

Comprehending 'Thirukkural' in Kannada Literary Culture

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Abstract: *'Thirukkural' is a Tamil Classical Text. It is believed to have been composed from 2nd AD to 4th A.D. Nothing much is known about the literature written in Kannada during this period. The first available Kannada Inscription dates back to 5th century. The first available Kannada Text 'Kavirajamarga' was written in the 9th century. There are references to the earlier Kannada poets, but the texts are not found. Therefore the classicality of the 'Thirukkural' is treated with love and honour in Kannada literary tradition. The present paper titled Comprehending 'Thirukkural' in Kannada Literature attempts to look at the presence of Thirukkural in Kannada literary culture from the classical times to the present.*

Keywords: *Classical Text, Kannada Culture, Classicism, Modern Literature*

1. Introduction

'Thirukkural' is a Tamil Classical Text. It is believed to have been composed from 2nd AD to 4th A.D. Nothing much is known about the literature written in Kannada during this period. The first available Kannada Inscription¹ dates back to 5th century. The first available Kannada Text 'Kavirajamarga'² was written in the 9th century. There are references to the earlier Kannada poets, but the texts are not found. Therefore the classicality of the 'Thirukkural' is treated with love and honour in Kannada literary tradition.

This text with total 1330 moral poems is divided into three parts as Dharma-Artha-Kaama. The poet Thiruvalluvar is Tamilian's adorable poet. It is translated into various languages of the world including Kannada. The history of Kannada translation of 'Thirukkural' goes like this; more than ten versions of Kannada translation of 'Thirukkural' are available. 'Thirukkural' is one of the texts which is translated more often among all other Indian texts in Kannada. The next place goes to Rabindranath Tagore's 'Geetanjali'. The efforts of translating 'Thirukkural' into Kannada were attempted 108 years before. In 1898 Kannada literary historian and great scholar R.Narasimachar translated it into Kannada as 'Neethi Manjari'. It has 38 chapters. In 1911 he translated some more chapters and published the second part. For which he used Kannada 'Kandapadya'³. 'Thirukkural' is written in original Tamil two lines called 'Venba' metre. Most of the old Kannada literary texts effectively used 'Kandapadya' metre. R.Narasimacharya who edited classical Kannada texts has found this metre more effective. The 'Khyatakarnataka Vrattha'⁴ was not to be used, because of its complexity. Therefore the language of classical period and classical metre are used here. This translated text was republished in 1928. The credit of introducing 'Thirukkural' to Kannada goes to R.Narasimacharya. Another great scholar B.M.Shrikantayya has also translated with the title 'Tamilkattu'. It is sad that the original text was eaten by the termites. With the translation of English poems 'English Geetegalu'⁵ he has contributed to the new spirit of Kannada poetry. Indeed, one could assume that his translation of 'Thirukkural' would have given new spirit to Kannada. His two translations of plays⁶ have opened the new ways of thinking in Kannada literary culture.

In 1952 L.Gundappa has translated the Dharma a part of 'Thirukkural'. This translation is in verse form with two lines and sometime three lines couplets. In verse form there is also a paraphrase. For his interpretation of 'Thirukkural' he used Parimelalagar text⁷. This text is more popular among the Kannada readers.

The above cited translations have done only a few chapters. The full book was translated by P.S.Shrinivas. He completed this work from 1972 to 1976. But, it was published in 1982. It contains first Tamil form, the meaning of Tamil words in Kannada and Kannada paraphrase of the poetry. Translation is in simple and lively style. After L.Gundappa's this is well received version in Kannada. In 1985 N. Muniswamy translated and

published complete 'Thirukkural'. K.Jayaraman's translated work 'Thirukkural' was published in 2001. N.Geetacharya and M. Pasumalai Arasu's collaborated translation of Kannada 'Thirukkural' came out in 2004. Prof. Pradhan Gurudatt's translation is also available. M.Govindaraju's 'Thirukkural' Kannada translation is published by B.M.Shri Pratishtana. M.Pasumalai Arasu in 1995 has translated the analogy of Sarvajna's Tripadi⁸ and Hundred Kurul as 'Sarvajna Nooru Kurul Nooru'. Apart from these, there may also be one or two translations available. From the beginning kurul have been translated for the purpose of pamphlet, speech and comparative study. That too, during the Cauvery water sharing dispute, in order to respond and express solidarity. The interests behind all translations are: 'Thirukkural' is the oldest Tamil classical text with the moral and ethical values, written in two lines, without any difficulty in the meaning, not being the lengthiest epic with the single subject, it responds and addresses to the universal issues. Even the single part translation of Thirukkural will not affect the meaning. The kind of universality it is having has also played a major role in the translation of 'Thirukkural' into Kannada.

