

Hospitality as Expounded in *Tirikaṭukam*: A Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

Hospitality is one of the significant virtues adhered to by Tamils from the beginning. Tirikaṭukam, one of the significant texts comprised in the collection of eighteen lesser works known as Patinēṅkīlkkāṇakku works emerged in the period known as post-caṅkam Period. Nature of hospitality has undergone tremendous changes from the period of caṅkam to post-caṅkam. To find out nature of hospitality narrated in Tirikaṭukam is primary objective of the study and identify whether any changes occurred on the hospitality in the text in comparison with Vedic tradition, Jainism, Buddhism and thoughts of early Tamils become secondary objectives of study. It is noteworthy that even though the text Tirikaṭukam emerged in the period in which Jainism and Buddhism had dominated Tamil Nadu, the text rarely shares many characteristics of hospitality of Jainism and Buddhism, instead the text substantially upholds traditional characteristics of Early Tamils. Hospitality of Tirikaṭukam abstains from religious, conditional and metaphysical aspects. Besides, hospitality of Tirikaṭukam reveals some unique and independent ethical ideas of Tamils: rational, humanitarian and positivistic outlook. Analytical, synthetic, comparative, critical and holistic methods have been used in this research. Primary literary source, secondary and online sources of the text were also used in this study.

Keywords: Early Tamils, Ethics, Hospitality, Positivism, Tirikaṭukam

Introduction

Tirikaṭukam, one of the important works categorized under *Patinēṅkīlkkāṇakku* works² in the history of Tamil Literature, consists of a proem at the outset, and hundred verses composed in *venba* meter.³ The text was composed by *Nallātaṇār*. The proem of the text leads us to infer that the author could be a *vaiṣṇavite* as it narrates three incarnation stories of Lord *Viṣṇu*. However, there is a difference of opinion on the authorship of the text as in the case of some major works of Tamil literature. The contents of the text speak ethical virtues in the rational background and it is rarely found that any label of orthodox system of thought on ethical virtues throughout the text.

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² See Shanmugam Pillai, M (2001). *Patinēṅkīlkkāṇakku-Vol.3, Mullai Nilaiyam, Chennai for a detailed study on the text.*

³ *Venba* is a popular form of poetry in which much classical Tamil literature was composed.

Generally, *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkkāṇakku* works belong to post-*caṅkam* period in which Jainism and Buddhism dominated Tamil Nadu as well as the history of Tamil literature. It is conceived by many as the *aṟaneṟikkālam*, which means the period of *dharma* (Velupillai 2004, pp. 52-55) as most of the literature of this period emerged to inculcate ethics to everyone and *Tirikaṭukam* is not an exception to this rule. *Tirikaṭukam* preaches three ethical virtues in positive and negative manner (dos & don'ts) in every verse. The post-*caṅkam* period views the *caṅkam* period as the age of social pathology and interpreted that the people of this age were affected by diseases related to individual and social ethics. Therefore, the post-*caṅkam* period literature, *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkkāṇakku* works were conceived as medicine for the people who were affected by the diseases. Some works of the lesser works were named the names of traditional medicines such as *Ēlāti* and *Cirupaṅcamūlam* and those are names of herbs of the traditional medicine of Tamils applied for some diseases. Thus *Tirikaṭukam* refers to a traditional medicine prepared by a combination of three herbs: *sukku* (dried ginger), *milaku* (pepper) and *thippili* (long pepper). Tamil scholars opine that *Tirikaṭukam* might have been composed in A.D. 725 (Vaiyapuripillai 1988, p.66). The ethical virtues of the text reflected not only the virtues of Vedic tradition, Jainism, and Buddhism but also those of early Tamils. In *Tirikaṭukam* there is no three-theme classification such as *aṟam* (righteousness, *poruḷ* (wealth) and *kāmā* (pleasure) as in *Tirukkural* and *Nālaṭiyār* and it is worthy to note that the latter works are attributed to Jains by eminent Tamil scholars (59, 64). However, the three themes are scattered across the text. Virtues for the householder as well as ascetic are found without classification. More materialistic ethical virtues could be found and some ethical virtues were expressed in the sphere of this world in the text.

Methodology

This research paper looks at the concept of hospitality from three main branches of philosophy: ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. This study tries to unearth the positivistic and materialistic characteristics of the ethical concept of hospitality. For this qualitative study, philosophical research methods such as critical evaluation of beliefs, clarification of concepts, analytical, synthetic, comparative, deconstructive, critical, and holistic methods have been used in this study.

