



Knowing the Unknown: Three Paths to Self-Realization in “Thirumurukatruppadaï”

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Abstract : The world has turned towards materialism to compensate for the loss of spiritual growth. People are unsure of what they want in life and so they fill up their empty lives with material objects. But the true path to a fuller life is achievable only if man takes up spiritualism thereby denouncing material pursuits. Spiritual growth and its importance to man’s survival has been discussed in “Thirumuruk truppadaï”. This paper attempts to prove that the principles of karma yoga, bakthi yoga, and jnana yoga are clearly illustrated in “Thirumuruk truppadaï”.

Vedanta philosophy states that there are paths to realization such as karma yoga, bakthi yoga, and jnana yoga. The aim of this paper is to prove that the principles of karma yoga, bakthi yoga, and jnana yoga are evident in “Thirumuruk truppadaï” which is the first song in *Pathup ttu*. There are two worlds namely the physical world and the spiritual world. Human beings live in the physical world which we call as reality. Spiritual beings reside in the spiritual world which cannot be seen by human beings. When human beings follow one of the three paths to realization, they acquire the ability to see the other world also called the spiritual world. The Oversoul is “benign and undivided”, it is “divine peace” and it is the “Supreme Soul” (Johnston 403). Vedanta philosophy states that the Oversoul is “the source not only of spiritual teachings, but of the spiritual world itself, wherein all worlds rest” (Johnston 407). It’s divine power is immeasurable and cannot be understood by us. The Atma is “Self, as we know it, first, in the selfhood of our everyday life, but with the thought of a deeper and more real Self” (Johnston 409). The Brahma is the “ultimate sum of Being, the Eternal, the Divine Consciousness” (Johnston 409). According to Vedanta philosophy the “spirit of man has two dwelling-places: this world and the other world”, and “the Spirit of man beholds both his dwellings: both this world and the other world” (Johnston 410). The world we live in is the known world and the world of the Oversoul is the unknown world. Knowing the unknown world sets us on a path of eternal peace which is the ultimate goal of man.

The first song of *Pathup ttu* is “Thirumuruk truppadaï” which guides seekers to Lord Murukan and it is recited by the people of Tamilnadu during worship in temples and at home. In the post-Sangam period, people were influenced by the Bakthi culture. Tamilnadu is a spiritual state and Tamil people strive constantly for spiritual growth rather than material growth. This is clearly evident in the religious practices adhered by the people for many years. Hindu religion proposes that worship and prayer offer guidance and purpose to everyone since having problems and hurdles are common to us all in this world. “Thirumuruk truppadaï” was written by Nakkeerar and it has 317 lines. It was written as a prayer song for worshipping Lord Murukan. The six Murukan temples such as Thirupparankundram, Thirucheer Alaiv y, Thiruv vinankudi, Thiruv rakam, Kundruthoru dal and Palamuthir Ch laiar are described in the song.

In “Thirupparankundram” Nakkeerar expresses the splendour of Lord Murukan. Nakkeerar compares Murukan to the sun which arises from the ocean with power and glow announcing to the world the arrival of the morning. This proves that the opportune time to worship god is in the morning. The poet says that we must acknowledge the existence of God before we begin our day:

உலகம உவப்பவவெல ஏரட தூராத்
பலரபுகழ் ஞாயாறு கடல் கண்டாஅஃ
ஓவற ங்ணையகடு செண்ண வள்ளங்கு அவார ஓவா
உயூற்றத் தாங்கைய மதல் உடை நொண்தாள்
செயூற்றத் தெயத்த செலஉறழ் தடகலக
யா ங்ண கற்பாண வானூர் கண்ணவல் (1 – 6)

Translation:

He shines splendidly with a glow at a distance,
like the sun that rises with strength from the ocean,
glittering without a break, causing those in the
world to be happy, one with powerful, strong feet,
large, mighty hands, who ruined his enemies and
protects those who suffer, husband to a woman with
bright forehead and faultless chastity.