The analytical forms of most of the Kannada translations have not come out of Brahminical framework. This is also found in Tamil analysis says Norman Cutler⁹. In India, the idea of looking out of the Brahminical framework was taught by Tamil literature. Scholars of Tamil and Kannada have called it 'Tamil Veda' and 'Tamil Bhagavadgeeta.' This is how 'Thirukkural' was framed into 'veda' and 'geeta', which was unwanted. Veda and Geeta along with its excellent thoughts it includes inequality, violence, brahminical attitude and male domination. Then how to compare it with 'Thirukkural'? But Tamil analysis and Kannada translations have accepted it.

The parts Dharma-Artha-Kaama of 'Thirukkural' appear to be the copy of Sanskrit. The structure of 'Thirukkural' doesn't look like the copy of Sanskrit. Apart from that it doesn't have Moksha part. 'Thirukkural' will not fit into the Sanskrit culture which has always accepted Moksha notion. Dharma-Artha-Kaama is belief and everyday reality too. 'Thirukkural' is built upon such a belief upon such a reality. For that it has used all sorts of imagination, description, exaggeration. It is his success of structure, style and narration. Here the caste is not mentioned. The desire to reach the mass is the strength of this text.

In the recent days new discussions about the relations between Kannada and Tamil have begun. Through his insightful texts S.Shettar¹⁰ has created a space for the new dimensions. The search for such relation started in the context of 'Sangam' literature. But the relations with 'Thirukkural' was not discussed anywhere. Not only in S.Shettar's texts, also in the major discussions had that happened regarding Kannada and Tamil relations¹¹. Let us discuss the reasons.

'Thirukkural's period is identified as 2nd to 4th century'. The first available Kannada text 'Kavirajamarga' is said to have been composed in 9th century. There is no reference about Tamil in 'Kavirajamarga'. But this text was also in search of new poetics to come out of Sanskrit framework. It was towards finding new poetics. It was not successful like Tamil. But its attempt is remarkable. The author of 'Kavirajmarga' was not enthusiastic to learn from Tamil, or he might have not had tools to learn it. But his way of finding new independent Kannada poetics is related with Tamil poets. S.Shettar cited an interesting observation 'Kavirajamarga did not get interpretations in olden period, but Tholkappiam got more number of interpretation texts¹². If the successive poets in Kannada have developed the poetics of Kavirajamarga Kannada poetics would have been liberated and strengthened. The unimportance of kavirajamarga is ascribed to a historical fallacy. In this regard 'Tholkappiam', 'Shilappadikaram', 'Thirukkural' are privileged texts. They went on growing generations with poets, critics and interpreters. Champu¹³ poets of 10th (A.D.) century have not mentioned Tamil literature or culture in their texts. Pampa¹⁴, while comparing his poetry with the beautiful woman has cited Kerala and Andhra. But has not referred to Tamil anywhere. In Vachanas there are more references to shaivabhakti tradition. It means, the relation with Tamil is restricted to Tamil geography, but there are no examples of learning from Tamil literature. Further, in the writings of Harihara¹⁵ the influence of Tamil bhakti movement can be seen. Overall, the influence of Tamil literature on Kannada literature is very less. That too, the influence of 'Thirukkural' is not quite visible.

What are the reasons for it? Classical Kannada poets were exposed to vast subjects. For that Mahabharata, Ramayana, the stories of Jainacharyas and Prakrit literature helped them. They divided poetry into 'Laukika' and 'Aagamika'¹⁶. This division has outgrown its limitations. It means one can see 'Laukika' in 'Aagamika' and 'Aagamika' in 'Laukika'. The stories of Karnataka and its rulers are depicted in the canvas of Mahabharata and Ramayana. The nature of 'Thirukkural' did not fascinate Kannada poets, who have found in classical epic poetry, the lengthy figure of speech, native narrative styles, love and war, sacrificing the life and entering in to the vairagya (Renunciation). It is applicable to many classical Kannada texts up to 19th century, and the modern Kannada literature learnt from English literature. Modern Kannada Literature learnt from Bengali, Marathi, and Telugu but has not attempted to learn from Tamil especially from 'Thirukkural'.