Extensive use has been made of *Tirikadukam*, and *cankam* and post-*cankam* literary texts to present the argument, respectively as primary and secondary literature.

Hospitality and *Cankam* Tamils

Hospitality⁴ is one of the highly emphasized virtues in *Tirikaṭukam* and its significance is sensed as being narrated intensely throughout the text. *Tirikaṭukam* leads us to infer that even though the period of the *Patīṇenḱīlḱkanakku* works is much associated with the concept of *dharma* advocated by Jainism and Buddhism, it can be found that ‘hospitality’, one of the virtues of early Tamils from the *cankam* period is also continued and observed by Tamils of post-*cankam* period. *Puranāṇūru*, one of the greatest pieces of literature mirroring the life of ancient Tamils portrays the import of observance of hospitality in many places. The hospitality of Tamils has some unique features. Unconditional ethics⁵ is the unique feature of the hospitality of early Tamils. Further, hospitality was practiced by early Tamils in a purely humanitarian background. Some poems of *cankam* literature condemn the merit resulting in an exchange of adherence to ethical virtues. The person who expects good consequences (attainment of heaven or successfulness in the materialistic life of this world) is depicted by a poem of *Puranāṇūru* as ‘*ara vilai vaṇikan*’, which means merchant of merit (Hart and Heifetz 134). Even though some householders underwent the condition of severe poverty, they had never given up the observance of hospitality. A poem of *Puranāṇūru* speaks on a warrior wife who observed the virtue of hospitality by using seedling millet even in the condition of severe poverty (33). Hospitality of early Tamils treated all guests

⁴ Hospitality refers to *விருந்தோம்பல்* (phonetically transcribed as *viruntōmpal*) in Tamil language

⁵ Any religious system in the world is generally based on merit and demerit for its prescribed actions. Adherents of religion are predominantly motivated to do morally good actions to receive merit as the result of them. This is conditional ethics. On the contrary, it could be found thoughts of unconditional ethics among early Tamils – an agent expects no merit for a good action. Besides, early Tamils had satirical outlook on merit-based ethics formulated by any religious system. Read the following lines, for instance: “இம்மைச் செய்தது மறுமைக்கு ஆம்’ எனும்/அற விலை வணிகன் ஆஅய் அல்லன்/பிறரும் சான்றோர் சென்ற நெறி எனஇ/ஆங்குப் பட்டன்றுஇ அவன் கைவண்மையே” (Hart and Heifetz 134). Hart and Heifetz (134) phonetically transcribe the same as, “‘Immaich seitatu marumaikku ām’ eṇum / ara vilai vaṇikaṇ Āy allan; / pīrarum cāṇṇor senṇa neṇi eṇa, / āṅkupattanṇu, avan kaivaṇṇame.” The meaning of these lines has been rendered in English as following: ‘Āy is no businessman trading in virtue for his own profit/Thinking what he does in this birth will serve him in his next / But because before him other noble men/Have followed this right path, his generosity is what it is! (Hart and Heifetz 1999, p.85). It could be observed that the same mental disposition was continued and articulated in the virtue of hospitality in *Tirikaṭukam*.

without social hierarchy and partiality. Early Tamils believed that receiving guests and having food with them a great value to their life and believed that household life is meant for hospitality. Poems of *caṅkam* literature evidence that hospitality is largely based on a positivistic and rational background and not the background of religion and metaphysics at large.

Pride and Hospitality

Pride was another significant virtue adhered to by early Tamils as a virtue of hospitality and they conceived that losing pride is equal to losing their life. Sometimes they believed that pride (pride of clan) is more valuable than life. For the purpose of protecting clan pride (சூலப்பெருமை) they were happy to sacrifice their life so readily (343). Visiting as a guest to someone's home is perceived as disgracing to clan pride of the guest among early Tamils and *Ātticūṭi* of Poetess *Auvaīyār*, a significant didactic work prescribes “*erpatu ikaḷci*”⁶ (receiving is a disgrace). Even though hospitality was observed by the early Tamils, the status of the social hierarchy had been taken into consideration by guests and not by hosts of hospitality. The guests selected their host by considering many factors. In the very critical juncture, only any early Tamil would have gone a guest for his host. Since virtue of pride had restricted many early Tamils as guests, hospitality would hardly have been adhered to by *caṅkam* Tamils. *Tirikaṭukam* registered evidence that visiting as a guest to others is a matter of lack of pride for the guest or the clan of the guest. A stanza of the text depicts the miserable feeling of a guest who is all ready to go as a guest to the next village and the text portrays the guest will have sorrow and dishonor feeling on being a guest: *uḷantu viruntiṇanāi vērrur pukal* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.10).⁷

