

[Our previous series of articles on valluvar had created a great deal of interest among our readers, and we now publish a series of three articles by A.N.Kandasamy on what he regards as unique in Valluvar. The second and third installments of this series will be published in the coming weeks. - EDITOR, Tribune]



The final impression that scholars and writers who write on Valluvar leave in the minds of their readers is that he is either an outstanding moralist of the stoic-philosopher type or a didactic poet on ethics. But to me this is a grossly wrong estimation of one of the great thinkers of the world, a secular philosopher with a unique outlook in many ways, not just an author of a few hundreds of ethical aphorisms, but how is it that this well-unintentioned, in fact adulatory under-estimation has gained such currency among writers and readers as well? Perhaps the fact that the early translators of Kural were Christian missionaries like the Rev.G.U.Pope and Rev.W.H.Drew has something to do with it.

It is the opening section of Thirukural ARAM or VIRTUE («Èõ) that has appealed to these gentlemen as the cream of Valluvar's thought. The Second and Third sections deal with Politics and Love respectively and the vocation of these translators must have had a limiting influence on their appreciation of these sections.

Kural is in fact a three-fold book of ideas. It sets forth the thoughts of a keen intellect on three important subjects, Ethics, Politics (Economics included) and the Psychology of Love. This three-fold nature of the book was well realized by the early Tamil commentators who put particular emphasis on it by calling it the MUPPAAL NOOL (ÓôÀ¡ø áø). The three-sectioned book - and the author himself was referred to as the MUPPAL NOOLAR (ÓôÀ¡ø áÄ¡÷) which means the one to whom belonged the three sectioned book.

THIS THREE SIDED genius of Valluvar makes him appear in my eyes as Marcus Aurelius, a Machiavelli and an Ovid all rolled into one. Or shall we say that he was trinity of penetrating knowledge with three faces, that of Marcus, Aurelius, Kautiliya and Vatsayana?

In all the three fields that Valluvar chose to expound his views he has brought to bear a certain amount of realism and originality unmatched in the thinkers of his time. A quick journey of Thirukkural through all its three sections will easily enable us to see the positive and realistic life and his problems.

FIRST let us take his ethics. Nowhere is his positivism and realism so pronounced as in this field. For example, on the question of marriage and celibacy Valluvar seems to have had a different view from all the thinkers who had lived before him. They all have directly or indirectly expressed the view that a state of unmarried celibacy is higher than a married state. In fact most of them for example, the Buddha, mahavira and Jesus lived the lives of wandering mendicants, thereby creating the impression that better men always preferred a state of homeless celibacy to that of a householder.

However one should admit these leaders of ethical thinking were generous enough to permit their followers to marry if it pleased them. But the point to remember here is that in their eyes the married state was only a permissible one, a second best and not an ideal one. It was to be understood and tolerated with sympathy but not to be looked up to. In point of fact, it was actually to be treated as an excusable crime, a merciful concession that one had to grant to those who cannot overcome the weakness of their flesh.

THIS NEGATIVE attitude towards marriage is well illustrated by the following sentence in the Bible:

"If they cannot contain one, Let them marry, for it is better to marry than burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9)

But Valluvar thought differently. To his positive mind married state was not to be regarded as superior to non-celibacy. The sexual life was worthwhile and worth pursuing. In fact after going through Valluvar one could enter wedlock without what modern psychologists would call guilt feelings, while after pursuing the teachings of the others I have mentioned, one could only enter matrimony as if he or she were committing a dark crime.

Valluvar extols the virtues of married life in two hundred beautiful stanzas. These are found in the second chapter on the section of Virtue and is entitled the Domestic Way of Life (பொருட்குறி). In

expounding his theory that marriage is an ideal state for all men and women Valluvar proves that he is a realist in every way. It is in the biological nature of man and animal to mate and bear offsprings and any advice contrary to natural processes would be futile even if it were good. Valluvar accepts reality and looks into the positive aspects of marriage rather than the negative aspects and shows how to make a success of it.

THE FOLLOWING stanzas of the Kural provide a good indication of the robust and clear views he had in the matter of a house-holders life;

If one liveth in proper household life what gaineth he by going into any other way of life?- Kural 46.

If one liveth the householder's life in nature's way, he shall be deemed as the one who leads the best way of life.- Kural 47.

To touch the body of children is pleasure to the body. To hear their words is pleasure to the ears.- Kural 65.

It is those who have not heard the prattle of their children who would say: the lyre is sweet and so is the trumpet. -Kural 66.

In a woman you find joy to all the sensory organs. the eyes, the nose, the ears, the mouth and body. -Kural 1101.

Is the land of the lotus-eyed (the heavens) more pleasurable than embracing the shoulders of one's beloved? - Kural 1103.

[to be continued]

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