Apart from that, classical Kannada texts are story-oriented. Kannada poetry has accepted positively the story and narration. Majority of the folk poems tell stories and find contentment in narration. But Vachana is exceptional. Tripadis¹⁷ of Sarvajna also don't fit into the classical texts' framework. Harihara created Ragale¹⁸ which to tell the stories of shivabhaktas. Till the beginning of modern Kannada literature this tradition continued. 'Thirukkural' structure is different. It is not interested in narrating any story. It has narrated its understanding of values and morals. It will not make difference if you reorganise the chapters. 'Thirukkural' has no characters, incidents, different structural patterns. It's away from classical Kannada literary models. Therefore its influence on Kannada literature is not seen.

Old Kannada literature is influenced by Sanskrit and new Kannada literature is from English. On the other side in Kannada there were new experiments in writing literature were done. Kannada literature was delayed in knowing about Tamil poetics. In 1980s and 90's Kannada scholarly world started understanding Tamil poetics. It is common in all Indian languages that the enthusiasm they have shown to borrow from Sanskrit and English was not extended to other regional languages.

There are various texts on 'Thirukkural' in Tamil. Norman Cutler has written a detailed article on it¹⁹. There was a need for explanation for the gaps in 'Thirukkural' and since there were many opportunities to understand the brevity and density of the text opines Norman Cutler. He understood it in a theoretical way. There is a possibility of perceiving 'Thirukkural' Kannada translation history in a theoretical perspective. It has been already told that 'Thirukkural' Kannada translations did not impact historically. It has also not effected the poetic consciousness of Kannada poets. The reason may be different. The translation of R.Narashimachar is in 'kandapadya'. This old metre did not give the spirit to new poets. Further, 'Thirukkural' translations are in simple style. Already Sarvanja has proved his ability in his Tripadi using complex, moral and simple styles. More than that Kannada poetics has learnt from several native and western styles. Kuvempu has remembered Tamil Kamban poet in his 'Shri Ramayana Darshanam'²⁰. 'Thirukkural' was not remembered. It's not a parametre, but to remind that there are no examples of remembering 'Thirukkural' in Kannada literary tradition. From old Kannada literature to modern Kannada literature, there is not even a single text which is shaped by 'Thirukkural'. But Kannada has respect for 'Thirukkural' for being the classical text of Tamil literature.

There are various specialities in the poetry of 'Thirukkural'. The Kannada poetry of 9th century has worked to spread the teachings of Jainism. Scholars have noted that the poetry transformed from religiosity to various levels of experience, nevertheless, one of the essentialities of it was to indicate shifts in religions. But 'Thirukkural' does not show particular interest in religion unlike other poetry. His poetry was that of the people, it strives to observe, sensitize human behaviour and emotions instead. He focussed on the inner potential of humans and the ways of individual development in his poetry.

Nevertheless, in the first section of second chapter of 'Thirukkural' there is a whole part dealing with the phenomenon of rain. The significance of rain, the loss of life due to rain, the refreshing atmosphere due to rain, agriculture, the relationship between rain and human life likewise have been discussed. Kannada poetry seldom talks of rain, but never a whole chapter has been dedicated to the same. 'Thirukkural' has elaborately discussed the connection between rain and farmers and their woes. The poetry in Tamil has introspected the various modes and conventions of poetry writing itself which gave Tamil poetry a distinct identity.

The response to 'Thirukkural' by Kannada scholars has been varied. Its aestheticism has been overlooked as simple and ordinary. H.M Nayak, for instance, even commented that the aesthetic quality of Manku Timmana Kagga²¹ has not been achieved in 'Thirukkural'²². The Kannada realm could not recognise the aestheticism of 'Thirukkural' humanism and ethics as it mainly focussed on the technicalities and complexities of poetry writing such as Champu, Vachana, Ragale, Shatpadi²³ etc. It's not that Kannada poetry does not have simple value based didactic poetry, but Kannada poetry has often stressed on poetical devices, complexities and sophistication. In the view of these 'Thirukkural' has been analysed. Probably the poetic trends of a language governs the understanding and analyses of poetry in other languages as well which has often led to the reception of 'Thirukkural' as rather simple in the Kannada realm.