Hospitality is an Unconditional Duty to Society

Tirikaṭukam also echoes the idea of early Tamils that occupation of cultivation is meant for hospitality. The peasant society in Tamil Country is known *vēḷāḷaṅ* clan because their profession is cultivating crops, especially paddy and sugarcane. The *vēḷāḷaṅ* refers not only to a clan of Tamil society but also to the person who has the willingness and generosity to help the needy

⁶ ஏற்பது இகழ்ச்சி

⁷ உழந்து விருந்தினனாய் வேற்றூர் புகல் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.10)

(Vaiyapuripillai 1982, p.3844). The early Tamils undoubtedly believed that selfishness could not be the essential and ultimate goal of an individual as well as society, instead, the selfless and altruistic attitude of life was expressed as the goal of the individual in the text; ‘a peasant will not eat when a guest awaits outside the home’: *veḷāḷaṅ enpāṅ viruntirukka uṇṇātāṅ* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.13).⁸

Collective existence and sense of humanity were also revealed in the aforesaid stanza. *Caṅkam* Tamils had not worried about the social hierarchy of the guest and a guest may belong to whatever social condition. This is one of the unique features of *caṅkam Tamils*. There is hardly found caste or sectarian-based hospitality among early Tamils. The hospitality of early Tamils conveys their matchless humanity as a message to the world. The Early Tamils also revealed the message to the world that hunger is a common phenomenon for all and it should be treated on the humanitarian ground and not sectarian religious and philosophical background which prescribes many criteria for host and guest. The Early Tamils proposed only a criterion for a guest that a guest should have a feeling of hunger. *Tirikaṭukam* emphasized that a member of the *veḷāḷar* clan cannot only enjoy the privilege of the clan in which he was born but also the action ought to be committed to him should be committed. Through the action, the clan would have such pride. There was a custom among early Tamils that the host is highly honored by the observance of their hospitality.

Even though there are no sectarian criteria for a guest *Tirikaṭukam* identifies a universal hallmark for a great guest that the guest would have satisfaction with whatever things are provided by the host: *olvatu ariyum viruntinaṅ* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.18).⁹ The ideal guest is not greedy but needy and content with things received by him. *Tirikaṭukam* avers that such a guest will be the happiest person with received things. As per early Tamils a guest who is content with received things is called ‘*gñalam*’ (ஞாலம்). ‘*Gñalam*’, the Tamil word literally refers to ‘ordinary world’ but figuratively denotes ‘gentlemen or highly virtuous persons’ in the text. It could be found similar kind of usage of the Tamil word, ‘*உலகம்*’ (whose literal meaning is ‘world’ in English) in *Tirukkural*, the great literary work of Tamils that highlights the same in its stanza no. 280 as:

⁸ வேளாளன் என்பான் விருந்திருக்க உண்ணாதான் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p. 13)

⁹ ஒல்வது அறியும் விருந்தினன் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.18)

ulakam paḷita olittu vṭṭ which means ‘if you abstain from evils prescribed by gentlemen or highly virtuous persons’ in English (Desikar 1950, pp.386-387). For Early Tamils, the world was not only a composition of facts and events but a construction of ethical values. The world has seen unscrupulous and greedy guests sometimes who claimed the lives of hosts. *Tirikaṭukam* never recognizes the aforesaid type of guests, instead, it gives full of freedom to the host to determine what type of hospitality should be given to a guest. However, as per *Tirikaṭukam*, a genuine guest would be pleased with whatever thing or hospitality is given by a householder.

