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Language in Andal's *Thiruppavai*

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The Focus of This Paper

Andal (a:NDa:L) is a mystic hymnist of South Indian religious renaissance, in particular, the Vaishnavite tradition. The main motive of the religious mystic is achieving an intimate relationship with God. It is essential to have knowledge of the fundamental principles of the mystic's philosophy and theology to understand the language of a mystic. This paper will attempt first to analyze the philosophical and religious content of Andal's *Thiruppavai* and then proceed to discuss its poetic richness and lyrical felicity.

Consummation of Relationship with Lord Ranganathan

Andal, who lived over a thousand years ago, is seen as a mystic due to her recognition of the existence of the soul and its relation to the Divine Soul. Andal is also a great mystic because through her sensuous poetic images she brings out the intimacy between her and Lord Ranganathan, the presiding deity of the Vaishnavite sect, Lord Ranganathan of Srirangam. She looks for the consummation of this relationship with him as her consort, longing to marry him.

Lord Ranganathan is Emperumal, my or our Lord and Master. Tradition records that Andal was eventually absorbed in the image of Renganatha at Srirangam, which represents the human identification with cosmic process. In other words, spiritual union takes place and her yearning for this is depicted in sensuous terms in her poems of great artistry and intimate communication.

The Alchemy of Relationship

Max Muller, the great Indologist, wondered about the alchemy of Hinduism where men become Gods and Gods become men. The immortal story of Andal presents an example of this alchemy: a pious devotee par excellence being turned into channels divine through the metamorphosis of pure bhakti. Her lyrical poems Thiruppavai and Natchiar Thirumozhi celebrate the intimacy of human soul with the Universal Soul.

The Structure of Thiruppavai

Andal's Thiruppavai consists of 30 verses in which Andal imagines herself as a cowherd girl during the incarnation of Lord Krishna. In the first fifteen verses a cowherd girl beseeches other Ayar (shepherd) lasses to wake up and immerse in the depth of enjoyment of her verses. In the next fifteen verses, Ayar lasses sing 'Thirupalli Ezhuchi' (exhortation to rise up in the morning) to the Lotus-navelled Govindan and his Nappinai and seek their blessings.

Consider the significance of this division of verses: Individuals are asked to prepare themselves to worship their deity. Preparation includes many rituals including chanting of verses. In the next part actual worship is encouraged.

Andal's Poetics and Syntax

Andal's poems owe their origin to a religious observance among nubile maidens. The use of questions and exclamations, the repetitions of the compound words 'elor empavaai' towards the end of each verse impart a conversational character. She achieves the integration of the mystic, the poetic girl and the mythical Gopi in her poems which express her ethereal longing for the comely Lord of Thiruvarangam. Andal's syntax is often emotive.

The Sensuous and the Spiritual Go Hand in Hand

Andal's Thiruppavai is both sensuous and spiritual in its content. Thiruppavai celebrates the Lord of Thiruvarangam as a sensuous person even as it focuses on his spiritual being. The syntax, the tone and tenor all work towards providing a linguistic experience through alliteration, mellifluous rhythm and great imagery. Her poems are rich in the use of similes and metaphors and their use is functional rather than decorative.

Physical Beauty

Most of the similes and metaphors are used to describe the physical beauty and characteristic features of Lord Arangan. The following examples will exemplify how the concrete is used by Andal to clarify and bring home to the readers the abstract and the spiritual elements.

- In verse 1, it is described that Kannan remains as hot as sun but as cool as moon to his ardent devotees. As for Andal, as a young ardent girl in perennial love with Kannan, the sensuous and the spiritual emotions seem to provide both moon and sun in the same person.
- Being dark in color, Kannan is compared to black cloud in verse 3 and to emerald in verses 16 and 26. The lover is many-splendored for the lady love. She sees beauty in every aspect of her lover.
- In order to enumerate the physical strength of Lord Krishna, Andal extols him as the lion's cub in verse 1 and fierce lion in verse 23. The lover is cuddly and cute as well as fearsome protector.
- Lord Krishna is compared to 'hillock tall divinity' and his feet to 'lotus golden' in verse 30. Unmatched divine status with all purity. Lotus becomes the symbol of knowledge, wisdom and everything divine.
- In order to bring home the exquisite charm and beauty of Nappinai, Andal compares her to 'creeper gold' in verse 11 and praises her rosy cheek in verse 2. The imagery of creeper stands for steadfast love seeking to envelope her lover, while the rosy cheek is an integral part of feminine beauty, caused or kindled by natural shyness ascribed to all women of great culture in Tamil tradition. It is more likely that Nappinai is the alter ego of Andal herself.

The Rain

Within the Tamil poetic tradition, the kaar season is the season of rains during which pining for the lover is highlighted. Nature serves as an appropriate background for Andal to express her intensely emotional bakti and sensuous love for her heart-throb Kannan. Lord Krishna appears in incarnations of various moods of Nature in the verse 'Azhimalai Kanna' which may be described as a small scientific treatise, yielding wealth of information about rain. To Andal, rain is Krishna and Krishna is rain.

At the spiritual level, it is an ethereal mode of seeing God in Nature and Nature in God. At the sensuous level, longing to be with one's love and lover become the major focus of this season. To her, the color of the cloud, the flash of lightning, the roar of thunder and the down pour of rain all look like the complexion of Krishna, the wheel, the dextrogyral conch and the arrows

discharged from Rama's bow. Every bit here is both sensuous and spiritual, a hallmark of Andal's poetry.

The Intrinsic Beauty of Poems

The essence of the famous poem 'Azhimazhi Kanna', is translated in English by Chennai Padmanaban thus:

Oh! Rain! Gracious alike ocean, pupil of my eye
Thou shall never flout this altitude
Enter sea, emerge replete, ascend a mass dark in
space;
Color a la form of Lord Eternal. Let lighting flash
Thunder shoot as wheel and dextogyral
In the hands of Padmanabha, His arms a fortitude;
Brook no delay, force a cloud burst;
Pour down as would darts from Saranga lash
To facilitate life on earth bright;
And the Margazhi bath to our delight;
Listen and consider, our damsel.

Translations and translators have their own problems in capturing all aspects of the original composition. Here in this translation, the focus is more on the spiritual and mythical and less on the original intent of sensuality and spirituality going hand in hand.

Lyrical and Transcendent

Just as in her style, so also in versification, Andal can hardly be surpassed. She opts for a specific poetic form in Tamil. With her everything is lyrical and transcendent and she fluently rhymes her response. She assumes herself as a cowherd girl, which fits in well with her lover's background as a member of the cowherd community, in his incarnation as Lord Krishna.

Andal feels that the feelings and the emotional passions of the heart are at their simplest and purest in humble and rustic life. The Ayarpadi environment is replete with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature. So she imagines herself as an Ayarpadi girl. Srivilliputhur turns Yadava land for her. The temple of Vadapatrasayee becomes the palace of Nandagopalan. Vadapatrasayee is Krishna for her. She imagines herself as one among the Ayarpadi maidens going from house to house bidding their friends to rise and join them for the Margazhi month rituals to be followed by prayer to Narayana who alone can give mankind 'parai' (grace).

The tone and tenor of the poem suggests that the month of Margazhi is the right time for humankind to benefit from Nature to attain God- consciousness. Andal seeks the Ayarpadi lassies to listen to the warble of the birds and feel the loveliness of the fresh flowers and the pure

breeze which will help them absorb the glory and grandeur of the Lord Narayana, and approach him in a mood of total surrender.

The sensuous description is overtly presented, but the goal is to seek the Divine. Interspersed with sensuous beauty and spiritual yearning, the poem takes us to a world of beauty and mysticism.

Dramatic Progression

There is always dramatic progression of thought in her poems. If Kannan is compared with the dark cloud, his Ayarpadi lasses are compared with peacocks. The peacock dances on seeing the dark clouds that forebodes the coming rain. Similarly the Ayarpadi lasses too, at the sight of dark colored Krishna, sing, dance and become elated. They are compared with tiny parrots (verse 15) which usually repeat the same tune in rhythmic ways and they are totally mesmerized by their own singing. They prattle sweet nothings to their lover. They are also compared with the moon in verse 30 emphasize that they receive light and happiness from the sun, Lord Krishna.

Kannan is also compared with rain as he showers blessings in abundance as the rain pours water on the earth for the benefit of humanity. To his ardent devotees Kannan remains as cool as moon but to evil-minded personalities he is hot as sun. Thus, language and theme merge together to convey the devotional ardor of Andal.

Sound and Sense

Andal is renowned not only for powerful handling of religious emotion but also for the depiction of Ayarpadi environment accurately and precisely. She cares both for sound and sense. Words attain rhythmical power and there is a harmonious fusion of the lyrical and metaphysical elements.

