

Seven Occult Tamil Proverbs



Wisdom crieth in the streets! Esoteric truths for the masses.

By P.R. Venkatarama Iyer

From The Theosophist, Vol. XII (2), November 1890, pp. 76-80.

Tamil is one of the oldest languages of India, if not of the world. Its birth and infancy are enveloped in mythology. As in the case of Sanskrit, we cannot say when Tamil became a literary language. The oldest Tamil works extant belong to a time, about 2,000 years ago, of high and cultured refinement in Tamil Poetical literature. All the religious and philosophical poetry of Sanskrit has become fused into Tamil, which language contains a larger number of popular treatises in Occultism, Alchemy, &c, than even Sanskrit; and it is now the only spoken language of India that abounds in occult treatises on various subjects. The popular belief is that there were eighteen Brotherhoods of adepts scattered here and there, in the mountains and forests of the Tamil country, and presided over by 18 Sadhus; and that there was a grand secret brotherhood, composed of the 18 Sadhus, holding its meetings in the hills of the Agastya Kūtam in the Tinnevely District. Since the advent of the English and their mountaineering and de-forestation, these occultists have retired far into the interior of the thick jungles on the mountains; and a large number have, it is believed, altogether left these parts for more congenial places in the Himalayan ranges. It is owing to their influence that the Tamil language has been inundated, as it were, with a vast number of works on esoteric philosophy. The works of Agastya Muni alone would fill a whole library. The chief and only object of these Brotherhoods has been to popularize esoteric truths and bring them home to the masses. So great and so extensive is their influence that the Tamil literature is permeated with esoteric truths in all its ramifications; so that, even in these degenerate days, esoteric philosophy is ringing in the bazaars and streets of the Tamil country; to those that can raise the symbolic veil and can understand the grand truths “wisdom crieth in the streets.” In no country in the world has occult philosophy become so much diffused among the masses as in Tamil India. The very lullabies sung by old matrons to soothe and lull to sleep crying children, the seemingly unmeaning songs sung by boys in play, and even the words of abuse uttered by angry people, have a deeper and inner meaning for those

who care to learn and know. The begging class in Southern India is a peculiar one, quite dissimilar to the corresponding classes in other countries. A man can learn the whole philosophy of the Hindus by hearing any of the innumerable *Pandarams*¹ that idly stroll about the streets, reciting songs and ballads as they go from door to door.² Tamil is the only language which has got occult proverbs as reservoirs of metaphysical truths; and this is due no doubt to its being the language of the occult sages as well as of the populace. A proverb freed from its surface impurities, and interpreted aright, is a better teacher than the obscure statements of ancient writers in a cart-load of books of Yoga philosophy. I have taken some model proverbs and shall now examine their meaning.

Proverb No. 1

*Āru āru thalailē āttukkutti mēyukurathu
Kandapēr kēttapēr shallāthayangōl.*

This literally rendered into English means:

Over six, six, lamb is grazing, and he who hears and sees it must not and cannot tell it to others.

This is uttered by young Brahman children when they play together. Now six, six, is thirty-six, *i.e.*, 36 Thathwams³ and lamb in Sanskrit means “Ajām,” and which “Ajām” means “Para-Brahm,” being derived from the root “A+ja” — not born — and this word is used to denote Para-Brahm in all the *Upanishads*. The whole means that Para-Brahm is brooding over 36 Thathwams, and he who realises that knowledge cannot indiscriminately impart it to others, as it is intended for “the elect” and not for “the profane.” Another occult law is involved here, which is that the powers of seeing and hearing are the same; for in the Vedas “Akshavantham” and “Karnavantham” are spoken as synonymous, and it is aptly said that the yogis hear through the eyes and see through the ears (as this is spontaneously evolved in snakes, which see and hear through the eyes).⁴

Proverb No. 2

Okkalayilē pinnaivaiththu ularellām thēduvathēn.

This literally means:

Why should you search all over the country after the child, when you have it upon your hip.

The esoteric explanation is that when you have the true goal and the necessary requisites for its attainment within yourself, why do you unnecessarily run after strange gods and practices such as are observed by orthodox communities. There is another pregnant idea embedded in this. The Tamil word “Okkal” also means “conjunction” or

¹ [The Pandaram caste is composed of respectable people. The name pandaram means valuable storing place of jewels, navarathnas stored in the temples and palaces, they are placed to maintain the jewels of temples and palaces. They are land holders, traders, Sannyāsis (mong), priests (guru) and managers of richly endowed temples.]

² See *The Theosophist*, Vol. VI, p. 344.

³ See “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac.” [Full text in our Secret Doctrine’s First Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

⁴ This is natural history of an extremely occult type. — ED.

“union,” and the proverb asserts the grand truth, that it is no use in having any amount of knowledge in Śāstras and Darsanas, and in expecting to bring forth the child of “Moksham,” while that is possible only by the conjunction of the individual soul with the universal one. The word “Yoga” is derived from “yug,” to join, and hence the proverb under discussion clearly conveys the idea that the *true child* is born only when Jīva merges in Paramātman by (Rāja) yogam, and not by any amount of other observances and practices.

Proverb No. 3

Idaichchi yai sēuthal kedaiththa lāpam.

This literally means:

If anybody can call a thing a ‘gain’ or ‘profit,’ it is in joining with a shepherdess.

