Chapter-VII

COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI VEMANA
Comparative Study of Sri Vemana and Thiruvalluvar

More than 20 centuries ago i.e before the birth of Christ there came into literary horizon of Tamilnadu a great personality called "Thiruvalluvar". He was a moralist philosopher and poet rolled into one. His name was valluvar. The prefix “Thiru” denotes the saintliness of the person. The word ‘Kural’ is derived from the kural-metre in which the composition of the poetry is set.

Thiruvalluvar gave out the sacred KURAL the finest of Tamil compositions filled with ethical, poetical words of wisdom, read by all mankind. The undying fame of the immortal work has secured translations in various languages both in Asia and Europe. Rev. Father Bosehi rendered it in Latin.

Thirukkural contains 1330 couplets in 133 chapters.

Just like vemana, Thiruvalluvar's nativity, time and parents were also unknown.

The great Telugu revolutionary poet Sri Vemana's birth place, caste and time is controversial. Vemana belongs to 17th century. After self realization Sri Vemana traveled entire South India in his middle age. During that period Vemana listened “Thirukkural” verses and was attracted. Kural's simplicity and their thought provoking meanings impressed Vemana Thirukkural filled with universal truths.
Both the poets Thiruvalluvar and Sri Vemana have many similarities in their teachings and through his kural we can understand that Thiruvalluvar was leading a simple and humble life. He was always in meditative mood. As regards his religion and creed, it may not be correct to classify him either as a Jain, a saivite or Vaishnavite or a Buddhist. The whole of kural avoids classification.

Vemana renounced all worldly things. He discarded all religious ideologies. He strived for the welfare of common people. He led his life as a wandering saint and Raja Yogi along with sincere disciples.

**Both were poets of the people**

Valluvar adopted the short stanza form 'Kural' for his poetic communication. It is just like Telugu Dwipada. His language was the expressive, living language spoken by the common people of his age. Welfare of the people was his ideal and his statement direct and effective.

Vemana's stanza form was short too. He chose the four-lined Ataveladi. He language also was the easy, natural language of the common people full of sayings and proverbs. His verses are so simple and memorable that hardly any Andhra exists who does not know at least a few of his poems by heart. Both were worshippers of One God (Monists) Valluvar believed in one God. He prayed to the one universal God the creator of the world before beginning to write his
great book. That Vemana too was a believer in one God Siva the universal power.

**About Caste System**

Valluvar did not condemn caste system as explicitly as Vemana did. One of the Kurals No 972 reads thus when all human beings are born equal. Differences arise only on account of their trades and patterns of behaviour. This thought of Valluvar’s resembles the adage in Sanskrit Janmana Jaayathe Sidrah, Karma na Jaya the dwijah”. All are Sudras when born their deeds make them Vysyas, Kshatriyas and Brahmans. Let us now look at the progressive view print expressed by Vemana. He said that all human race belonged to only one caste. God has created all human beings equal of whatever caste they may be. Then how can one tell that one is high and the other is low? Therefore, men should give up all differences of caste and religion and became one caste.

**On Poverty**

Poverty is the most terrible of evils according to both poets. There is nothing more harmful to man than poverty. He must overcome this evil in order to develop his potentialities to the fullest extent.

The Devil of poverty comes into this world and destroys this world as well as the other. It deprives man of peace not only in this life but also in the life after death. (Kurals 1041, and 1042). Vemana
has compared poverty to a forest fire that consumes every thing. Want is like forest fire. It destroyes both the person himself and those who approach him. Even to think of poverty is a great sim. It is therefore, the duty of every man to acquire wealth.

**On Charity**

The wealthy people must consider it their duty to help the deserving people. Charity should be given to those who are really in need. Help should bot be rendered to others expecting some thing in return. Help must be altruistic said Valluvar (Kural 221) Vemana, too emphasized this he said give to the man who is in need.

