

Classical Tamil Literature, Thirukural

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Abstract

Like the great Vedic literature, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Thirukkural by Thiruvalluvar is also an epic. The word Thirukkural is a combination of two Tamil words “thiru” and “kural“. The word ‘Thiru‘ means beautiful or auspicious. The word “kural‘ means short poem consisting of two lines, a couplet. Thirukkural consists of 1,330 couplets (kural) and divided into three parts. The first part deals with the ethical code of conduct (virtues: aroma) and the second part deals with political governance, wealth and other topics of social and material interest(pond). The third part deals with romance and love(inbam). Thirukkural expounds various aspects of life also known as rarniimarai (Tamil Veda); poyyarnozhi (speech that does not become false) and dheiva two! (divine text).

KEYWORDS: vedic, auspicious, kural, divine.

Introduction

Thirukkural written by Thiruvalluvar is one of the most notable literary and ethical treatises in the Indian languages. There is a general consensus among the historians and literary authorities that Thirukkural was written around 2000 years ago. Thirukkural is one of the few literary works that have survived over the past two thousand years and is regarded as relevant even today. Thirukkural aims at guiding human beings to lead a moral, ethical and useful life in this world. Its focus, unlike religious works, is “life on earth” and “life-affirmation”. According to him , “One who lives an ideal life in this world will be ranked amongst the Gods in heaven”. In an ever-changing world, Thirukkural deals with certain basic, but permanent, aspects of life such as morality, ethics, politics, and romance. Thirukkural has been translated in more than 30 languages, and is the most translated book on ethics in the world next only to the Bible and the Koran. The most important features of Thirukkural are: 1) it is secular in nature, 2) it is universal and applicable to people living everywhere, 3) it is everlasting and its messages transcend time. This secular, universal and immortal nature of Thirukkural combined with its conciseness and literary charm has been the pride of Tamil people for the past many centuries.

Well known philosophers like Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and Machiavelli have generally dealt with selected aspects of human values and experience. But, Thiruvalluvar covers the whole spectrum of human experiences in a very comprehensive manner. In the words of Prof. KamilZvelebil, a renowned Tamil scholar from the Czech Republic, “...Thirukkural is a contribution of the Tamil creative genius to the world’s cultural treasure and should be familiar to the whole world and admired and beloved by all in the same way as the poems of Homer, the dramas of Shakespeare, the pictures of Rembrandt, the cathedrals of France and the sculptures of Greece.”

The great sage Tiruvalluvar has presented his thoughts in verses of extreme beauty and delicacy. The combination of ideas, language and metre is unique. The verses presented in this article are all translations from the original Tamil. Every translator, without exception, has admitted that it is not possible to capture the elegance of Tiruvalluvar's beautiful style and rhythm in a translation. It can, at best, be a pale reflection of the original work. His teachings have had a warm place in the hearts of the Tamil people for many generations, and have become part of their culture and life. They might not have always followed the saint, but they have loved, cherished and revered him. The following are few of the tributes in honour of Thirukkural from the world scholars of yester-years (Krishnamurti, 2009):

“I wanted to learn Tamil, only to enable me to study Valluvar's Thirukkural through his mother tongue itself. Only a few of us know the name of Thinivalluvar, The North Indians do not know the name of the great saint. There is no one who has given such treasure of wisdom like him.- “It is a text-book of indispensable authority on moral life. The maxims of Valluvar have touched my soul.” – Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of Modern India.

“In its essence, Thirukkural is a treatise par excellence on the art of living. Tiruvalluvar diagnoses the intricacies of human nature with such penetrating insight, perfect mastery and consummate skill absorbing the most subtle concepts of love and modern psychology, that one is left wondering at his sweep and depth. His prescriptions, leavened by godliness, ethics, morality and humanness are sagacious and practical to the core, They cut across castes, creeds, climes and ages and have freshness which makes one feel as if they are meant for the present times.” — Dr K.M. Munshi (1887—1971), Indian Educationist and Freedom Fighter, Founder of Bhartiya Vidhya Bhavan.

“Thinivalluvar's poem is thus by no means a long one though in value it far outweighs the whole of the remaining Tamil literature, and is one of the select number of great work which have entered into the very soul of a whole people, and which can never die”. “...Complete in itself, the sole work of its author has come down the esteem of ages absolutely uninjured, hardly a single various reading of any importance being found.” — Rev. Dr G.U. Pope, Christian Missionary and Educationist, first to translate complete Thirukkural into English, 1886.

