

Food and Literature Across the Ages

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In literature many writers registered cruelty of hunger in their works. Food is one of the basic components for the functioning of everyone in this world. It is the duty of a ruler to provide basic essential to the people of a nation. Many children die due to lack of nutrition. Many countries in the world suffer with extreme forms of hunger, especially Somalia like countries are suffer much due to hunger and people are being exploited. Every nation has its own unique food culture, but hunger is common for all. Many Tamil writers discuss about hunger in their writings. Among them Ovaiyar Tamil poet is very vividly expressed it in the following manner in her Nalvali:

Honor, class, learning, strength, wisdom, sense of charity, austerity, aspirations, perseverance, desired of women of sweet talk all these ten will vanish once is confront with hunger. (Nalvali26)

Through her words one can know the nature of hunger well. In Hungry mood one cannot listen to anything, cannot do anything, in his life. Extreme hunger leads to many problems. In her text 'The Room of One's Own' text Virginia Woolf states the plight of hungry as: "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well" (Woolf ..)

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation also observes the importance of food, he states that food is very important. It is like God for the needy, where he say: "There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread" (Ganthi 62).

The Poet Subramaniya Bharadhi asserted responsibilities of a nation in providing a proper shelter and food for its people. Thus, he vey boldly asserted people's right to throw away the failing rule in the following manner and showed himself as a radical fighter who voiced for the sake of his nation. "If there is no food for an individual let us destroy the entire universe" (Bharathiyar 45)

In Manimekalai, the sequel to Cilapathikara of Illangovadikal, Saththanar depicts the myth of Manimekalai, the daughter of Madhavi of Silapathikaram. She gives 'Amutha Surabhi'

(ever giving food bowl) which will satiate hunger of all living beings. While giving her the Amutha Surabhi, the goddesses Deeva Thilaki explains to her the virtue of feeding the hungry. She says that the one who gives food to the needy will be consider as God and one of the best charity is offering food to the needy it classifies the offering in the following in the following manner:

Benefactors to the ale are just traders in virtue;
Those who satiate the hunger of the feeble are
Who embody virtuous life in this world.
To all those who live in this atom filled world-
One who gives food is one who gives life (Manimekalai 11 92-96)

The above lines one can find meaning for the different types of charity. The offering which has expectations is like a business, but the offering which is given to the needy is worth doing than other offerings. One can trace God's presence by giving a hand to the needy. So providing food to the needy is usually consider as a life giving act, because food is life for the one who is suffering with hunger.

The cruelty of hunger is very clearly portrayed by our Indian poet Jayanta Mahabharat in his much fascinating poem 'Hunger'. This poem depicts the sordid realities of life. Its sketches two different type of hunger one is for food another is for flesh. First part of the poem tells about the suffering of a poor fisherman. The fisher man is at the verge of poverty and is unable to feed his daughter and finally he turned himself as pimp for his own daughter and offered his body to the poet who is longing to satisfy his carnal hunger. The acts of the fisher man reveal the sayings of Avvaiyar's words which were discussed in the above.

It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.
The fisherman said: Will you feel her, carelessly,
trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words
sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes'. (Jayanta Mahapatra 'Hunger')

Thiruvalluvar too discussed how the wealth of benevolent man is useful for the society and how poor will be benefited by the wealth of a virtuous men in the following couplets, "The wealth of men who love the 'fitting way' the truly wise, / Is as when water fills the lake that village needs supplies" (Kural 215). The wealth of benevolent man who wants to exercise his duty to the needy is like a city water tank which provides water for all people irrespective of

color, creed and caste: ‘‘A tree that fruits in the hamlet’s central mart, / Is wealth that falls to men of liberal heart’’ (Kural 216).

The wealth of a virtuous man is like a tree which full of eatable fruits in it and also standing in the central place of the village, which means any one can get fruit out of it and quench his hunger. Likewise, the wealth which is possessed by a noble man can easily be received by the need of a single request. Valluvar differentiates the miser from the benevolent man. The misers are the greedy people who always wanted to possess a lot but offer nothing to the needy or to the destitute. They are the men with stone hearts, because they are the sole reason for the economic disparity of the society. He ridiculed them in the following couplet: ‘‘When he whom no man loves exults in great prosperity, / ‘Tis as when fruits in midmost of the town some poisonous tree’’ (Kural 1008). Valluvar says that whoever neglects to spend his money towards charity and the needy are sinners. The wealth which they possess is like a tree with full of poisonous fruits, even if it stands in the middle of the village it is useless. So, this type of hypocrite will not get any due recognition from the society even among his own people.

The Holy Bible also stresses the importance of providing food for people. Jesus wanted to provide food to the multitude of people who followed him for three days. He fed forty thousand people with seven loaves and some little fishes. He stressed the importance for hospitality.

So, the multitude marvelled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel (Matthew 15:31 King James Version)

Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, ‘‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way. (Matthew 15:32 King James Version)

His disciple said to Him, ‘‘Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude? (Matthew 15:33 King James Version)

Jesus said to them, ‘‘How many loaves do you have?’’ and they said, ‘‘Seven and a few little fish (Matthew 15:34 King James Version)

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground (Matthew 15:35 King James Version)

And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude (Matthew 15:36 King James Version)

So, they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left (Matthew 15:37 King James Version)

Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children (Matthew 15:38 King James Version)

In Indian epic Mahabharat, Pandava after losing all their wealth in the gambling of dice with Kavruavas went to exile. During this period of exile, the Pandava would obtain their food by means of the Akahaya Patra, which would become exhausted each day once Drupathi finished her meal. One day when Draupadi finished her meal, there came Lord Krishna with many men. However, she did not come out of the house to greet Krishna. Then Krishna enquired for the strange behavior. He came to know the situation, then he asked to bring that Akshaya Patra. She showed it to him. There was only a single grain of rice inside the pot. Krishna took it away and ate. Then entire men's stomachs were filled. He then justified that giving god food is equal to feed entire world. Thus, it also stressed the importance of hospitality.

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