

Chap 10

BESCH

AND

TIRUKKURĀḷ.

Beschi and Tirukkural

Tirukkural, one of the main sources of Tamil culture has lent its ideas and phrases to all authors in Tamil from Sankam poets to Barathiar. Its words and thoughts are as precious as gold to these poets. It is not wonder that such a work of catholic outlook was appreciated and abundantly used by the Catholic Missionary poet, Beschi.

In Tembavani:

Joseph was full of love to all, realizing the truth that love is the life-principle of the body and without love the body is just a skin-covered bone. (Temb. 4.65; K.80). Mary and Joseph after distributing the wealth of their ancestors to the temple, to the priests and to the poor, lived and worked with love, ready to give their very house to others, resembling the rain that gives food and becomes food to others. (Temb. 6.65; K.12,72). Joseph of the Old Testament as minister of Pharoa saved Egypt by his method of accumulating wealth in time of prosperity and distributing it in time of want. (Temb. 20.96; K.385). Elian, one of the consultants of Herod dissuading the king from his murderous intent, even though it was distasteful to his ears (Temb. 25.27; K.389), says, that if the king were to follow the advice of unsteady men he will perish even if he has no enemy. (Temb. 25.58; K.448). John the Baptist, the young ascetic in the forest first listened to

the message brought by angels, which was the food for his ears, then partook of the food for the body, sent by Mary. (Temb. 25.137; K.412). When Joseph and Mary left Egypt the love of the people for them betrayed itself through their tears. (Temb. 30.17; K.71).

In prose works.

As already mentioned, Fr. Beschi's language in Vedar Olukkam receives a literary flavour from its quotations from and references to Tirukkural. Even the foolish disciples of Paramartta Guru makes references to Kural as in these two passages:

"ஆ அ முன்றோர்கல் "தவஞ்செய்வாரி தங்கருமருத் செய்வாரி" என்ற சொல்லி யிருக்கிறார்கள். இதுக்கத்தாட்சி யிப்போது கள்ளுலகக்டோய், நம்முடைய குருக்கல் பண்ணிக்கொண்டு வருகிறதவத்தின் பலவீனவே. சாதிக்குதிரை தாது பொ'ன தாற்றைம்பதுபொன் பெறத் தக்கது நா மைந்தபொள்ளுக்கு வாக்கித் தொகட்டுபொலிடுமெயென்றான்.

அதக்குமடையலிடுமெயா லோசலையோ "அ "றத்தாள்வருவதேயிப்ப மற் றெல்லாம் புறத் "தழுகழுமீவ" என்றது நிகெட்கவிலீலையோ ஈதியமாத்திரமல்லை புண்ணியத்திடு விப்பரும்வருமொழிய மற்றதெல்லாந் தன்பழும்பகிர்த்தியுமாகும். " (பக்கம்-11)

As noted above, the epistle of Beschi to the people of Turukkadavar contains a quotation of Kural 113.

ஆகையால் திருவள்ளுவர் சொன்னபடி.

நல்பே நரினும் நடுவிகத்தாம்ப ஆக்கத்தை

அல்பே ஒழிய விடல்.

அப்படியே அறமெனும் நடுநெறி வகுவி பாவ விழந்து.....

It is not surprising that the grammars of Beschi contain abundant quotations from Kural in illustration of their rules. In the preface to Centamil Beschi asserts that 'Tiruvalluvar' is not the name of the poet and that Kural has seven commentators. This grammar of high Tamil has quotations of Kural in about eighteen places.² Two of these places are worth mentioning. In No.1, after quoting Kural 80 to illustrate that makes the syllable long, Beschi draws our attention to the principle of Tamilians contained in this couplet. "To understand this couplet note that in Tamil tradition the body is called 'uyirnilai' that is, basis for the soul; here the poet will say it is because of the love with which we render help to our neighbour, that our body is the basis of the soul; the body of those who have no love ought to be termed not basis of the soul, but bones covered by skin." In No.73, the meaning of the Kural no.366

அஞ்சல தோரும் அறவே ஒருவனை

வஞ்சிப்ப தோரும் அளா.

is laconically given as: "Virtutis timor et timoris amor". Babington has translated it as: "The fear of deceitful lusts is virtue".³ This same Kural is clearer in Beschi's commentary on Tirukkural: "It is the virtue proper to ascetics to guard from sensual desires which deceive and ensnare men."

