

THIRUVALLUVAR



Thiruvalluvar is a celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher popularly known as Theiva Pulavar ("Divine Poet"), Valluvar, Poyyamozi Pulavar, Senna Pothar, Gnana Vettiyan or Ayyan whose contribution to Tamil literature is the Thirukkural, a work on ethics. Jains, Buddhists and Shaivites, claim him as their own. Thiruvalluvar is thought to have lived sometime between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century BC. The famous Tamil poet Mamulanar of the Sangam period also mentioned that Thiruvalluvar was the greatest Tamil scholar and Mamulanar also mentioned the Nanda Dynasty of northern which ruled until the 4th century BC. This estimate is based on linguistic analysis of his writings, as there is no archaeological evidence for when he lived.

Thiruvalluvar



Where & when born

St. Thiruvalluvar, the author of THIRUKKURAL was born about 30 years before Jesus Christ in Thiru Mylai (Mylapore) Chennai in Tamil Nadu or in Thirunayanarkuruchi a village in Kanyakumari district of Tamil nadu.

Brief history of the person -personal

Both Thiruvalluvar's faith and identity are disputed. His disputed identity includes a low-caste Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, crypto-Christian, high-caste Hindu, Brahmin and half-Brahmin. There are little or no clues available to trace Thiruvalluvar's background. There are a few legends about the birthplace of Thiruvalluvar. However, according to one of the legends, Valluvar was the son of a Brahmin father (Bhagavan) and an 'untouchable' mother (Adi). Further, it is said that he was abandoned as a child to be picked up by a Vellala (high non-Brahmin, landowning caste) woman who named him 'Tiru-Valluvar'. Following objections by her neighbors, the Vellala woman too abandoned Valluvar to be picked up this time by a family of Paraiyars (untouchables). It is said that he later moved to Mylapore (part of Chennai, now) where he worked as a weaver.

One legend associates him to Madurai, the ancient capital of the Pandya rulers who vigorously promoted Tamil literature. According to another he was born and lived in Mylapore, a part of present day Chennai city and travelled to Madurai to submit his work, the Thirukural, for approval of the king (Pandian) and his college of poets.

There are, also, traditional stories citing the Tamil Sangam of Madurai (the assembly/conference of eminent scholars and researchers conducted on a regular basis) as the authority through which Thirukkural was introduced to the world. Thiruvalluvar might have spent most part of his life in Madurai because it was under Pandia rulers that many Tamil poets flourished. There are also recent claim by Kanyakumari Historical and Cultural Research Centre (KHCRC) that Valluvar was a king who ruled Valluvanadu in the hilly tracts of Kanyakumari district of Tamilnadu.

Principles & Practices in Spiritual Life

Thiruvalluvar earned a living by weaving cloth and selling it. In the same place there was a rich man whose son was a naughty boy. This lad came to the weaver Thiruvalluvar and asked what the price of the sari that he was selling. Thiruvalluvar replied, "Three rupees (the price in those days)". The lad tore the sari into half and asked what the price of the half of the sari was. Thiruvalluvar replied, "A rupee and a half." The lad tore it again into two and asked what the price of the torn piece was. Thiruvalluvar replied calmly, "It is worth twelve annas" (The three fourths of a rupee). He did not get angry at the lad's behavior. He was calm and

Thiruvalluvar

unruffled. The young lad was astonished. He asked Thiruvalluvar, "How did you acquire the quality of forbearance (Kshama)?" Thiruvalluvar replied, "Forbearance is truth. It is right conduct. It is non-violence. It is a source of great joy. It is heaven itself. There is nothing greater than forbearance in this world." That's the quality of Thiruvalluvar he not only preached through his famous Thiru Kural but also practiced in real life.

When some aspirants enquired to Thiruvalluvar: "O sage, which Ashrama of life is better—Grihastha or Sannyasa?" Thiruvalluvar did not give any answer. He simply kept quiet. He wanted to teach them the glory of Grihastha Ashrama by example simply through the following ways.