THIRUVALLUVAR AND GURU NANAK SOME REFLECTIONS ON THEIR MORAL TEACHINGS

Tamil Nadu and Punjab are isolated from each other due to geographical distance but have intimate connection in the field of religious and cultural ideas which got wide acceptance in North beyond the Vindhayas and vice-versa. In spite of almost negative mutual contact, there had been much greater interplay of ideas from time to time and it is wrong to say that it was a great divide between the North and the South or both these parts lived in isolation and developed on separate lines. In fact there was and has been a regular contact and absorption of new ideas in religion and culture between the so-called Aryan North and the Dravidian South. The sages, philosophers, preachers and founders

of all religions races and creeds have indeed preached almost the same social conduct and basic moral values of life for human contentment and moral strength. In Indian context, many common thoughts of the two great saint-seers, Thiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak have been universally accepted as guidelines for moral, material and spiritual prosperity. Both have been considered as the most hounoured teachers, guides and philosophers of not only the Tamilians and the Sikhs but indeed the whole mankind. Their writings have been an eternal source of inspiration, delight and enlightenment for one and all. A careful study of both Thirukkural and Guru Granth Sahib, with a critical and comparative eye, would reveal that both are the two great treasure houses of human wisdom. The moral teachings contained in both have remained as an embodiment of all that is best in our literary and socio-cultural heritage. Again, both Thiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak's writings (as contained in Thirukkural(1) and Guru Granth Sahib(2) respectively)are held as sacred to the Tamils and the Sikhs as the Bible to the Christians, Koran to the Muslims and Torah to the Jews. Before the appearance of Islam on Indian soil, there had been two major traditions of thought in India: Vedic and Non-Vedic. The Vedic tradition, which we call Hinduism, in modern terminology, believes in the Ultimate authority of the Vedas. The Vedas, which are the primary testimony in matters related to religion and philosophy in Hinduism, are considered Shruti i.e. Revealed by God himself. Upanishads are a part of the Vedas and the Puranas, Itihasas, Shastras and Bhagwad Gita are considered as Smriti. There were non-Vedic schools of thought also as old as Vedic traditions. These traditions did not believe in the ultimate authority of the Vedas, rather they opposed it. Sikhism too belongs to non-Vedic tradition, as it does not believe in the ultimate authority of the Vedas. Its ultimate authority lies in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs. That way it is a non-Vedic tradition and is a revealed and independent religion. Beginning from the South under the inspiration of the reformers, mystics and poets, a wave spread through out India. This has often been called the Bhakti movement, for the promoters of this wave sought to bring the desired change through love and devotion to the Almighty. Beginning with protection from fear as a starting point of primitive man's religion, it gradually developed into a combination of love and yielding which presently is known by the generic name Bhakti. Bhakti in Hindu context has been conceived as an integral and natural development since it has obvious advantages over complicated ritualism of the sacrifices and over the pain inherent in penances and other austerities. Bhakti is simple, easily given, open to all and does not involve any special exertion. However, the major element of Bhakti from the devotee's point of view surely involves surrender to the lord. Its popularity lies in the fact that it is regarded far superior to the sophisticated Vedic worship-forms favoured by the Brahmins. It appears that one major problem in the history of socio-cultural and religious ideas in our own times is to study the inter relationship between the religious and cultural ideas in the North and the South of the Vindhya, particularly relating to the Tamil and the Sikh Bhakti movements. As pointed out by a number of scholars, the term Bhakti has been used as a blanket term to denote movements, which have different backgrounds and purposes. The powerful and the direct impact of the Tamil and the Sikh movement on the contemporary religion and culture may be considered as an important feature of these two movements. The question therefore, arises as to how these movements originated and developed almost in isolation and to what extent these influenced each other in their own specific ways. There has been in fact so much of give and take, at least in the field of