Even in Tamil literature, the poetry in Sangam age had been stratified as 'superior verse'(Merkanakkam) and 'inferior verse'(Keelkanakkam) where the technicalities of poetry stand high and ethical value based poetry was considered low. 'Thirukkural' has also been categorized among the inferior verse owing to its simplicity. It indicates that it did not attract the Tamil scholars in terms of its aesthetic appeal.

Further, 'Thirukkural' sections on love 'Kamattuppal' are close to Kannada poetry of praise. Kannada poetry is filled with verses of praise about a woman's graceful body and beauty and behaviour. 'Thirukkural' also hints at these but is distinct from other poetry. Ancient Kannada poetry has praised both men and women, for instance, Arjuna, Bheema, Karna and Krishna's beauty has been elaborately praised. But 'Thirukkural' has negligible praise of men. Further, Kannada poetry had portrayed women's dilemmas, inner conflicts in poetry such as Akka's Vachanas²⁴, the praise of Draupadi²⁵, Amritamati²⁶, Maluhani²⁷ etc. have been slightly complex.

Also Kannada poetry of praise and love culminate into aestheticism. The moments of intense love, physical desire are nearly to deflate the notions of these and guide people to spirituality and asceticism. Lust physical desires have also been portrayed as upheavals in human life. An edge of experience is also attributed to it. The works like Adipurana²⁸, Prabhulingaleele²⁹, Bharatesha Vaibhava³⁰, Allam's Vachana³¹, Tatvapada³², have been able to bring out the experiential face of it. Further, modern poetry has various forms of love poetry and in the context of these; 'Thirukkural' has been discussed in a different light.

'Thirukkural' has often been compared to Kannada vachanas, sarvagnya's tripadi and keerthanas³³. A comparative study of these has been attempted. The points of references involving such a study have been the Chandassu (metre) and not ethical base. Bringing out wisdom in a few lines has been noted in these. The small size of poetry, enjoined with a moral value, popular style speech among common people, making meaning out of lives, life's ups and downs explicate in poetry, humanism brought into the front have also been matter of discussion and comparative study. These poems reflect a sense of human equality, egalitarian society and have been similar to each other in this respect. The poems give a scope for portraying a sense of equality.

Another interesting point is that the author of 'Thirukkural' Tiruvalluvar has been a part of Karnataka's cultural politics. Similarly, Kannada poet sarvagnya. It was the period of Caveri water dispute. The conflict among people over water distribution led to bullet firing, protest movements, suicides and many other kinds of losses including the loss of human lives. Both the governments tried to exercise force over the centre. The centre postponed the verdict endlessly. Meanwhile the political force changed and the dispute had reached the Supreme Court. The trial and tribulations are still pending on the same. It was in this crucial and hard times that Sarvagyna and Tiruvalluvar proved to be peacemakers for the two disputing states and cultures. After a lot of contemplation both the governments agreed to install the statues of Tiruvalluvar in Bangalore and Sarvagyna in Chennai. This was taken as a symbol of peaceful friendship. Some people protested against such a move too. But the strong will of the government and people, general public led to successful installations of statues in both the cities. Tiruvalluvar's statue was unveiled by the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi on August 9, 2009 in Bangalore and B.S Yediyurappa the then Chief Minister of Karnataka unveiled Sarvagyna's statue in Chennai on August 13. It is interesting to note that these figures (Sarvagyna and Tiruvalluvar) gained much prominence in such a dispute.

Kannada poetry has tried to learn from a famous Tamil poem 'Shilpadikaram'. Kannagi has been the daughter of Kannada too. Her sorrow and protests melted Kannadigas heart. She has played a significant role in Kannada feminism too. 'Thirukkural' has acquired the love of Kannada people. But it couldn't wield much influence on them. We have to wait to see how the next generation perceives it and responds to it.