In Tennul Vilakkam, Kural is quoted often, but it is difficult to distinguish which of them were by Beschi and which by the first publisher Vetagiri Mudaliar.⁴ In the third chapter of Porul, speaking of the development of a topic by means of an introduction (Patikam), expansion (virivu), Beschi gives a concrete example of that development. He takes for it the Kural 34:

"மணதீபக் கண்ண மாடிலன் ஆதன் அனைத்து அமன்
ஆளுநர் நெய் பிறி"

and gives an introduction for it: "கிதர் கெலா முகாநணமம்படி
திருவள்ளுவ நாயனார் யய வெணன் நெய்தீபக் தேற்றம் மெளடீர்
யகைக் கியற்றியநீடாய் அநிதித்துறைப்பதிகமாவது....."

This passage has been quoted by writers as a specimen of elegant Tamil prose of the 18th century.⁶

As already mentioned, Mr.J.Vinson raised a question whether Beschi was the author of the grammar 'clavis' on the fact that the Latin rendering of the couplets of Kural in Clavis is quite different from that in Beschi's commentary. Kural is quoted here in about 12 instances.⁷

Commentary on Tirukkural.

Beschi's predilection for Kural made him render into Latin the first two parts of Tirukkural and thus introduce Kural and Tamil culture to the whole Western world for the first time. That commentary is given by Dr.G.U.Pope in the notes to his "The 'Sacred' Kural".⁸ Ellis uses it in

his commentary on some couplets of Tirukkural.⁹ Beschi's commentary is said to have been written in 1730.¹⁰ The Latin of the commentary, says Pope, is tinged with Tamil;¹¹ perhaps he means that it is not a classical Latin but a Latin influenced by Tamil constructions.

In this commentary some Kurals are just translated. Others are explained in detail.¹² To others Beschi adds an illustration from other authors. For instance, after translating Kural No.621, he quotes Seneca: "Adversa adversis adversa non sunt, sed aversis" and explains the meaning of it: "If you flee from adversity and are saddened on account of it, it will be adversity; if you neither are saddened nor changed the course of your journey on account of it, but finish your journey begun, along with it, then it will not be adversity." In his translation of Kural 649, Beschi throws a hint at the asiatic way of speaking. For he translates it as: "Those who do not know how to speak clearly and briefly desire to speak in the manner of asiatics."¹³

In his meaning to some couplets Beschi, differs from other commentators. 'Pira vali ninthal arithu' in Kural 8 is understood to mean the sea of births by the Jains, the sea (that is other than Aram) of Porul and imbam by Parimelalakar, the sea of vice (as contrasted from the sea of virtue) by Paritiar and Ellis; Beschi takes it to mean the sea of this miserable life. "Unless you adhere

to the feet of him who is a sea virtue it will be difficult to cross the other sea which is outside it (Namely, this miserable sea).¹⁴ In 'piravi-p-perunkadal' of K.10, the other commentators, Parimelalakar, Paritiar, Manakkudavar and Kalingar saw a reference to the sea of many births, but Beschi sees in it a reference to the sea of this birth; "They whò swim this vast sea of miseries." As the other commentators read in the phrases 'piravali' and 'piravi-p-perunkadal' their religious belief in many births, so Beschi reads in them his Christian belief in one life, one death followed by Judgement, and is reminded of such Scriptural statements as: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries." And such a reading of Christian ideas in Tirukkural may not be against the mind of Tiruvalluvar, the native of Mylapore, where St. Thomas lived and dies and we may like Dr. G. U. Pope, picture Valluvar "pacing along the sea-shore with Christian teachers, and imbibing Christian ideas..... and day by day working them into his wonderful Kural."¹⁵