**On Anger**

Both the poets considered anger is a deadly enemy: Anger is the roof cause of all sins. It is best to give up anger even against your worst enemy. Is there a greater to man's laughter (and happiness) than anger any man who wants to save himself must keep his anger under control. Otherwise, his anger will lead him to his own distraction (Kural 303, 304, 305)

Vemana Says "A man will lost his dignity on account of his anger. It will cause him misery. He who conquers anger will achieve all that he desires. Both believed in non violence.

Valluvar says "What is 'Karma'? It is non-violence being compassionate to all living creatures. Violence destroys man's virtues.
Men should live without any thought of violence. Only then can they attain salvation in this life (Kural No. 321) and Vemana questioned how can killers of life ever attain salvation?

The subject matter of Kural touches all aspects of human life like household life; learning; friendship; self-control; citizenship, state craft; true ideals of patriotism etc. Thirukkural is noted for purity of its language, richness of its diction, lofty tone of its morality and the variety of its topics.

To conclude, Vemana and Valluvar were not only great poets but also great teachers. Their poetry and their teachings have earned them a permanent place in the hearts of lovers of literature and the good life.

Some morals of Thiruvaluvar

1. Outward purity comes through water; purity of the heart is manifested in sincerity.

2. One may study many philosophies and dear doubts, but it is the well regulated life that ultimately avails and nothing else.

3. Discipline of life is more precious than life itself; for it is out of that discipline that life derives value.

Comparative Philosophy of Sri. Vemana and Sarvajna:

Sri Vemana and Sarvajna both were practiced various yogas for self realization. Both had the intention in Alchemy.
Sarvajna a famous progressive poet and a great social reformer of Karnataka was contemporary to Sri Vemana. Both were saint poets. Both have same ideology in reforming the society which was in great crisis. Palkuriki Somana a great Telugu revolutionary poet and a great thinker treated as chief disciple of Basaveswara. Sarvajna occupied the second place after Basaveswara in Karnataka.

Sarvajna mentioned in his poems that his father was Basavarasu a Aradhya Brahmin and his mother was a widow belongs to potter community. Sarvajna was not his original name. He named himself as Sarvajna. He thought that the society would look down him because of his birth. He used to say that he was a ‘God given child to his parents and he was an incarnation of pushpadanta a demi God. He told that he was a precious pearl in a shell. Again he says the pearl’s value is great but the shell’s is nothing of value. Sarvajna was a natural poet like Vemana in Telugu. Both used simple and sweet local language to attract common people. They used their poetry as powerful weapons to destroy the superstitions and social evils in that critical period.

It is believed that Vemana and Sarvajna were met in their middle age and discussed on various topics. The writers of “Viswakavi-Viplava Yogi Vemana Vedasastram” mentioned in their book about their meeting. They said it was a book about their discussions in Kannada.
Both of the poets stressed on giving food for the poor. Man live on food. If there is no food they will die. So food is more than God. So Sarvajna says those who give starving, who speaks always truth, who loves the enemies they will attain salvation. Vemana also says like Sarvajna,

“One who gives food to the poor he will prosper and worshipped by the gods in heaven men swallowed knoweth that the food only in the Brahma”. “Food is equal to divine nector Brahmins take it as ‘ANTU’. The Trinity is the personification of divine nector.

Sarvajna was a rationalist endowed with a broad vision. He thought of every human problem as has own and tried to find a permanent solution to it. There is no mystery of human existence that he did not unravel. There is no field of human activity into which he did not enter. No human pain or pleasure escaped from his examination. The name ‘sarvajna’ fitted eminently to him in every way. According to Gandham Apparao’s Thesis Sarvajan’s Vachanas are on the lips of one and all the scholars, the layman, the peasant and the labourer. They suggest effective solutions to all the problems that man has to face in his day to day life....... 

His cherished goal was the establishment of a social order in which all differences of class, creed or religion disappeared totally. He condemned all forms of superstition, including blind idol worship. He affirmed that the right path to salvation was that of
devotion coupled with knowledge (Jnana and Bhakthi). He exorted the people again and again to exercise their reasoning powers and follow the path of truth, virtue and compassion.