2. References

- [1] *Halmidi* is the first available Kannada inscription. During the reign of *Kadamba* king *Kakutsabhataraka*.
- [2] *Kavirajamaarga* written by *Shreevijaya* of *Rastrakuta* Empire.
- [3] *Kandapadya* is four line metre. Especially used in the Kannada classical texts.
- [4] *Khyata Karnataka vrutta* is a prosody which is used in Kannada classical texts.
- [5] *English Geethegalu* (1921) by *B.M.Shrikantayya*, the translation of English Romantic poems.
- [6] *Aswathaman*(1929), *Parasikaru* (1935), translated plays. *Ashwathaman* is a translation of *Sophocles'Ajax* and *Parasikaru* is based on *Aeschylus'The Persians*.
- [7] Historically, *Parimelalagar's* commentary, written in the late thirteenth or fourteenth century, has by far been the most influential of the *Thirukkural* commentaries.
- [8] *Tripadi*, this is native metre. It is the oldest one, during 17th century the poet *Sarvagnya* used it.
- [9] *Interpreting Tirukkural: The Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text* (Oct-Dec 1992), By *Norman Cutler*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 112, No 4 pp 549-566.
- [10] *Tamilagam Shangam Kannada Sahityadaantarsambada* (2007) *Halegannada lipi, lipikaararu, lipivyavasaya* (2014)
- [11] *Sahitya Kathana*(1996) by *D.R.Nagaraj*, *Akshara prakashana heggodu,Tamilu Kavya Mimamse*(1997), by *S.Carlos*, *Akshara prakashana heggodu, Anannya*(2015) by *Tamil Selvi*, *Srushti Publication Bengaluru. Bahubhasha sahitya*(2010) by *Krishnabhat Arthikaje*, *Sapna book house Bengaluru*.
- [12] *Tamilagam Shangam Kannada Sahityadaantarsambada* (2007) by *S.Shettar*, *Abhinava prakashana Bengaluru*.
- [13] *Champu* was in practice from the 9th century. It is a mixture of Poetry and verse.
- [14] *Pampa* ninth century poet, has written two epics.
- [15] *Harihara*(1200) wrote many *ragale* which is on *shivabhaktas*.
- [16] The division made in the classical period, *loulkika* epics are based on *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. *Agamika* was based on the life of Jain saints.
- [17] *Tripadi*, this is native metre. It is the oldest prosody during 17th century, the poet *Sarvagnya* used it.
- [18] *Ragale* is separate meter which is used by poet *Harihara*. This is in lengthiest form of poetry
- [19] *Interpreting Tirukkural: The Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text* (Oct-Dec 1992), By *Norman Cutler*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 112, No 4 pp 549-566.
- [20] *Shree Ramayana Darshanam* (1949, 1951) by *Kuvempu*, (1990) publication Department of Kannada and Culture, Govt. of Karnataka. P-140.
- [21] *Manku Timmana kagga* is a collection of poetry, written by *D.V.Gundappa*. poet has used only few lines to express is ideas. It is very popular among kannadigas.
- [22] *H.M.Nayak(preface),Thirukkural* (2007) translated by *P. S Shreenivas*, *Priyadarshini publication, Banglore*. P-vii.
- [23] *Shatpadi* is six lines poetry form. This is having its own metre. Practiced in the period of classical Kannada literature.
- [24] *Akkamahadevi*, 12th century poet, her poems are bold in expressing the subjects related to love, desire and society.
- [25] *Draupadi* is projected differently in classical Kannada texts.
- [26] *YashodharaCharithe* (1225) written by *Janna, amruthamathi* is the heroine of the story. She left her husband the king and falls in love with *Ashtavanka*, the musician.

- [27] *Harihara*(1200) the women in his *ragale* called *Maluhani*, it has picturised the love of *Maluhani* and *Maluhana*.
- [28] *Aadipurana*(1940) written by *Pampa*, based on the life *JainacharyaAdinatha*.
- [29] *Prabhulingaleele*(1430) by *Chamarasa*. *Allamaprabhu* is the protagonist.
- [30] *BharatheshaVaibhava* (1560) by *Rathnakaravarni*, written in *Sangattya* prosody. Portrays the life of *Bharatha* and *Bahubali*.
- [31] *Allamaprabhu*(1150) famous *vachana* poet.
- [32] *Tatvapadas* are writing in late 18th century genre. The poets from various caste and creed were part of it.
- [33] *Keerthane* found in the 16th century writings. *Haridasa*'s has composed it.