Krishna is described as a shepherd tending the flock, and so also Jesus calls himself “the Good Shepherd.” Sheep in Sanskrit is “Pasu,” but this “Pasu” is applied to all the individual souls which are enwrapped in Pasuthwam, Jadathwam, ignorance or animalism; and hence “Logos” is known as “Pasupathi,” *i.e.*, lord of Pasus or Jivātman; and hence when Krishna is spoken of as tending a flock, it means that he was the Logos that overshadowed and guided all the individual souls through its divine effulgence. Now who is the shepherdess? She is “Sophia,” the goddess of “Sophia,” or wisdom, the indivisible effulgence of the “Logos,” and hence the esoteric explanation of the proverb is, that it is only by uniting ourselves entirely with the “divine effulgence,” the Gnostic Sophia, that we get “the true gain of Moksha” and not by other practices and observances. Orthodox people not knowing the philosophical import of the story of Krishna, his tending the flock, and his union with so many Gopikas, have spun most shameful theories and stories out of their fancies, and have dragged the symbol to a most horrible practice of even celebrating the literal nuptials of Krishna with his paramours — the Gopikas, the Shepherdesses. The Bible speaks of the “solemn nuptial compact with ten thousand damsels,” and the meaning is precisely the same. Arjuna is said to have married the sister of Krishna, after he became an ascetic, and this is ridiculous, unless it has a deep symbolical meaning to convey. Arjuna, the neophyte, after leaving every worldly concern, united with Subadra, the sister of the Shepherd Krishna, the “Sophia,”¹ and then only became a fit chela for the reception of the higher mysteries of nature, from Krishna, the Logos. The marriage is spoken as the union of the fifth principle with the sixth, *i.e.*, the absorption of human Manas by spiritual Buddhi. Hence the “Shepherd” and the “Shepherdess” mean respectively “the Logos” and its light.

Proverb No. 4

Kalaham piranthāl nyāyam pirakkum.

This literally means:

Justice will be born only when battles and quarrels take place.

¹ [*i.e.*, His Śakti.]

This is the pivot upon which the true progress of a neophyte turns. If reference will be made to “The Discourses on the Bhagavad Gita,” by T. Subba Bow, the meaning of this proverb will become clear. When Arjuna shed tears at the thought of killing his kith and kin, Krishna plainly tells him that their destruction was necessary for the possession of Hastinapura. It was only after Arjuna became determined for the battle, to kill Kauravas and their adherents — the woes and pangs to which humanity is subject¹ — that Krishna began to preach the true doctrine, and it was after the thorough extirpation of Kauravas, that Arjuna had the undivided supremacy of the spiritual realm. This proverb, therefore, means, that unless we turn our higher nature to war against the lower, real progress and the consequent attainment of the divine possession becomes impossible.

Proverb No. 5

Vannān vittuku vayiyundō innam kidakkarathu pātālam.

This means literally:

Which is the way to the washerman’s house? It is far, far, in the deep.

The term “washerman” is used for Para-Brahm by Agastya and others in all the Tamil Occult works; for this reason, that Para-Brahm takes away the ajnānic dirt of the individual souls, just as a washerman removes dirt from clothes, and hence “the washerman’s house” is the seat of Para-Brahm, and this seat is Sahasram, the 7th spiritual centre in man. Though Para-Brahm has its undivided seat in all the centres, yet a true recognition and real absorption takes place only when consciousness merges itself in this centre through Sushumnā, and this is not an easy task. The proverb is in the shape of question and answer thus:

Where is that centre, where the ‘causeless cause’ resides, and by centring our consciousness in which we can enter the house of Para- Brahm, — Moksha?

It is far away, it is not an easy thing, it is secret and very difficult to attain.

Proverb No. 6

O’m mudierthpōvāyi.

This means:

You will become the end of “Aum.”

This is an abusive phrase uttered by mothers towards their children, but this abuse is really no abuse, but a blessing. The end of “Aum” is the universal cause itself, and to become one with it ought to be the effort and wishes of everyone; and the mother, even when threatening her children with abuses, really blesses them;² and the saying that even the abuses of matrons are philosophy is verified by this proverb.

¹ The Kauravas have sprang from blind Dhritarashtra, and the Pāndavas from the white Pāndu, and this shows that the former are the offsprings of blind Prakriti — the passions and vrithis, — and the latter of the pure, white, higher nature, and that the destruction of the lower nature is necessary for the development of the higher powers. After all his sons were killed, the blind father attained salvation, *i.e.*, when all the lower nature were transmuted into higher golden powers, even manas where reside all māyāvic illusions lost its individuality and became incorporated with the higher nature.

² [Karma, however, weighs motive far more heavily than words. — ED. PHIL.]

Proverb No. 7

Sēththuppōna theruvaiththān mottuppōla molaththānām.

This literally means:

The man in the sacred deep who died sprouted again as the bud.

The “sacred deep” is the occult nature, and the “man” in that domain is the “Ātmam.” Materialists are of the opinion that nothing survives the dissolution of this physical body, and that there is no responsible entity. This proverb cuts away that erroneous conception and teaches that the individual entity survives the dissolution of the Sthūla Śarīra and re-incarnates in a fresh body after its Devachanic period, thus establishing the theory of reincarnation.

It has thus been proved by these proverbs:

- 1 That there is one “Ātman” in man.
- 2 That man by Rājayoga effects moksha by merging the individual soul in the universal, and that all other rites and observances are illusive.
- 3 That to so attain moksha by “yogam,” man must unite himself with “Jñānam.”
- 4 That the destruction of the baser principles must be rooted out if any spiritual advancement is to be accomplished.
- 5 That the seat of the highest spiritual consciousness is “Sahasrāram,” and it is a very difficult thing to attain to it.
- 6 That the end of man’s existence is to become the end of “Aum,” *i.e.*, part and parcel of the divine essence.
- 7 That if he will not attempt to become so, he is subject to re-incarnation.

P.R. VENKATARAMA IYER, F.T.S.

