

CHAPTER – 6**SCIENCE FOR LIFE : RITUALS AND BEYOND****Dr. A. THENNARASU**

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A child's character education should take priority over his academic education. All educational efforts are basically meaningless unless built on the solid foundation of good character –The Rebbe.

Every creature in this universe has its own uniqueness. But the humans are distinct from other species and have attached some unique significance in their life. Human beings are evolved over the ages and form a distinct type from other life. Humans have learnt effectively to adopt and live with respect to conditions, circumstances, occupation, characters and so on. Hence humans have been rightly termed as social animal. Hence the meaning and purpose of human life is many-folded one.

In this context, here an attempt is made to share some vital factors in the thought process of our intellectual community. It throws light on the conflicting issue i.e., the relevance of rituals in human life.

CONCEPT OF RITUAL

Indian society is known for customs and rituals since ancient ages. Rituals are the pervasive feature of every social group. Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community including religious community. They include not only the worship rites and sacraments of organised religions and cults, but also rites of passage, dedication ceremonies, coronation and presidential inaugurations, marriages and funerals and so on.¹

PURPOSE OF SCIENCE IN HUMAN LIFE

The influence of science on human life is growing. The recent benefits to humanity are unparalleled in the history of the human species. Science should reflect the social consequence of misconception in human's duty to day life. Science can be used to predict the future as well as explain the past. Hence it is very essential every human action should have the spirit of science. So the purpose of science in human life is to validate knowledge in such a way that people which different interests can agree that it is valid.²

RELEVANCE OF SCIENCE AND RATIONALISM IN HUMAN LIFE

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Human have unique sense which adds to their strength and hence they excel in every sphere and even trying to overcome the nature in this modern era. They have conquered the world through the best understanding of science and nature and try to control the outer space too, though nature overpowered men often.

Every human action is subject to scientific or rational investigation in a broader perspective. The role of science is not only to unravel the mystery of natural world but human world too. The social behaviour or attitudes of humans have to be measured based on scientific rationalism. The progress of science has reduced the gap between imagination and reality.

Rituals can be considered as superstition unless it is validated by scientific test. One rationalist view is that rituals are altogether superfluous. However, the rationalist view of rationalism is 'reliance on reason as the best guide for belief and action'. In this context, it is apt to see every step of human life through the mirror of scientific rationalism.

LIFE STYLE IN SANGAM AGE

The Tamils of Sangam Age lived in prosperity in all walks of life. It had been very dynamic for centuries and heritage has become our heritage. They had a well-organized social life. They were excelled in agriculture, pearl fishing, weaving, temple architecture, music, dance, drama, painting etc.,

The Sangam Tamils had accorded prime interest towards moral customs rather than by observing mere rituals. They possessed the qualities of courage, honour, courtesy, hospitality and loyalty. Chastity was the most important virtue of Tamil women. They considered 'karpu' much more important than the life itself. On the other side 'valour' with 'dharma' was the essential character of men folk and they treated womenfolk with due regard and respect. The rule of Sangam monarchs was just and benevolent.³ The base of life of all these social segments was virtue. Thus the rituals of ancient Tamils were based on religious scientific, philosophical and cultural ideologies. These traditional good practices have been dynamic over the centuries in Tamilagam.

However in course of time, superstitious belief polluted the minds of Tamils to some extent. The contemporary events in some quarters shook the foundations of scientific rationalism. The so called modern civilizations can be considered as pseudo in character.

CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

The world we live in the 21st century is neither entirely scientifically advanced nor rationalist in spirit. The contemporary events reveal many superstitious practices in Tamil Nadu. To appease the God of rain, marriages for frog, donkey etc., are conducted in rural areas. Also another kind of barbaric practice is prevalent in the remote tribal villages of Tamil Nadu. Women are forced to go naked around the village at night for the same cause.⁴

The ritual sacrifices of animals and birds are performed as very common in Tamil Nadu. Some isolated pathetic cases of human sacrifices occur especially in rural areas.⁵ The beliefs behind these sacrifices vary from inducing rainfall to helping childless woman conceive.⁶ In our traditional bound India the so called godmen who claims possession of mystical powers has come up largely. These self-styled godmen who have been involved in sex scandals, murders, tax evasions etc., arrested by the police force across the country.⁷ These happenings are not the good sign of a nation which visualise as a super power but the superstitious beliefs has come in the way of its vision.

ESSENTIAL OF VIRTUE AND NON-ESSENTIAL OF RITUALTHIRUKKURAL

Thirukkural, the magnum opus of classical Tamil literature is at best to be considered as a book of morals or ethics is the best testimony for the tradition of ancient Tamil. It ordains the essential of virtues rather than rituals. As it is well known the work is divided into three sections. The first section, entitled 'Aram' deals with ingredients of an ideal family life. It also gives guidelines to spiritual aspirants. The second section, broadly entitled 'Porul' deals with various matters pertaining to government, like royalty, the parliament, politics and alliance. The third section deals with 'inbam' and is concerned mostly with marriage and love⁸

Though kural has given prime accordance to virtue since it is the foundation by which the rest lye⁹ and hence it is called Holy book, book of morals etc., On virtue, Kural makes comments On what is good and what is bad. It describes life and lays down a code of conduct or behaviours. The first ten verses are in praise of god. Thiruvalluvar devotes twenty chapters to the important subject of domestic virtue. The themes beginning with married life, bliss of having children, hospitality, kindness, gratitude, self-control, good conduct, charity, good deeds etc., Thiruvalluvar devotes thirteen chapters to the subject of ascetic virtue. The themes were non-killing, mercy, hypocrisy, truthfulness, curbing of desires and the renunciation of objects.

The underlining theme of all these chapters is virtue. Religion does not mean just God and Prayer, but beyond that. There is not only one way to reach God, even you can reach God without praying by doing daily duties¹⁰

Thiruvalluvar says rituals form secondary over virtues.

மனத்தது மாசாக மாண்டார்நீ ராடி

மறைந்தொழுகு மாந்தர் பலர்

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As the Kusay says: These are many men of masked conduct who perform their ablutions and make a show of greatness, while their mind is defiled with guilt

Thirivalluvar also outlined the unnecessary of rituals for those who lead the path of virtue

மழித்தலும் நீட்டலும் வேண்டா உலகம்
பழித்தது ஒழித்து விடின ... 280

As the Kural says. There is no need of shaven crown nor of tangle hair if a man abstain from those deeds which the wise have condemned.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is said that “Ritual provides a meaningful way to deal with our subtle or psychic, environment, which consists of the various mental and emotional forces which energize our lives”. Hence it can be commonly understood performance of reasonable rituals have some inner effect, though these forces are not visible but it can be felt. The real ritual is one which focus the benefits of society to prevail peace and harmony preventing war and other social disorders.

Rituals are of special importance for young people, who need not only social bonding but bonding with the world or nature and spiritual reality in order to discover who they really are¹¹. Otherwise, young people feel alienated and out of harmony with life. Even though it cannot be disregarded at outright the uses of meaningful rituals, this article underlines two vital aspects in human life with relevance to rituals. One is the meaningful rituals should not be encountered as irrationalism. Certainly the lack of meaningful ritual is surely a factor in the high rate of crime, depression and suicide among the young.

The second one is the central idea of human life should be primarily based in virtues over rituals. On the contrary, we witness increasing number of incidents of virtue less rituals. Let us take pledge follow the path of life with scientific and rationalistic spirit in a more secured manner.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual> Edger Thurston has given a detailed account on the customs, manner, rituals and culture of south Indian people in his monumental work, Caste and Tribes of Southern India, vol 6, Madras Govt. Press 1909.
2. <http://www.quora.com/what-is-the-man-purpose-of-science>
3. www.indiaandindians.com/India-history/social-life-in-sangam-age
4. These practices are prevalent in stray parts of Tamil Nadu on the blind belief that God will shower rains to earth. See new modern rationalist [com/appeasing-the-rain-gods-thirst-for-developing-sacrifice](http://new-modern-rationalist.com/appeasing-the-rain-gods-thirst-for-developing-sacrifice).
5. Even in the early years of twentieth century Edger Thurston has given vivid pictures on animal superstitions and human sacrifice, see chapter II & VII in Omens and Superstitions

of Southern India, New York; M^cbride Nast & Company, 1912. Also see Abbe J.A.Dubois, Hindu Manners Customs and Ceremonies, Oxford, 1906.

6. For details see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/superstition-in-India>
7. www.dw.com/en/dark-times-for-indian-godmen
8. The Tamil equivalence of Aram, Porul and Inbam respectively are virtue, wealth and love (see Swami Shivananda On Tirukural, divine life society, Rishikesh).
9. The real spirit life itself exists on account of morals and its degeneration will exit the human race.
10. One of the four cardinal values as outlined by Swami Vivekananda
11. See The Culture of Ritual and the Quest for Enlightenment by David Frawley in 'The Quest' Biennial, Theosophical Society, America, 1994.