Thiruvalluvar was taking cold rice in the morning. He said to his wife: "Vasuki, the rice is very hot. Bring a fan to cool it". Thiruvalluvar's wife was drawing water from the well when Thiruvalluvar called her. She at once left the rope and ran to him with a fan to cool the rice. She did not ask her husband, "How can the cold rice be hot? Why do you want a fan now?" She simply obeyed his commands. The vessel that contained water was hanging half-way in the well unsupported, on account of her Pativrata Dharma Shakti. The aspirants noticed this phenomenon and the noble conduct of Vasuki and were simply struck with amazement.

On another occasion, about midday, Valluvar called his wife and asked, "Bring a lamp immediately, O Vasuki! I am stitching the cloth. I cannot see the eye of the needle. I cannot pass the thread properly". Vasuki did not ask her husband, "Why you want a lamp in the broad daylight when you can see the eye of the needle clearly". But she simply obeyed his word. The aspirants were much inspired by the ideal life of sage Thiruvalluvar and the exalted conduct of Vasuki. They did not speak a word to the saint. They quietly left the place with profound satisfaction and were deeply impressed by the practical and exemplary life led by Thiruvalluvar and Vasuki.

They learnt the lesson that the life of an ideal householder was in no way inferior to that of an ideal Sannyasin who was treading the path of Nivritti and austerity in the Himalayan caves and that each was great in its own place, time and circumstances.

Spiritual Works

When Thirukural presented to the King Pandyan, it was weighed along with other contemporary works of other poets by placing all of them on a golden lotus and allowed it to float in the tank of famous Madurai Meenakshi amman temple in Tamilnadu. The sanctified golden lotus that would recognize only the masterpieces was said to have rejected all other works and retained only the Thirukural.

There are three most important features of Thirukural which make it unique, they are

- It is secular,
- universal and applicable to people living everywhere and
- everlasting as its messages transcend time

Thiruvalluvar

Writings / Celebrated books

Thirukkural is one of the most revered ancient works in the Tamil language. It is considered a 'common creed', providing a guide for human morals and betterment in life.

Thirukkural is divided into three sections: section one deals with Aram, good ethical behavior with conscience and honor ("right conduct"); section two discusses Porul, the right manner of conducting worldly affairs; and section three dwells on Inbam, love between men and women.

The first section has 38 chapters, the second 70 chapters and the third 25 chapters. Each chapter consists of 10 couplets of kural, for a total of 1330 couplets. Although two sections, Aram and Inbam, are devoted to the private life of an individual more than half the couplets in Thirukkural are grouped under Porul which discusses ethics in public life. Thus Thiruvalluvar gives more importance to righteous living in public life.

This classical work in Tamil has been widely translated in over 60 languages of the world. Nearly 300 years ago, the Italian Jesuit missionary, Constantius Beschi (known as Veeramamunivar in Tamil) who came to Tamil Nadu in 1710, translated the Thirukkural into Latin. Rev. G U Pope who hailed Thiruvalluvar as "the Bard of Universal Man" translated the Kural and printed it first in English. Many European missionaries have made translations into English between 1820 and 1886. Freedom fighters and statesmen, C Rajagopalachari and VVS Iyer have also translated the Kural into English. Barring perhaps the Bible and the Koran, the Kural is the most translated work.

Memorials

A temple-like memorial to Thiruvalluvar, Valluvar Kottam, was built in Chennai in 1976. This monument complex consists of structures usually found in Dravidian temples, including a temple car carved from three blocks of granite, and a shallow, rectangular pond. The auditorium adjoining the memorial is one of the largest in Asia and can seat up to 4000 people.

There is a 133-foot tall statue of Thiruvalluvar erected at Kanyakumari at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, where the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean converge. The 133 feet denote Tirukkural's 133 Chapters or athikarams and the show of three fingers denote the three themes Aram, Porul, and Inbam, i.e. the sections on Morals, Wealth and Love.

There is also a statue of Thiruvalluvar outside the School of Oriental and African Studies in Russell Square, London.

The government of Tamil Nadu celebrates the 15th (16th On Leap Years) of January as (as Per Tamil Calendar) Thiruvalluvar Day as part of the Pongal celebrations in his honour.

Sources

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