Sarvajna’s teachings are rationalistic and pragmatic and provide excellent food for thought to all serious minded persons the following ‘Vachana’s’ on birth and caste reveal to us his critical insight.

“We all walk on the same earth, drink the same water, and in the end, are burnt into ashes by the same fire. Whence then do distinctions of caste and pedigree arise?”

“All human beings possess identical bodies consisting of identical organs. How then, can it be said that one is a ‘Bhavi’ and the other a Bhaktha; that this man is a swapacha and that man a Sudra?” “Is a lampless bright in the house of an outcaste? Never speak of high and low caste.” “Pretend to agree with a fool. You must be a wary in dealing with him as you would be in moving your tongue between the two rows of teeth. It is not everywhere that one should tell the truth. We can understand from these Vachanas that Sarvajna was fully aware of the necessity of being practical and worldly wise.

Let us now see what kind of domestic life he wanted to live. “A cosy cottage, sufficient money for the necessaries of life”, a pair of bullocks, a milch cow, fire sons, a daughter-in-law who does not shirk work a wise grand mother, and a wife who knows husband’s
mind-if you have these you can very well set fire to heaven says Sarvajna we find there his preference for the joint family system of the former times when co-operative labour and loyalty to the family resulted in domestic happiness and prosperity. Those were days of agricultural village economy when joint families flourished in the village every member contributing his share of honest labour for the common good. The basis of a socialist society is the sharing of labour in co-operation, and Sarvajna believed that a family or society organized the basis of honest, co-operative endeavour could easily become a heaven on earth.

The poet may be likened to the creator. He is a seer, a social reformer and a sincere teacher. Sarvajna the poet of the common man, has proved to us by his example that there is nothing that a true poet does not concern himself with. It is mother Karnataka's great good fortune to have had such an illustrious son.

Sri Vemana is kind hearted and great humanitarian. In his view God is on all living beings Jeevatma (individual soul) and paramatma (universal soul) are inseparable. Sri Vemana's heart filled with love and compassion. One who has no love and kindness he is called a beast with two legs. Sri Vemana believes in the conception of non-violence preached by Lord Buddha. His heart breeds when he saw animals being killed during sacrifices. He could
not tolerate the wickedness of some of the Brahmins performing the sacrifices.

Is one living being kills another it is like killing God himself ponder over this and you will realize that ‘Jeeva’ and ‘Siva’ are one. He questions how these killers attain salvation. He says God is all loving and all merciful therefore follow the path of love and non-violence.

Vemana went further, even if you have a worst enemy in your custody do not do any harm him. Render him necessary help with righteousness and leave him away. Lord Buddha says only the love and compassion bestow the perfect Bliss (Nirvana).

In all aspects the ideals of both the poets Sarvajna and Vemana are close and similar. But they differs in the issue of non-violence. Sarvajna the great Kannada poet says that it was utterly impossible for man to live without hurting other living creatures. He went to the extent of saying that there was no such thing as death therefore no killing of life (Jeeva himsa). Here are two Vachanas of Sarvajna in which he redicules the doctrine of non-violence, of the Jain.

“One half of the living creatures on the earth subsists on living things that can move and the other half on living things that cannot move. Life subsists on life. I do not know of any living creatures that
live on life less things when one creature eats another creature and perpetuation of life."

When one looks at non violence from a rationalist point of view, it may appear to be impracticable. But there is no doubt that non violence is very essential if man has to develop in himself, compassion and humanity; for only through them could he promote universal peace. Man needs both rationalism and compassion.

Both Vemana and sarvajna were progressive poets similar in many respects. But on this one question of non violence, they thought differently and expressed directly opposite views.

**Comparative study of Sri Vemana and Ravidas**

Ravidas the cobbler a fellow disciple with Kabir of the same great master Swami Ramananda. Ravidas followed the path of the service of man. He knew only too well of the throns that bestrew it, in as much as he had to remove them one by one in his progress. His attitude is summed up in his song. What loss of this body be torn to pieces. Thy servant only fears lest his love grow less.