Audible signs of dawn are in abundance in verses 6,7,and 8. Both rhythm and rhyme merge together to make the reader hear

- The chirping and chattering of birds
 - The roaring of white conch
 - The sonorous clatter of crows
 - Gurgling noise of curds in pots by churn-dash.
 - The clanking sound of gold pendants threaded in the necklace of dairy women
- and
- The coo-cooing by the flock of larks

A Painter of Landscape in Words

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Andal exposes herself as the original painter of landscape with words. The pastoral environment is brought home in a picturesque way in her poems. Visual signs of dawn are described in verse 13. The Ayapadi lassie is asked to look at the pale eastern sky during dawn. They are also asked to see the buffaloes moving with heavy pace to graze the field. Prosperous life led by the shepherds is revealed in verse 12, which depicts that the shepherd's home is wet and miry due to overflow of milk dribbling from the udder of young buffalo. The milk vessels always brim with abundant milk because of incessant flow of milk from the cow and Ayarpadi people pour ghee copiously on cooked rice and eat it.

In verse 2, Andal details the code of discipline that the Ayarpadi lassies have to follow during *no:nbu* (fast). They are advised not to drink milk or taste ghee and also not to comb and adorn their hair with flowers. Austerity and depriving oneself of good things of ordinary life become a prelude to the meeting with and the celebration of the Divine. Now the *no:nbu* has come to an end. The lavishness and luxury involved in the end of the vrata (fast) are depicted in verse 27 as thus:

Cooked milk - rice delicious,
Steeped in ghee poured off copious
Which flows down the elbow, Thou Amorous!
Entranced would remain conjunct, consider
our damsel.

Yielding to Spiritual Interpretations, Multiple Interpretations

Another significant feature of Andal's language style and versification is that they yield to spiritual interpretations. The following specimen will demonstrate this fact:

In your backyard garden pond
Lotus hath opened its petals benign;
Lily hath closed its petals as a cone.

In this verse, according to religious interpreters, 'the backyard garden' points to the physical body which yields to various kinds of pleasures and grief. 'Pond' signifies the heart. As the pond is important to the garden, so is the heart to the body. Andal's lyrics use many striking smiles which enhance further their religious meanings.

R. Bangaruswami translates verse 23 in English as follows:

The valiant lion snugly sleep
In its mountain cave during rain
Wakes up eyes aflame; bristles its mane
In all directions, stretches its limbs
Stands erect and sets out roaring

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Even so you, though flower-like
Leave your bed, March into the hall
And taking your lion-held throne
Our grievances enquire and dear mercy.

In this verse, Krishna's rising is compared to a lion's after its hibernation during the rainy season. The spiritual commentators feel that the lion in this verse is symbolic of Lakshmi Narasimha. They feel that though Lord Narasimha is compared to the lion, his mental attitude is like that of a flower. They interpret that in the line 'Wakes up eyes aflame; bristles its mane', 'flame', symbolizes 'jnana' (knowledge). If Krishna glances at jeevatma (individual soul), the knowledge of jiva-paramatma identity (union of soul with supreme soul) will be imparted to him.

Idiomatic Tamil and Indigenous Poetic Forms

No doubt Andal has powerful command over the language which enables her to compose poems in idiomatic Tamil in an indigenous form. She epitomizes the sweetness, elegance, and essence of the language when she expresses her profound feelings of devotion, love and saranagathi (total surrender) in her immortal and exemplary lyrics. She preaches to humanity that there is nothing equal to the route of chanting to train the mind to seek Divinity. Her theology motivates people to chant the name of the Lord Ranaganathan, to develop a close rapport between him and his devotees.

In verse5, Andal advises the people to sing of his glories so that they will get close to Krishna as follows:

Child of North Mathura Maya incarnate
Sporting in the holy waters of Yamuna!
Lustrous lamp of the cowherd clan!
Purifier of your mother's womb! Damodara!
If we but approach you with purity'
Worship you with flowers pure'
Sing your praises with deep emotion,
And mediate upon you in our minds,
Our past errors and those creep in future
will be burnt like cotton in the fire.

(Trans.by Bankaruswami)

She advocates purification of bakthi cult in her lyrics where she uses the simplest lyric measure with great skill and ease and has enabled the people from village, town and city to recite her songs in the month of Margazhi for centuries.

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