Hospitality, Egalitarianism and Communism

The virtue of hospitality of *Tirikaṭukam* proved and indicated that the early Tamils developed rudimentary ideas of egalitarian and communist society. Many revolutions were caused by scarcity of food and hunger which demolished mighty kingdoms in the world. The virtue of hospitality also witnessed that feelings of compassion and empathy had already been deeply rooted in the minds of early Tamils. *Tirikaṭukam* argues that partaking in food for the needy definitely would be one of the best education: *pāttuntānku keḷviyuḷ ellām talai* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.21).¹⁰ The hospitality of early Tamils is not only reiterating a householder to remove the hunger of a guest but also expect the householder to treat the guest as a human being as equal to the host. This is one of the unique features of the hospitality of early Tamils. The author of the text contends that hospitality, having and sharing food with the needy is conceived as *nallarivāṇmai* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.25)¹¹ which means ‘higher- knowledgeness’ and the author also states that hospitality is an action of the person who has ancient wisdom: *tollarivāḷar toḷil* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.25).¹²

Tirikaṭukam conceives that observance of hospitality would lead one to a healthy life while non-observance of hospitality would lead one to a state of disease. The text refers to this condition as: *viruntinri uṇṭa pakal nōyē* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.27)¹³ which means that, ‘it should be

¹⁰ பாத்துண்டாங்கு... கேள்வியுள் எல்லாந் தலை (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.21)

¹¹ நல்லறிவாண்மை (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.25)

¹² தொல்லறி வாளர் தொழில் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.25)

¹³ விருந்தினர் யுண்ட பகல்... நோயே (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.27)

certainly a feeling of disease, if a householder who does not have food with a guest'. It is a rarely found metaphysical assumption and interpretation of the consequences of observance and non-observance of the hospitality of early Tamils. The aforesaid verse compares the condition of disease to the non-observance of hospitality. It is worthy to note that the non-observance of hospitality had mostly been expressed by the author within the boundaries of the empirical world and not on the world hereafter. The consequence of non-observance of hospitality is not to be found in the life after death, namely punishable by confinement within hell or subjection to similar suffering in the next birth. There is any, this happens within the bounds of this empirical world itself. Hardly any reference other than this could be found in the text. The evidence lead to the inference that there is rarely found karma theory and eschatological states such as heaven and hell in association with observance or non-observance of hospitality in *Tirikaṭukam*. It is worthy to note that *Tirukkural*, which also comes under the collection of the texts known as *patiṇenkiḷḷkaṇakku* works speaks on the metaphysical stance, heaven, in association with hospitality. *Tirukkural* emphasizes that the perfect observance of hospitality would lead a householder to heaven and the householder will be a great guest to heavenly beings in its stanza no. 86 (Desikar 1950, pp. 146-147). Unlike *Tirukkural*, *Tirikaṭukam* limits all the consequences of hospitality to this world and constructs binary oppositions: disease/health in the sphere of this world by relating non-observance of hospitality with disease and observance of hospitality with health respectively.

The early Tamil householder had not only enjoyed pleasure and happiness from his family members but also from the society in which he had lived and his pleasure and happiness largely depend on hospitality. Unparalleled adherence to the hospitality of early Tamils leads us to infer that early Tamils are ruled by more altruistic motives than egoistic ones. Successful observance of hospitality is not only based on a wealthy and generous householder but also on the moral qualities of a wife. The text emphasizes that a wife of a householder should have moral qualities such as an attitude of willingness to adhere to hospitality. The text here highlights the immoral quality of a wife who is endowed with an attitude of unwillingness to observe the hospitality and the text also conceives that a householder who lives his life with such a wife will not be a good life, as such

life brings no worth: *viruntañcum ērvaḷaiyai illatuiruttal... nañmai payattal ila* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.35).¹⁴

A householder having food with a guest is one of the significant features of early Tamils and many verses of the text highlight this virtue. Such customs of early Tamils reiterate again and again that the Tamils had already committed to the principle of universal brotherhood. The hospitality of early Tamils not only expresses their compassion and sympathy for fellow beings but also conveys to message to the world that their sincere commitment to equality through hospitality. Many lines of verses of the text depict this. *Tirikaṭukam* conceives that perfect observance of hospitality is the first of three prime ethical duties attributed to a chaste wife; giving birth to children and maintaining a household life without transgressing its norms are the other two principal duties of a virtuous wife (64). The text also describes that a wife who will be a friend to a householder if she adheres to hospitality perfectly: *nalviruntompalin nattāḷām* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, pp.35-36).¹⁵ It is worthy to note that there is no reference to heaven which is the consequence for a chaste wife who is a perfect adherent to hospitality and there is also no reference to hell to a wife who is non-adherent to virtue of hospitality in the text. The above-mentioned analogy that a chaste wife who is a perfect adherent to the virtue of hospitality as a friend to a householder alludes to that early Tamils had much not been obsessed by theological and metaphysical consequences of ethical actions. The aforesaid evidence led us to infer that early Tamils had much been influenced by the rationalistic and naturalistic view of life.

