their sweet words. Shakespeare also relates all evil to the inability to love children. Even *Lady Macbeth* indirectly affirms the bond between the mother and the child, when she says, '\* I have given suck and know how tender it is love the babe that milks' (1.7 54,55). When she says that she will destroy even her child if she took a decision to do it only means that it is the most difficult thing to do. Similarly when *Macbeth's* men destroy the family of *Macduff*, he comments on *Macbeth*. 'He has no children', (5.1 217) In the last plays the sins of the elders are redeemed by the love of the children.

To Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare erotic love as embodied in *Kamattuppal* and romantic comedies respectively is the beginning of this expansive love. Only when two young souls merge their separate identities and discover themselves in the other undergoing the entire gamut of emotions such as wonder, awe, pain and joy and sublimate their physical passion into spiritual bond, but never ignoring their body, they become fully human.

Thiruvalluvar's *Kamattuppal* is comparable to Shakespeare's glorification of love as wonder and wonderful psychological experience in his comedies. In fact the love scenes in Shakespeare's plays have much in common with Thiruvalluvar's descriptions and dialogues in *Kamattuppal*. It is significant that the entire *Kamattuppal* is in the form of dialogue. Both consider the eyes of

the lovers as the gateway of love. Whereas Thiruvalluvar says, 'the words of the mouths are of no use whatever, when there is perfect agreement between the eyes (of lovers) (1100). Shakespeare's Romeo says 'She speaks, yet she says nothing sWhat of that? Her eye discourses', 'I will answer it (2.1 58,59). Again whereas Thiruvalluvar rejoices that the eyes of the sweetheart attack like the army of the enemy, Romeo says 'Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye than twenty of their swords; look thou but sweet. And I am proof against their enmity'(2.1 113-5). In, both women complain that their hearts conspire with their lovers and forget their lovers' imperfections when they are close.

There are interesting parallels between the ways in the lady love teases her lover in gentle wrangle in both. But even quarrel is only part of the dialectics of two souls'craving for union. In Shakespeare's comedies lovers' quarrels enhance their love and end with their throwing away their disguises symbolizing the discovery of their true selves, through love. In Thiruvalluvar lovers' quarrel culminates in happy union.

Both Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare see the society or the body polity as an extension of the family. Valluvar's concept of the state gives importance to just governance based on human and moral qualities. It is the king's humanity rather than royalty that is focused. Similarly Shakespeare has no kings, but only men and most of his kings succeed or fail in relation to their human and moral qualities. Both Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare want their rulers to be strong, but compassionate.

Richard II is the tragedy of a weak mind, whereas Richard III is very cruel and in Henry IV we see the emerging of an ideal king. He is contrasted with Hotspur whose his heroism and love of honour are not praiseworthy as he thinks of only himself whereas Hal subordinates his personal glory to the glory of the nation.

The theme of honour is fundamental to both Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare.

Both equate honour with life. Whereas Thiruvalluvar says that people will give up their lives to vindicate honour Shakespeare shows several characters like Brutus and Antony committing suicide when there is a threat to honour.

Accordingly to Kant "In the kingdom of ends everything has either value or dignity. Whatever has a value can be replaced by something else which is equivalent; whatever on the other hand, is above all valife, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has dignity".

Based on this Toynbee says,

Value is relative, and anything that has value can be exchanged for something of equal value (this is the function of money). By contrast, dignity (alias honor) is absolute, not relative; and there is nothing, however valuable, that can be exchanged for dignity or for honor.

According to Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare also one can give up his life to save honour(341).

The theme of revenge begun in *The Merchant of Venice* and developed in the problem plays and *Hamlet* finds its solution in *The Tempest*. Whereas in

*The Merchant of Venice* Shylock's revengeful spirit is countered by Portia's demand for mercy, *Hamlet* though based on an old revenge play questions the very philosophy of revenge. In *The Tempest* displays a capacity to forgive even his enemies and this is the essence of Thiruvalluvar's philosophy also.

Self mastery, and compassion are more valuable than personal glory to both. According to Stephen Greenblatt, Prospero restrains himself from the full exercise of his power to harm his enemies that he breaks his magic staff & drowns his book, is his highest moral achievement, a triumphant display of self mastery. 'The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance'(5.1 27-28/3050).

Both also emphasise the readiness to die for the sake of love and culture: whereas Thiruvalluvar says he who desire admirable culture will even drink the poison poured in their presence King Lear tells Cordelia, 'if you have poison for me, i'll drink it (4.7.71)'. Both Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare use organic imagery particularly images connected with rain and growth while talking of society and love if the first chapter of *Thirukkural* shows the ascent of man the second chapter shows the descent of Heaven in naturalistic terms - as rain. Here is an ethics which is sublimation of natural and human instincts. A humanism based on nature is essential to Sangam culture.

To Marx also, "Society is the accomplished union of man with nature, the veritable resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature"(315).

But in *Tirukkural* though nature is not explicitly given that importance, human nature includes nature an ethics is described as the nature of the world. The rains are responsible for fertility as well as culture, love and grace and Valluvar sees a link between in *Porul Pal* also we find sublimation of natural impulses in the social life and the political order.

We have already referred to the images: the water in the tank, the tree with fruits, medicinal plants and the combination of the abundant crops, the righteous and the unfailing wealth is symbolic of an organic cyclical view of life - the perpetual generation and regeneration of life. Valluvar's ethics is related to an economy based on agriculture.

In Shakespeare also, in *The Merchant of Venice*, mercy is compared to the rains. Danby shows in Shakespeare's *Doctrine of Nature* the interrelatedness of nature and human order in Shakespeare, particularly in *King Lear*. In the play there is a correlation between the violence in nature and violation of human pieties. Finally the regeneration of Lear through Cordelia's love is accompanied by the rains. In *Macbeth* also organic imagery suggests the assertion of life principle against death.

Both Thiruvalluvar and Shakespeare feel that chaos will come if the moral order is not maintained. There is a constant reference to cosmic disorders consequent on violation of ethics in society in Shakespeare. Thiruvalluvar says that the mother earth will swallow everything but for men of noble character (But both are also alive to the power of evil.

Thiruvalluvar's idealism would not allow any one to do evil deeds - or deeds condemned by the noble men even if one's mother was starving. But he is also conscious of meanness and wickedness in human nature. The ethical

pluralism and the shades of gradations in the human nature depicted by Thiruvalluvar are comparable to Shakespeare's grasp of the infinite variety of humanity ranging from the diabolic Iago to the angelic Desdemona.

One cannot ignore the fact that Shakespeare's dramas provide a wider canvas to portray the psychological complexity of humanity, whereas Thiruvalluvar's ethical treatise is more alive to the essentials and his approach is more normative. But he is also dramatic and dialectical in his entire vision as well as in each couplet and chapter. Each couplet is a dialogue -with two levels. Aram is subdivided into domestic and ascetic and again they are not simple opposites. The pleasure principle and the moral favour, pragmatism and idealism, individual effort and social consciousness clash and interpenetrate throughout as in a drama. In each chapter a concept is broken into its atomic structure through a process of contradiction and synthesis.

In the beginning god and man are seen in contradiction and complementarily and in the end, man and woman are brought together through conflict and complicity. God is portrayed through negative structures, he is perceived as negation of negation in the end. Similarly kural is the negation of love and kural becomes the negation of that negation. If the beginning shows man in advaita relation with the cosmos, enacting the soul's recognition of unity in separation, the end shows the lovers' union in spite of their separateness and ends with a triple affirmation of love and bliss. It is this affirmation of love and life and a moral order that brings him closer to Shakespeare who has a similar zest for life with a profound moral sense. Both depict an ethical world order pulsating with the exuberance of existence.

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