The pregnant phrase 'petran perin' of K.58, is translated by Parimelalakar as: 'If the woman wins the (glory of) serving the Lord....', by Manakkudavar and Kalingar as: 'If the woman gets as her husband him who has her as his wife....'. This meaning of the last two authors is made clearer by Beschi who comments as: "If the woman has got such a husband who can be said to have got her

(and this can be said only when she is faithful to her husband)

....." Here the teaching of St. Paul: "The wife hath no power of her own body, but the husband. And in like manner the husband also hath no power of his body, but the wife," and the desire of St. Paul to apprehend Jesus and to be apprehended by him may have come to Beschi's mind.¹⁶

One more clarification is Beschi's interpretation of the word 'Ul'. Whereas the other commentators understand by ul, the fate which is an inexorable decree used by one's life in a previous birth, Beschi takes it to mean the decree of God. For, ul, he says, means by itself nothing but something that is ancient;¹⁷ in this sense it can be applied to God's decree, and there is nothing more ancient than God's decree. This meaning of the word seems better in the context of the whole chapter on Ul and particularly from the sense of the couplet No. 377 where the Ordainer who governs (the personal God of Providence) is expressly mentioned. Aware of the fact that he is deviating from the traditional interpretation of this chapter, Beschi writes a long note of 33 lines in defence of this meaning. He has translated the title of the chapter ul, as 'Divinorum Decretorum irrefragabilitas' (Irrevocability of the divine decrees) and prefixed a remark: Caput unicum et ab anterioribus materiis avulsum' (A unique chapter and one that is different from the foregoing matter). It may be recalled here that Beschi in his Tembavani (in the discussion of Joseph with Civacivan) applied Ul to the ancient action of Adam and Eve.¹

Even if this new interpretation of Beschi is not accepted, there should be no difficulty in accepting that Beschi's works benefitted by the wonderful ideas of Tirukkural and Tirukkural also benefitted by the works of Beschi, particularly by his Latin commentary. This is yet another instance of the East and the West influencing each other.

Notes.

1. வயி வயி வள்ளு வர் Dr.R.P.Sethu Pillai, Preface.
2. Beschi's Grammar of High Tamil: NN.1, 5, 6, 8, 13, 21, 23, 33, 37, 50, 70, 72, 73, 95, 101.
3. B.G.Babington's translation of the Grammar of the High Tamil, p.91, Second Edition, St.Joseph's Industrial School Press, Trichinopoly, 1917.
4. Tonnul Vilakkam: NN; 100, 123, 124, 158, 160, 195, 205, 207, 215.
5. Ibid. Sutram 149.
6. Mayilai Seeni Venkataswami, கிந்தித்த வயும் தந்தும் , 83, Saiva Siddhanta Publishing Co.Ltd., Madras, 1955; Prof.A.M. Paramasivanandam, M.A., M.Litt., தமிழ் உரைநடை P.200, Tamilkkalai-p-pathippakam, Madras, 1959.
7. Clavis: NN: 13, 25, 41, 48, 55, 56, 59; Part iv.13, 18; part v.3, 15.
8. In a letter of 25-6-1962, Fr.Michael Francis, S.J., wrote that he found in a library in Paris a manuscript of Beschi's Latin Commentary.
9. Tirukkural, Ellis' commentary, edited by R.P.Sethu Pillai, University of Madras, 1955.
10. Tirukkural - English translation by Tiruvasagamani, p. 505
11. G.U.Pope, The 'Sacred Kural', Preface v. (London, 1886)
12. Beschi's Latin Commentary, NN: 20, 24, 27, 76, 801 etc.
13. Ibid. No.649: Asiatic loqui affectant, qui pure et lconice loqui nesciunt.
14. Ibid. No.8. Nisi adhaereris pedibus illius, qui mare virtutum est, difficili erit aliud mare, quod extra illius (nempe hoc miserum pelagus) trajicere.

15. G.U.Pepe, *Op. cit.* Introduction, 111
16. I Cor. 7,4; Phil. 3.12
17. The meaning of 'something ancient, mature' to the word ul
is found in Purananuru, NN. 109, 381.
18. Temb. 27, 122.