In his days there used to be frequent gatherings of pilgrims bent on the spiritual quest, and their numberless followers. On such occasions Ravidas would look after old and decrepit, the woman and children with unwearied devotion. His enthusiastic zeal brought fervent youths flocking round him to join in what he called the five fold obeisances by way of service. But there was also something in
Ravidas which brought even queens to his feet. Mirabai the famous devotee of Krishna came at a later stage of her development to sit at the feet of the cobbler saint, who worshipped the divinity of unmanifest form and scoffed at ritual and asceticism. There are many wonderful stories widely known in public about Ravidas. Five gold pieces. Ravidas appears to have been of the same mind as Kabir who says “Sufficient be thy toilsome endeavor thine own living to make and help others” and he thankfully accepted from providence his daily reward of five gold pieces (as he called the gifts of five senses). We may like wise surmise that the hidden treasure of the story by means of which Ravidas was supposed to have built his rest house for wayfarers was but the wealth of devotion to toil and service which underlay his character. In his songs Ravidas said,

How could this iron have become burnished gold

Unless touched by the gem ( of divine grace)

That is what Ravidas himself says of the touchstone of the legend of the divinity of man he speaks in terms of his own trade. “Under the vast vault of blue lives the divinity clothed in hide.” Vision of higher Destiny Born and bred in the chamar caste in those days of social narrowness and intolerance. It is wonderful to find Ravidas on the one hand pursuing unashamed his lowly trade and on the other illumined with so great a vision of man’s high destiny. He does not hesitate to avow. “Low was I born-low in caste, in rank,
in trade know ye citizens born am I of the caste known as chamaras
Ignorant, despised carriers of carcasses to and fro" But that leaves
him no doubt of the greatness of man's spiritual heritage.

By much merit have I earned this human birth. Let it not be in
vain for lack of care

Let not mine be the plight of the king who asleep on his regal
bed dreamt he was a beggar His pray was "Fill, oh fill my cup
withlight. The light that's in sun and moon He who drinketh of the
light before him, what fear hath he of death?

A remarkable poem of Ravidas which was attracted and
imitated by rabindranath Tagore: Spiritual Utopia: It is interesting to
find that even so long ago Ravidas had his vision of Utopia. 
Begumpur is the city called. No suffering of body or mind there. No
taxes, no impositions, No accumulation, no possessions

No oppression no fear

This is the city I have reached where welfare ever abides;

O Brother! Cries Ravidas the chamar

All are my comrades who dwell there in

In view such revolutionary sentiments of Ravidas, It is not
surpirings that he got into trouble with the ruling authorities and
had to suffer persecution. We can easily imagine that the above
cited poem of Ravidas the spiritual utopia may be the inspiration for the Tagor's famous poem

"Where the mind is without fear
And the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not bee broken up
Into fragments by narrow domestic walls"...........

Ravidas was not one of those easy going optimists who can see no evil in the world. He asks:

Where to get pure offerings for the worship of the Lord?

The milk is fouled in the teat sucked by the calf,

The flower is fouled by the bee, the water by the fish

The snake nests in the 'Sandal wood tree

Every where are nectar and poison mingled together

His own answer is yet if I offer up body and mind in reverence

Through grace shall I reach him who Transcendeth all.

And he says for them :

What impels me thus to seek my beloved?

The touchstone awaits the iron

Mercy descends on the fallen and low

Lowest of the low and I, Lord keep me ever at thy feet.
Vemana the poet of 17th century emphasised every body should work hard to earn money for the lively hood and to help others.

He exhorted to earn wealth and use it for charity and the good of the fellow beings.

Vemana was at the same time theist and atheist. There were many similarities in the lives of self realized persons in the all over India.

It is too wonderful to the readers and researchers the above mentioned song of Ravidas “Where to get pure offerings... was introduced as it is in Telugu language by an unknown saivite poet.