The text identifies a person who is a rare and great guest to deserve to receive hospitality from a householder. The guest who had not only lost his way and destination but also suffered a lot in many aspects including severe hunger is identified by the text as a guest of such nature: *nontu neṟi māṟi vanta viruntum* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.37).¹⁶ It is obvious that the guest of *Tirikaṭukam* hardly refers to a person who is in a higher social hierarchy including an ascetic. Like this, another verse of the text mentions of a rare guest ‘the guest (who) visited in a heavy rainy days’: *mārināḷ vanta viruntum* (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.40).¹⁷ The aforesaid criteria of a guest lead us to infer

¹⁴ விருந்தஞ்சும் ஈர்வளையை இல்லத்திலு இருத்தல்...நன்மை பயத்தல் இல. (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.35)

¹⁵ நல்விருந் தோம்பலின் நடடானாம் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, pp. 35-36.)

¹⁶ நொந்து நெறிமாறி வந்த விருந்தும் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.36)

¹⁷ மாரிநாள் வந்த விருந்தும் (Shanmugam Pillai 2001, p.40)

that hospitality based on religion is getting secondary importance among early Tamils and the portrayal of the guest in the text also confirms that *Tirikkatukam* is to form criteria to determine a great guest which is based on the more rationalistic and egalitarian background than religion and metaphysical one.

Hospitality in the Vedic, Jaina, and Buddhist Traditions

To comprehend the unique features of the hospitality of early Tamils, it is necessary to compare the hospitality of Vedic, Jaina, and Buddhist traditions with that of early Tamils. There are many references and prescriptions on hospitality in Vedic texts including *Upaniṣads* and *Dharmaśāstras*. There is a reference to hospitality in the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* which refers to a guest as a god: ‘Be one to whom a guest is a god’ (Hume 1984, p.282). However, the hospitality of the *Upaniṣad* bears the hallmark of metaphysical stance as it equates the guest with God and it might be based on the religious aspect. However, there are some similar lines of thoughts between *Tirikaṭukam* and *Rig-Veda* on hospitality: ‘The Gods have not ordained hunger to be our death: even to the Well-fed man comes death in varied shape’ (*Rig-Veda* 10: 117: 1) and like *Tirikaṭukam*, *Rig-Veda* also reiterates partaking food with needy as: ‘...He feeds no trusty friend, no man to love him All guilt is he who eats with no partaker’ (11). However, the hospitality of *Rig-Veda* consists of conditional and metaphysical assumptions such as God and guilt.

Like this, early Tamils substantially differ from the assumptions and conditions of the Laws of Manu on Hospitality and the Vedic text expresses hospitality which is based on metaphysical assumptions as: ‘that *brāhmaṇa* who thus daily honors all beings, goes, endowed with a resplendent body, by straight road to the highest dwelling- place, viz *Brahman*’ (Buhler 1993, p.92), and the text also expresses socially unequal states on the hospitality as: ‘Even a *vaiśya* and a *śūdra* who have approached his house in the manner of guests, he may allow eating with his servants, showing (thereby) his compassionate disposition’ (95).

The hospitality of the Buddhist tradition could be identified with the characteristics of a more religious and metaphysical stance as in the case of the Vedic tradition. Buddhism conceives hospitality as *puñña-kamma*, meaning ‘meritorious deed,’ that which brings happiness to the agent

in this world and the world hereafter. The conditional nature of hospitality in Buddhism is revealed by the phrase *puñña kkhetta* which means ‘conceiving guests as merit field’ (Somaratne 2019, p. 213). There could also be found a hierarchical difference in Buddhist hospitality as an ascetic receives a more prominent place than a layman. Even though Like early Tamils, Buddhists maintain a substantially egalitarian policy for treating guests (*samānattatā* in Pali language), it provides more privileges to ascetics in the practice of hospitality and it believes that hospitality for ascetics brings more merits than that for laymen: ‘... one can treat those spiritually virtuous guests first and this favoritism cannot be considered discriminatory, rather it is more meritorious deed...’ (Somaratne 2019, p.218)

Like Buddhism, Jainism also maintains similar ideas on hospitality and there cannot be a considerable difference between them. