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Relevance of cultural values in moral development with special reference to Thirukkural



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Abstract

Moral development of an individual is mostly shaped by cultural values. Family and social institutions take the role of inculcating cultural values. Cultural values are in the nature of both instrumental and intrinsic. Cultural values are made acceptable as a collective wisdom. These values are imbibed in the lifestyle right from childhood. Thirukkural augments the inculcation of cultural values by emphasising soft control both internal and external Kural also emphasises the role of family in promoting cultural values. So that moral development of everyone is ensured.

Introduction

Thirukkural is considered as an eternal moral guide for humanity. It is a compendium of Tamil wisdom. It deals with virtue, wealth and love or happiness. It is known for its universality of secular nature. Out of cultured values of Indian culture virtue, wealth, love, and liberation, Thirukkural directly leads with virtue, wealth, and love. Due to its emphasis on non-violence, casetelessness and brotherhood, it organized the character of universality. Even though Thirukkural is considered as a bedrock of Tamil culture, cultural values of Tamil culture are unique in its own Tamil culture advocates love and values as prominent issues. In order to have a comprehensive view on cultural values of Tamils, it is necessary to study the interface of Indian culture and Tamil culture from the perspective of Thirukkural.

In general, value means ‘the object of desire’¹. The term, value may be defined as ‘that which is desired’. Values may be either instrumental or intrinsic. For example, water is an instrumental value, because it quenches thirst. Truth is an intrinsic value. Intrinsic value results in good here as well as elsewhere Intrinsic value is an end in and for itself “Human objectives were divided into four categories-moral action (dharma), economic activities and statecraft (Artha), propagation of the race (kama), and emancipation (moksha). These values drive men towards perfection and peace.

Since culture is the excellence of character, character needs to be moulded by customs, law of morality and conscience². Many community groups follow collectivism and harmony as their regulating system. From the cultural point of view, respect for elders and law of Karma play a vital role in regulating system. Many Indians tend to have a sense of acceptance towards one’s life position or a belief that, due to one’s past life good or bad personal circumstances are deserved. Most of Indians follow the law of moral life as laid down by seers, prophets and saints that should govern human behaviour.

Thirukkural

Thirukkural is the second largest book translated into other languages³. Though it was composed in first century B.C, its influence in Dravidian civilization is immense and forever. The book of one thousand Three hundred and thirty couplets deals with Morality (Dharma), Wealth (Artha) and enjoyment (pleasure). This book is not only ideal but also practical. It is capable to govern the conduct of wise and good men in the affairs of the world. It reflects the process of controlling both the internal and external affairs of men. The values of Thirukkural, if practiced in full-fledged manner, will lead to a life of perfection⁴. These values are inculcated in the process of culture. The process of culture trains tender minds in the lines of love of all forms of life, respect for elders, purity of actions life of equity, goodness etc.,.

Moral Actions

Moral development of an individual is beneficial both for the individual and society. Family, society, religion play a vital role in shaping moral development through the process of culture. Family inculcates ethos or good habits. Individual learn ethos by imitation. Society encourages good habits by reward and punishment method. Religion also inculcates morality by prioritising higher goals viz realization of God. All these processes paves way for the development of conscience, which is the highest stage of moral development. The spiritualities of Indian culture govern most of Indians by according spiritual freedom as summum bonum.

From cultural perspective, conduct of good in imitated by the people of large. In any matter of doubt or where alternative prescriptions are to be found, one would not commit any wrong is one were to follow the customs of one's own locality, community or family. Thus, culture inculcates morality as the collective wisdom of community.

Karma Actions

In India moral actions are controlled by scriptures⁵. Scriptures prescribes dharma or duty.

Scriptures direct to do certain actions, which are obligators. Even though performance of such actions attracts no rewards, non-performance of such actions would attract sin. These actions are called Nithya karmas. There are certain actions which are beneficial to the performer.

Being non-obligatory, performance of such actions would result in receiving fruits of actions. These types of action are called kamya karmas. Besides these actions, there are obligatory duties in the sense that if those things happened, the relevant actions need to be performed. These types of actions are called naimittika *karmas*⁶. In addition to these duties, conduct is also influenced by belief in God, ancestors, future life and law of Karma. The foundation for these types of action is faith. Faith, being a questioned, is being imparted through cultural activities, signs and symbols of religion and even by religion practices. In the Indian context for most of persons, morality in based on religion, because religious ideals are put into practice by culture of duties.

Postulates of Morality

Moral development is analysed both from individualistic and collective aspects moral value system is individualistic for moral value system centre on the individual as the moral decision maker and the basic for moral decisions. This is more prevalent in western countries. A collective moral value system centers on the family community and nation as moral decision-makers and bases for moral decision-making. This is more prevalent in India. In India families play an important role in moral development as well. Culture also influences moral development. Culture dictates societal opinions. It also shapes the way one views the consequences of behaviour and decisions.

In the institution of family, parents influence moral development through their own moral beliefs and action. There is religious or spiritual tradition and their parenting style. Sometimes moral reasoning is becoming less focussed on self and more focussed on the opinion of other culture

controls moral development as the opinion of others, especially elders philosophical approaches of morality while philosophy give the ideas, culture put them into practice by day-to-day activities of life.

Thus, the altitude of different philosophies has affected the nature of moral problem and its solution. "If the absolutistic position of the Advaita Vedanta be accepted as true, the reality of finite disappears altogether and there is no sense in talking of the freedom of a being that does not arise in reality". But this aspect need not be over emphasised because the self-realised beings transcend the world which is the practical ground for morality. As long as the individual believes the world as real, moral laws applicable to him⁷. Thus, no one in above moral laws, because morality is regarded as a necessary ground for philosophical competence.

Cultural values in Thirukkural

According to Thirukkural Goodness and Truth are inseparable. Even falsehood has the nature of truth if it confers a benefit that is free from fault. As a core of Tamil philosophy, it promotes characteristics such as gratitude, friendship, knowledge and virtue "Morality is when a person is guilt-free in his mind"⁸. To be guilt-free one must follow his understanding on ethics. Kural says "live what you have learned"⁹. Thirukkural prepares everyone for a lifetime of happiness and will ensure that every one live their life to the fullest potential. In emphasising goodness, Kural says, "listen to the good however little and gain that much". Kural emphasises the role of family in moral development. "Morality can be demonstrated by family life"¹⁰. For peaceful co-existence, Kural says "birth is the same for all, discrimination arises on the performance of occupation".

Conclusion

Collective wisdom plays a vital role in keeping the senses under control. Thirukkural advocates that practicing truthfulness in thought, word of deed are essentials of morality. The abjuration of six

deadly like, Sins, lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy. It is a human obligation which all must fulfil. Thus ethics, culture and philosophies all culminated in realisation of the ultimate unity of absolute existence. Realisation of unity of existence may result in peace and perfection.

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