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Praying to God in the morning cleanses our body and mind and acts as a moral compass for the rest of the day. One of the aspects of Bakthi yoga is that it guides us in the right path with the help of devotion to God. In this case, the poet says that Lord Murukan is like a sun and he shines bright even from a distance proving that God is in the other world which is far away from this world. His presence can be felt even in this world because of the brightness and splendour of Lord Murukan. The poet says that Murukan’s light glows without stopping. According to Vedanta philosophy, there is eternal light in the spiritual world emanating from the Oversoul which we call as God. Lord Murukan emanates unending light because he looks after us from the spiritual world. The poet says that his presence and glow makes the worshippers happy in the physical world.

Nakkeerar talks about surrendering to Lord Murukan in lines 62-66. He says that we must worship with the intention of surrendering at the feet of Lord Murukan so that we can attain eternal bliss. The poet says that we must not worship Murukan while committing bad actions:

செவடி படருய செமயல உள்ளையா
நலயபுரிகொள்கைபுலப பாரிந்து உறையுய
செசெய ந நயந்தனை ஆயாடு பல உடக
நனைரெநஞ்சுத்து ஐனெநக வாய்ப்ப
ஐனெகெ பெறுது ந முனெனாயவனெனெய (62 – 66)

Translation:

If you go with a mind of surrendering to his fine feet
with the principle of doing good, moving away from
bodily desires and desiring eternal bliss with a good
heart through many births, good fame will occur, and
you will get the benefits of your past actions.

Instead we must strive to do good actions by following the principle of Karma yoga. A karma yogi is an altruist who acts for the welfare of others. His actions are always good and selfless. In this stanza, the poet says that we must surrender to the fine feet of Lord Murukan with the principle of selfless action. The poet states that we must move away from bodily desires. He intends to say that we must stop going after material growth and start striving for spiritual growth. The first step towards spiritual growth is devotion to god. Vedanta philosophy states that reincarnation

process comes to an end when the soul reaches God and becomes one with the Oversoul. In this stanza, the poet says that by devoting himself to Lord Murukan, the worshipper can reap the benefits of good deeds from his previous births. The devotee will be judged by his past actions in the present birth and will be allowed to enter the spiritual world and become one with the Oversoul. The poet suggests that by surrendering to Lord Murukan, a person with good heart will achieve eternal peace when his soul enters the spiritual world and when the Atma unifies with the Brahman. Jnana yoga is the knowledge of the existence of the Brahman (Oversoul) and the Atma (Soul) and the understanding of their unification. The poet suggests that a person can end his cycle of rebirths and become one with Lord Murukan with good deeds from his previous births as well as his present birth.

In “Thiruv vinankudi”, the poet describes the inward and outward attributes of the sages who have come to worship Murukan in Thiruv vinankudi. He begins the stanza (lines 126-137) by expressing the outward appearance of the sages. They are wearing clothes made from tree bark, their hair is white, and they have covered themselves with deer hide. They look thin as they have no flesh in their body and their ribs are sticking out:

சீரை தைஇய உடுக்கையா சாராடு
 வலையுரா புரையுயவாவு நரை முடியாரை
 மாசு அற ஐயைகரும உருவாரையானை
 உராவு தைஇய ஊடு கெடுயார்பை
 னெடு எழுந்து ஐயங்கும யாகையர நனைபக
 பல உடக கழாந்த உணையர ஐகவொடு
 ஷெறைய நகைய மனததுரை யாவதுய
 கறவார அறியா அறவாரை கறவாரகடு
 தாய வரமபு ஆகிய தலைமையர காயமொடு
 கடுஞ்சை கடிந்த காடசையர ஐடுயரை
 யாவதுய அறியா ஐயலபாரை ஷெவரது
 துணைஐக காடச முனைவர முறபுக (126 – 137)

Translation:

The sages who wear tree bark clothing march
 in front, their hair beautiful and white like

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right-whorled conch shells, bodies shining in
purity covered with deer hide, flesh reduced
with ribs sticking out, they fast during the day.
Their minds not clouded with hatred,
they know even what the well-learned do not
know. Their leadership is the limit for the learned.
They have removed great rage and desire from
their minds and they do not know pain.

Voluntary poverty is an important principle of Vedanta philosophy. Even Mahatma Gandhi wrote extensively about voluntarily accepting poverty and denouncing wealth and material objects in his essay aptly titled “Voluntary Poverty”. The poet says that the sages fast throughout the day which is a symbol of their devotion to Lord Murukan.