religion and culture, which led to a close contact and adjustment between the North and the South. This is more true in case of the Bhakti movement. It is now an established fact that the Bhakti cult of North India had been very much influenced by **h\$ samts a\$\$** philosophers of South, notably of Tamil Nadu. It may be noted that the Aryanisation of the South, particularly of the Tamil Nadu, was not one-way phenomenon but resulted in Dravidianisation of Brahmanism to a great extent as can be seen from the Brahmanical devotion to the institution of the temple. (2) During medieval period at least, the country South of the Vindhyas, contributed to the enrichment of the Indian culture as much as it had imbibed from the North earlier. (3) The overall utility and unique contribution of Thirukkural and Guru Granth Sahebhas been acknowledged primarily in the field of their moral well-being. "From the time the Thirukkural was published". Says Justice Subrahmanyam, "the Tamils have recognized it in their own inner voice speaking to them of righteousness, justice and morality". (4) The Thirukkural, however, answers and has since been answering the 'inner voice' not only of the Tamils, but also of the whole mankind. The message of Thiruvalluvar, as outlined in it, is a 'message for all humanity'. It contains great truths, most of which are common to all times, places and persons. It is, in fact, a great book of morals which 'deals in **extesno** with the moral values of life which foster neighbourliness and love among all men and women to whatever race or community they may belong'. (5) The Thirukkural is virtually a universal code of morals, compiled by a great humanitarian, who has rightly been honoured as "the Prince of Moralists" and the "Bard of Universal Man". Hence said Ariel, who was probably the first to introduce it to the French-speaking people, "that which above all is wonderful in the Thirukkural is the fact that its author addresses himself without regard to castes, peoples or beliefs, to the whole community of mankind; the fact that he formulates sovereign morality and absolute reason, that he proclaims in their very essence, in their internal abstractedness, virtue and truth; that he presents, as it were, in one group the highest laws of domestic and social life." (6) Its appeal is, thus, universal, its approach fully cosmopolitan, and its object is purely humanitarian. The Thirukkural contains three parts dealing with the human pursuit, Aram, Poruland Inbam which in Sanskrit language mean Dharma, Artha and Kama which are regarded as purusharthas or human pursuits. Of these Dharma controls both Artha and Kama and makes them acceptable and beneficial to society. The Indian tradition thus refers to Dharma, Artha and Kama as Thrivarga, or the inseparable group of the three. The fourth, Moksha, is an optional trans-social pursuit which is meant only for those who intend to dive deeper into the spiritual dimensions of reality. The Thirukkural was written more than two thousand years ago. We are living in an ever-changing world. The world is considered as maya which means illusion. But it has another meaning-impermanence i.e. what exists at a particular moment does not exist the next moment. This is scientific truth. Change is the law of nature and changes have taken place in every field of human activity. Under these circumstances whether what had been enunciated regarding the art of living which is the essence of Thirukkural would be relevant to modern societies or not would be a moot point. However, one can argue logically and forcefully that most of the pronouncements in the Thirukkural are still valid. The Thirukkural has transcended the limitations of space and time and have enabled it to be relevant, centuries after it was written. Therein lies the genius of Thiruvalluvar, The fundamental human values are expressed in three simple and beautiful words-Satyam, Shivam, sundaram i.e. Truth, Love and Beauty which are called

Tatfvos-eternal, never changing values. Many scholars have dived deep into the verses in the Thirukkural and have brought forth this feature in their studies. The main point which emerges is the scientific outlook which Valluvar has exhibited in dealing with various subjects. He could not have a scientist, since science as it is understood today was not developed before seventeenth century. However a scientific outlook is as old as human civilization. Man is not just an individual. He is a social being- a citizen entitled to what we have resolved to secure in the Preamble of our Constitution:

"Justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, Equality of status and of opportunity, and to promote among the mall, fraternity assuring the dignity of individual."

The Thirukkural defines the pathways for man to tread to reach the human goals. It is a human document shining as a guideline to humanity to promote human happiness, harmony and peace. The Thirukkural is thus a document of universal application. (7) Scriptures, philosophical enquiries, great literary works and studies that dwell on domain of human wisdom rather than human knowledge have the potential to sustain themselves. The Bible will endure as long as Christianity lasts, so will the Koran as long as Islam has its followers. However, books on diplomacy or statecraft such as Kautilya's Arthashastra or Machiavelli's Prince can get our admiration but cannot last long in the ever-changing world in terms of their practical value and validity. Valluvar lived and worked in age, in a society, whose problems, challenges, ambitions, aspirations and even values were vastly different from those of the present.