“Emi chetura linga Emichetura
Ganga udakamu Techchi Neeku
Lingapujalu chedamante
Gangaloni chepalanne
Engilmatunnayi Linga”

Comparative Study of Sri Vemana and Kabir

Kabir das was one of the greatest mystic saint of his time. He was born about 1397 A.D. and lived until 1517. The life of kabir was full of miraculous deeds. His teachings are blend of devotion and wisdom. He was a powerful philosopher and poet. His songs are still sung in thousands of homes in India. He belonged to Hindu parentage. A Brahmin widow gave birth to Kabir and left the baby in
a lake near Banaras. A muslim weaver Niru adopted the child and brought him up as a muslim weaver. The child was named Kabir which means great in the Arabic language. Kabir was reflective from his very child hood. He became a disciple of Swamy Ramananda. Kabir's son was Kamal. Kabir strived to loosen the chains of superstitions, to integrate society, to bring about social harmony between castes and religions. He preached with humanitarian outlook. Kabir says “while making an idol the sculptor would beat hard with hammer and chisel. If the idol gets life it will swallow the sculptor at once.” In this manner Vemana criticized blind idol worship by asking,

If a stone is God will not heaps the offerings be swallowed by him.” “In the womb there was no caste and creed. The entire universe was created from Brahma. All castes born from the womb of Brahma. All are brother if they get together. Kabir seriously questions why these applications of ash on the body created by mud. Why these bathings in water? Why these chantings of Mantras? Why these countings the beads on rosaries? Why these meaningless prayers at Masijids and Mandirs? Why these fastings and why these journeys to Kaba and Kasi. Kabir criticized all the outer activities in the name of God. He strived for social harmony between the castes and religions. Like Kabir Vemana also scoffed imposters, hypocrites and charlatons who were deceiving the common people in the name
of God. The essential truth of all religious is the same. The following verse of Vemana bring out this idea beautifully.

"Cows may be of different colours but their milk is of one colour Though flowers differ in their colours they are all utilized for the same purpose that is in worshipping in the one God, Darsanas are varied but God is one." Vemana also emphasized to bring friendliness in all castes, communities and religions. Kabir sings,

_The tongue is moving in the mouth_
_The rosary is moving in the hand_
_The mind is moving through out the world_
_What is the use?_

"With moving eyes counting the rosary beads, chanting the mantras idly without doing any work cheating the people to fill their bellies are worst. Those are all parasites". Kabir and his sayings are widely known. He was a born mystic. Spiritual progress came naturally to him. He no need to carve out a path. But those whose spiritual endeavour is on the ethical plane have to follow some definite course. So when devotees came to Kabir for guidance along the mystic way he was at a loss how to advise them. All had to say is:

Path presupposes distance
If he be near, no path needest though at all
Verily it maketh me smile
To hear of a fish in water athirst
This truth is too near to the sayings of Vemana.

Is he whom you call God in another land? He is in the body with the Goddess Mounting vehicles of senses driving his chariot.4

"Until you find the thing you have lost you require a light only so long after finding it why keep the light? After be coming God why retain the body".5

"Search and view thy self; thou art the living being. Behold the great (Atma) existant and thou shall become the spirit. Earth and thou shall become the spirit. Earth and heaven shall depart and delusion himself be destroyed.6

As a mystic social refomer Kabir condemned social inequality injustice, exploitation and other all evils. He was attracted by the modern scientists thinkers scholors devotees as well as disciples and devotees. His poetry (songs) name and fame live forever in the country. Vemana stood always on the side of downtrodden poor who were helpless and hopeless. The popular Hindu scholar 'prabhakar machve says in his book which was published by the National Sahitya Academy’ Kabir’s language is Sadhukkari.Vemana told his verses in simple and sweet common telugu language. But his thoughts and preachings are emotional and potential. Kabir and Vemana both were enlightened prophets who sacrificed their lives for the welfare of mankind. Their names will remain as long as the history remains.
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