The poet explains the inward qualities of the sages. The minds of the sages are filled with clarity and not hatred since they have become altruistic. The sages have chosen the path of selflessness and they uphold the karmic principle. They are not affected by animal passions such as rage and desire because they have chosen the path of karma yoga. When a man stops living for himself and starts living for others he will reach his destination of eternal peace. The sages live by devoting their life to Lord Murukan. They are Bakthi yogis who have dedicated their life to serving Lord Murukan and they march towards the six holy sites to worship him. The poet says that the sages know something even highly educated and intelligent people do not know. The knowledge of the other world is not known to us because we are not altruistic, we do not devote ourselves to God, and we certainly have no knowledge of soul unification. The karma yogis are aware of the other world because of their devotion to selfless action. The bakthi yogis know about the existence of the other world because of their devotion to God. The jnana yogis are able to see the other world because of their devotion to knowledge. In the final line of the stanza, the poet says that the sages do not feel pain because of the clarity in their minds and the purity of their souls.

In lines 278-281, the poet portrays the divine qualities of Lord Murukan. The poet says that it is impossible to measure God since divine power is immeasurable. He also says that knowing God is an impossible task because God is from the unknown world. The world we live in is the known world. The world of

the Oversoul is the unknown world in which Lord Murukan resides and radiates light. We have knowledge and awareness of this world but we have no clue about the other world also called as the unknown world. Lord Murukan looks after us and guides us by his divine power and shares his light with us. He has no equals when it comes to spiritual wealth:

நன் அளந்நது அறதன் மன் உயர்க்கு அருமையன்
நன் அடி உளவா வந்தவன் நன்வெணாடு
புறையுநர் ஐசலாபபுலமையையாட வன்
குறத்தது மொழியா அளவையன் (278 -281)

Translation:

Even before you request like this,
“To measure you and know you is impossible
for lives on earth. I came here thinking about
surrendering to your feet, O Lord of spiritual
wealth with no equal,”

Worshippers arrive at his temple to be spiritually rich. They yearn for spiritual growth and so they have surrendered at the foot of Lord Murukan who has abundant spiritual wealth. He shares his spiritual wealth with his followers who emit light, thereby saving this world enveloped by darkness.

Nakkeerar speaks about Lord Murukan’s descent into this world in lines 287-295. Murukan will appear before us in this world and show his divine form to us. He comes to this world from the other world to tell us that he is aware of our visit to his temple:

கெயவையசாரை துறவ வளவகு உருவான
வானகூதாயநவப்பான தான வந்த யெத
அணவகு சாக உயர் நிலை தழுவ பண்ணைதத்
மணம கயபு கெயவெத்து ஐளநலப காடடி290
அஞ்சல ஓமபுய அறவன் நன் வரவ என
அன்புண நலமையாழ அளைஇ வளவய ஐண
ஐரு நிற முநந வளைஇய உலகத்து
ஓடு ந ஆகத் தொன்றவமுயா
பெறல அருய பராச நலகுப (287 – 295)

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Translation:

At this time Murukan will appear in splendid,
divine form, touching the earth and the sky,
show his ancient, youthful form with sweet
fragrance and tell you kindly, “Do not fear! I am
aware of your visit,” and he will give you gifts
appearing to you in this world surrounded by
dark, deep waters.

We can assume that the six holy temples of Lord Murukan are the gateways to the other world. These temples may even be considered as the border between this world and the other world where God exists. We visit these temples so that we can get a glimpse of the other world when Lord Murukan ascends from the other world and appears before us to share his spiritual wealth.

This paper proves that the principles of karma yoga, bakthi yoga, and jnana yoga are clearly illustrated in “Thirumuruk truppadaï”. The people who visit Lord Murukan’s six temples are seekers in search of wisdom and truth. They gain the wisdom that spiritual growth is more important than material growth. They realize the truth about the existence of the other world. When Lord Murukan comes down to bless the seekers, the light transfers to them and they emit light in this world which is filled with darkness. Thus it is clear that pursuit of material growth leads to misery while marching towards spiritual growth brings eternal peace which is what we need in this world.

Works Cited

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