How could anyone imagine that a book dealing so intimately with so practical and so mundane a subject as 'Art of Living' involving day to day duties and responsibilities and written two millennia ago, will be relevant today? If Thirukkural is a treatise on the 'Art of Living' it should not remain confined within the classroom or to be discussed in the Seminars and forums of the scholars. Since its appeal is secular and that it belongs to Hindus, Christians, Muslims and others, all alike, it must reach the people and form a part of their inheritance. Great works are the creations of the great among men and women. These men or women might be considered as divinely inspired; yet their words are those of human beings and are so treated. The age of science and technology began and brought in its train momentous changes. The development in nuclear science, the invention of computer, the adventures in space and achievements in life science, have almost transformed the world and given in a new form and numerous new tools for human advancement. Valluvar lived and wrote in the age of bullock cart whereas we are living in the age of Boeings and space vehicles. Again, Valluvar lived at a time when monarchy was the only form of civilized government. Today monarch as it existed then has disappeared and the concept of the welfare state has come to be accepted. (8) Thirukkural is referred to as Tamil Veda but it is a secular book with dimensions of a Veda that the Tamils have given to the world. Thus Thirukkural has no followers based on faith. It is not a scripture. It is a secular book and does not advocate any faith. Its appeal and acceptance are derived from its inherent worth.

During the period of Thiruvalluvar the most popular term used for education was Dharma. However, even the role of education keeps changing with time. The word Dharma was in use then and is in use even today. However, what it signifies today is very

different from what it signified in the past. A scientific study of Thirukkural brings out certain characteristics which make it immortal. These have been listed as : (i) Issues which concern wisdom in preference to knowledge (ii) Generalization (iii) Scientific outlook (iv) extolling human effort and presenting a possible ideal world. (9) Social systems consisting of groups of individuals are infinitely more difficult to understand and are intractable. It is here that human relationship plays a part' laws and regulations enter governance and control becomes necessary. The sum of human experience bequeathed over generations acquires relevance. It is thus wisdom rather than knowledge that helps and guides in the 'Art of Living'. Thiruvalluvar has been extremely careful not to deal with matters of knowledge that grow and change with time. It is here that he demonstrates extraordinary perception of things that endure and those that shift with the passage of time. Matters of wisdom do not change perceptibly with time. In the world of knowledge, at the present rate of growth, even a decennium is significant period; but in domain of wisdom a millennium or two may hardly matter. If what Valluvar said was valid then, it may not be valid now. The passages in the Thirukkural are essentially words of wisdom and the expression of a mature mind that have eternal relevance. Valluvar thought of human society as a whole, considered its characteristics, its strength and weaknesses, and extracted the essence and essentials that run through the system as the core. Political organizations may change; form of governance may change and these changes may occur in time and space. However, for Thiruvalluvar, deep in human life are certain relatively un-shifting foundations. Valluvar reached these depths and brings out guide-lines and norms for conducting one's affairs of life as a member of a social system. It is thus this aspect which makes Thirukkural relevant even today. Water is basic to life next only to air and any poem in its praise could have eternal value. Therefore, Valluvar has placed this chapter next only to the opening chapter "In praise of God". The ten couplets in this chapter emphasize the importance and indispensability of rains and will be relevant as long as we need water for life. The last couplet reads as follows:

"If it be said that the duties of life cannot be discharged by any person without water, So without rain there cannot be the flowing water," It is also translated by Rev. G.U. Pope as:

"When water fails, functions of the nature cease, you say: Thus when rain fails, no men can walk in 'duty's ordered way'." (10)

This statement is definite, categorical and also true. Valluvar must have made his observation with the definite conviction that this would be eternally true. Valluvar scrupulously avoids the use of names of places, objects and events in general, proper nouns to an astonishing degree. For example he devoted a whole chapter to the importance of the power of speech but has not mentioned the name of any language, including his own mother tongue, 'Tamil.' Again there is full chapter on state and the characteristics of a prosperous country, but does not mention the name of any country, place, city or kingdoms that existed in the Tamil country or elsewhere.

Thiruvalluvar refers to the necessity of having perennial rivers but does not mention any river. He often speaks of scholarly books and advises his readers to "do as stated in authoritative treatises or as suggested by the acknowledged authors. However, one does not come across the name of any book or author in the Thirukkural Thiruvalluvar knew that any author or any particular book may become obsolete; but the need to consult

acknowledged treatises and great authors will always be there and the advise and stress on such a need will always be there and will remain valid for ever. Thiruvalluvar uses the word tool in more than one place but never refers to any particular tool. You may fill up that place (tool) by eight thousand year-old plough or the most modern tool, the personal computer. He made the room for use of an appropriate tool by the reader on the basis of his understanding of the problem at a given point of time. The tool proper will change with time and place, but the need to use the appropriate tool will ever remain. There is perhaps no book dealing with human virtues that does not insist on 'good conduct'. Thiruvalluvar too speaks of the need for and greatness and propriety of, good conduct in general. The expression 'good conduct' is acceptable to all societies, at all times and is a part of every religion. His behaviour and conduct should conform to the tradition as obtaining at that time and he should accept changes as may be agreed upon by those acknowledged as wise and knowledgeable. Thiruvalluvar extols the virtues of education: the power of knowledge and the baseness of illiteracy. But in all the thirty stanzas devoted to education he does not make any mention of the subjects to be taught or books to be studied. By laying down the criterion "Learn what has to be learnt", Valluvar embraces all professions and all periods. He chooses to stress the need to learn but he would not specify what is to be learnt. This is what each may decide in accordance with the prevailing needs. It is surprising that in full three chapters that are relevant to learning he does not mention any subject, any book or any author.

In the chapter on "Glory of Defense" he says that the forces should have all the components; must not be afraid of suffering of war; and must have the ability to win the war. Although four components of the army were well-established then, he does not either mention the number or refer even casually to any of them. He was thus aware of the fact that components may vary from country to country and even in the same country from time to time. Similarly, he would say the person who has learnt medicine, but neither refer to the system or the acknowledged treatises on medicine or the names of authors of such books, even though at least two systems of medicine existed and several books had been written on both. Thiruvalluvar has devoted a full chapter to "Selection of Personal for Employment". He refers to the choice of persons to accomplish a task. Many of his observations would fit in extremely well with the modern principles of management. Thus in every topic that he dealt with, he has endeavoured to abstract the core of the subject and has succeeded in making the observation so general that they led themselves to interpretations in terms of contemporary developments leaving space for all changes that may take place in human progress. It here that Thirukkural has transcended the limitations of space time and is therefore relevant even centuries after it was written. In any area of activity where one applies knowledge one can see that the knowledge utilized has universal components and local components. Science is universal but its application is not. The moment Valluvar refers to a language or a country or a dynasty of rulers, he may have to ensure its relevance in a given situation. The fulfillment of this requirement will militate against the universal appeal of the book. Whatever topic Thiruvalluvar touched upon, he sifted it, analysed it in inner most details and selected for his discussion only those components that have an enduring value. (11) The final goal and ultimate objective of human endeavour is finding the truth. It is in this pursuit that humanity has involved itself since the birth of civilization. Whether it is religion or philosophy or science, the final aim is to know what is true, what is real.

Among the ancient thinkers there were many who possessed a scientific outlook in their pursuit of knowledge. They exhibited an extraordinary perception and a combination of reasoning and intuition for understanding reality. They exhibited a capacity to rise for a moment above their own faiths and beliefs and study the problem with an open mind. We certainly find these qualities, characteristics and a truly modern mind in Thiruvalluvar. We do find that from the times immemorial, there were cases where the just one suffered whereas unjust lived in plenty and prosperity. Valluvar points out this contradiction:

"The prosperity of individuals who are envious and jealous and the poverty of the righteous need to be pondered over, Valluvar thus raises a question " Why is this that we find that some among the envious and jealous are very well off and the righteous one suffer? " He does not give an answer but concludes that this requires investigation. In general the believers have established a model within which answers can be found to all questions. If no other explanation can be found, they have the final answer "Its God's will".

Since no one has any record what comes under God's will and what falls out side, such an answer is final i.e. one may accept it or reject it. But we see this in Thirukkural Valluvar's view that notwithstanding our faith in God. There are still questions in human lives that cannot be answered and therefore, need further study. He aptly concludes that neither our faith, nor our wisdom, nor our knowledge can provide all the answers. There are still many a things that lie beyond all the systems, human or divine. To recommend further investigation shows Valluvar's openness of his mind and a scientific approach in his outlook.

During the times of Thiruvalluvar, religion certainly played a major role both in society as well as in the life of an individual. Even the king heeded the advice of the religious heads and gave due importance to their counsel. Faith was thus a decisive factor but Valluvar does not refer to any religion. In the very first chapter "In Praise of God" he speaks of Him as an eternal being and stresses the need to worship Him, but does not get involved in any discussion of a religious nature or analysis of various faiths then existing.

The very first chapter shows that Thiruvalluvar is a believer in God and adheres to a particular faith but does not say anything that refers to, reveals or even implies to the religion that he might have followed what to speak of any religion or religious belief. Both in Buddhism and Jainism the monks denounced married life and extolled renunciation. It is to refute this approach that Valluvar domestic life above renunciation. Whatever be the religion of Valluvar himself, the fact stands out that his observations in the book do not reflect any preference to any religion. His book is transcending the bounds of individual faiths, including his own and rising above and looking at life and the world with the objectivity of a researcher. This makes Thirukkural truly a secular book. The wealth and prosperity of a nation today does not depend on the area of land or the natural resources or the population. It depends on human resources which represent the skill or the knowledge and training of the people. The world has now entered in the information era or the knowledge era and its message is: "Those who have knowledge will have all". This precisely and almost verbatim is what Valluvar says in Thirukkural 430. Even if we say we are crediting Valluvar with too much of modern

thought, but one cannot deny that this Thirukkural has in it the seeds and substance of human resource development.

The Pan-Indian culture speaks about four purusharthas, namely Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha or in other words Righteousness, Wealth, Enjoyment and Heaven. These were familiar to the Tamils even during the days of Valluvar. However he chooses to deal only with the first three and does not speak about salvation explicitly. By this single step he keeps religion outside his discussion and thus presents to the world a secular Veda or a secular treatise. Since it deals with this world, one can examine it, question its contents, accept or reject them fully or in parts.

Thiruvalluvar thus makes it abundantly clear that what ultimately counts is not what religion you believe or in what philosophy you expound or what prayers you offer. It is the way you live and your actions that matter. He declares:

"It is one's deeds (and none else) that form the touch stone for one's greatness or smallness."

While there may be other yard sticks for evaluation of one's greatness, finally and decisively on the actions that matter. Thirukkural eulogizes the virtues of human endeavour. It encourages, advocates and extols whatever it can and in whatever form possible, human effort, pursuit and perseverance. Valluvar's advice is that one's aim should be to improve upon and perfect what have on hand rather than neglect it. It is useless to yearn for something elusive, uncertain, or something that lies hereafter.

Valluvar's Thirukkural is verily the "Magna Carta" of human effort. Human beings keep evolving; they grow and develop and this process will continue. Thus standing the world of reason rather than religion, and using the language and grammar of the world, he tried to understand and interpret the path to spiritualism. The main aim of the Thirukkural is to lay down guidelines for living in this world in accordance with the way one should live. His intention is to suggest a way of life; the world of Valluvar has human being as the head; its culture is to:

"Aim high whatever is aimed at"

Again:

When an opportunity that is rare to come by, does come, Use it to achieve goal that or exception and unprecedented."

It is ultimately action, its quality, its dimensions that determine one's stature:

"One's deeds are the touchstone of one's greatness or smallness".

It thus the greatness of your goal that lends you greatness i.e. you become as great as your objective is. The simplest formula of Thiruvalluvar is to lead a life free from blemish; abstain from deeds as advised by the wise.

"He who on earth has lived in the conjugal state as he should live, will be placed among Gods who dwell in heaven."

A simple and more practical prescription that this is almost impossible. Even the most radical reformer or a rational of our times can not improve upon it. In every area of human activity, Valluvar establishes the ideal, investigates its maintenance and where he sees an inevitable need for exceptions and adjustments considering the paramount importance of the interests of society, he applies corrections to bring the ideal closer to the real world. He makes room for dreams of tomorrow; but takes into account the needs of today. His compromises are not compromises of the opportunist; but the compromises of the wise. It is this rational approach, which has given Thirukkural inherent strength and resilience thus making it possible to absorb new impacts and to stretch itself to withstand the new stress.

In short Thiruvalluvar is a bard who sings the glory of action, a poet who makes performance the criterion for greatness; a philosopher who assures heaven on earth for the endeavouring with the way of life that one is expected to adopt. Valluvar has not created in his mind an ideal society of his choice and organised the contents of his treatise to fit that ideal. Had he done that his book would have become another Utopia? As long as humanity has faith and confidence in itself and in its endeavour for progress and development, Thirukkural will remain relevant. That being so, the Thirukkural has justly been acclaimed as a marvelous synthesis of universal humanism and claimed as their own by the protagonists of a good number of faiths and sects. The Jains for instance, "identify him with a disciple of one of their saints. Kuntakuntacharya".(13) Rev. Pope has particularly been struck by the similarity of some of the ideas expressed in it with the teachings of the Jesus. Many passages according to him are "Strikingly Christian in their spirit" (14) This can also be said about the similar teachings of some other faiths as well.

As man is a man everywhere and human experience is everywhere the same, the possibility of such similarities can hardly be ruled out.

We find the moral teachings of Thiruvalluvar present at least in the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the celebrated founder of a modern and universal religion in northern part of our own sub continent.

Guru Nanak, though widely known and respected as a prophet or preceptor, was essentially a man. (15) The man in him was first and foremost, a teacher, a World Teacher, for whom the whole world was a "Class-room" of the Lord and its people the

"pupils". His own definition of a teacher is:

"He alone is a Teacher who imparts true **Ida to tesinstructions** to his pupils." (16). Yes, he indeed was such a Teacher who considered the whole earth as Dharamsal.(17) and linked it to a 'school' meant for learning and practicing Dharma. He was such an ideal teacher who cherished an implicit faith in the destiny of his pupils and who believed that all human beings have a basic fund of goodness, which like the pearl in the oyster, only awaits the opening of the shell to emerge and enrich him. The chief task of the teacher is to 'make his pupil aware of the treasure within him and then help him to unlock the jewel-box.' (18) He was such a marvelous Teacher who while accomplishing such a noble task, did not recognize any distinction between man and man on the basis of his caste, class,

race, religion, country or community. The Guru's first biographer Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636), called him rightly therefore, Zahir PirJagat Guru Baba. (19).

According to him,

'Guru Nanak re-established Dharma, All castes he merged into one caste of man, The rich and poor he brought on one level.' (20)

His attitude as a teacher, therefore, was humanitarian, his appeal universal, his teaching cosmopolitan and his lessons common for one and all. (21) Similar was the case with most of the teachings of Thiruvalluvar who preceded Guru Nanak by centuries in far away South and happened to express his experience and observations in an altogether different language, Tamil. Whatever he thought and taught was meant not only for Tamilians of a particular sector faith but for all people of all ages all over the world. The divine and universal truths couched in his epigrammatic sayings are there to guide us, one and all, on the path of life, and also to teach us what is fundamental and essential for leading an enlightened, elevated and beneficial life. Both in the Tamil and the Sikh Bhakti literature, the institution of family gets a special treatment' Thiruvalluvar, who has greatly influenced the Tamil religious thought has devoted a special section to the state of householder in his celebrated work Thirukkural. He states that of all the aspirants to Dharma, the house holder who lives upto the standard is most estimable. (22) Guru Nanak too had a positive outlook on life and family in contradiction to denunciation and renunciation of worldly life in the earlier religious tradition. With the Guru, Sikhism became a religion of the house holders. Both Guru Nanak and Thiruvalluvar were house-holders-cum-teachers. Domestic virtue, truth, purity, humility and charity form the favourite themes of some of their finest verses couched in simple and straight-forward manner in their respective languages. Again, their views about vast variety of themes such as good and bad actions, love, truthfulness, virtue, humility and good conduct etc., have been expressed without entering into dogmatic or doctrinal controversies. While trying to lead men from darkness to light, from evil to righteousness and from mortality to immortality, neither of them posed as a prophet or law-giver. (23)

Mysticism however, is not such a striking feature of Guru Nanak's teachings. On the contrary, he presented before the people a very simple form of creed which common man could understand and follow without any difficulty. His concern for life in this world was so large that he was opposed to asceticism. He neither preached nor followed the path of renunciation in order to attain spiritual unity with God. He killed "by example and precept, that old idea that a householder's life was a barrier to spiritual progress." (24)

The opposition to asceticism was given an explicitly social character through a series of measures adopted by the Guru such as institution of Dharamsals (the earlier nomenclature of the Gurdwaras meant for public worship), Langar (public kitchen) and

Kirtan (collective singing of hymns) have come down to the Sikhs since the days of Guru Nanak. The cohesive role played by these institutions has done much to hold the family and community together. This has undoubtedly helped to create a new image of a new faith and a new society based on family life, which indeed became one of the main planks of the mission of Sikhism and Sikh society. (25) The Sikhs have and are living as

fellow members of a common society and family, united by religious and social ties which have since become stronger with the passage of time. (26)

According to Valluvar, universal love, sense of shame, philanthropic munificence, indulgent look, and truthfulness are the five pillars on which perfection of character rests (27). He even went to the extent of saying that the touchstone of perfection of character is acknowledging defeat even at the hands of those who are not one's equals. (28) Hundreds of gems of moral, spiritual and philosophical content constitute the moral code of both Guru Nanak and Thiruvalluvar as reflected in their hymns, which are fortunately preserved in original and authentic form. Couched in simple language and homely style both have presented their aspirations in a precise and direct form as the seers, and therefore, can be understood by rustics and the sophisticated equally well. There is nothing of mystical or mythical, theoretical or ambiguous about them. Both are in fact teachers of common folk and were at their best while cherishing their aspirations. Both talked in their own idiom and taught what to aspire and how to proceed, what to do and what not to do in a simple and direct form, in an original and inimitable way.

This is not to say that there was no difference between the two. Both differed at many places. However, the difference is evident from their approach to and emphasis on various aspects of one and the same subject. A remarkable example of this sort of difference is evident in their respective attitude towards "Truth" as a towering virtue. According to Thiruvalluvar:

"In all the scriptures we have read, there is no virtue greater than truth" (29)

According to Guru Nanak:

"Sachauuchesabhko, uparsachachar" i.e.

"Truth is highest of all virtues, But higher still is truthful living" (30)

To sum up Thiruvalluvar's and Guru Nanak's teachings are so modern and scientific that they can be accepted universally. Their injunction to each and every reader to rise above the caste, colour or creed is another modern idea and should appeal to all such persons who believe in equity, justice and social harmony. Neither Thiruvalluvar nor Guru Nanak passes any stricture against the message of any other religion of the past or future. Both open themselves up to the ethics and to the themes of social justice.

Neither of them advocates hollow rituals but on the basic principle of love mankind irrespective of birth, caste, colour or gender. Both have discussed the various issues from their basic human point of view so as to be understood by all without any mystery or mystification. Both Thiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak placed individual conduct (36) before the ritualistic, and laid great emphasis on its moral as well as practical aspect; especially on the good deeds and cardinal virtues of love and truth, charity and righteousness, self respect and self-confidence, humility and generosity, courage and sacrifice, purity and honesty, unity and fraternity, loyalty and chastity, integrity and solidarity, benevolence and temperance, justice and fairplay, sweetness and tolerance, effort and faith, peace and reconciliation, good company and fellow feeling, dignity of labour and selfless service of mankind.

Lastly their clarion call that the salvation of mankind depends on the performance of noble actions, should come as an inspiring message to all those who are groping in darkness for want of a dependable creed. Judged by most exacting standards, the message of both Thiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak strikes us as a sort of new faith propounded by the two prophets, who though are separated geographically and in time span by thousands of miles and several centuries respectively, have left a unique message for the whole humanity. If followed faithfully each human being can play an effective role in the much desired religious and cultural regeneration of mankind.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Thiruvalluvar's Thirukkural is divided into three parts consisting of 133 chapters, each containing ten couplets. It presents seven ideals conveying lofty thoughts couched in pure and powerful Tamil. Thiruvalluvar lived about the first century A.D, and is said to be weaver by profession.
2. Guru Nanak was born at Talwandi Sabo, presently Nanakana Sahib in Pakistan in 1469 A.D. His couplets, over a thousand, are incorporated in Guru Granth Sahib which was compiled in 1604 A.D.
3. N. Subramanian's article in S.P. Sen (ed.) North and South in Indian History: Contact and Adjustment, (Calcutta, 1976), p. 46.
4. G.S. Dikhit's article in S.P. Sen, op. cit., p.64.
5. V.R. Ramchandra Dikshitar, Tirukural of Tiruvalluvar (Madras, 1949), p.ix
6. M. Ariel, in his letter to Burnouf, published in Journal Asiatique, Paris, November-December, 1948. Cited in Harnam Singh Shan, "Tiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak; Their Moral Teachings" (Chandigarh, 1974), p. 13
7. C. Subramaniam Foreword in V.C. KulandaiSwamy, The Immortal Kural, (Mumbai, 2002), pp.x-xiv.
8. Ibid., p. xx
9. Rev. G.U. Pope, Tirukkural, tr. (Chennai, 2004), p. 9
10. V.C. KulandaiSwamy, op. cit., p. 26.
11. Ibid., pp 23-41
12. T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram, A History of Tamil Literature, (Annamalainagar, 1965),

p. 47. Cited in H.S. Shan, Tiruvalluvar and Guru Nanak: Their Moral Teachings, (Chnadigarh, 1974), pi 3

13. Rev. G.U. Pope in his introduction to his translation of Tirukkural (Oxford, 1886), p. xxii

14. But what a man the like of whom is yet to be known to the history of mankind. He was a man whose life, according to Sadhu Vaswani, "opened up an era in the history of India and Asia, in the history of humanity.," Sadhu T.L. Vaswani, A Prophet of the People (Poona, 1952), pp. 13, 15.

15. Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Amritsar, 1604), Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee's Impression, Rag Ramkali, p. 938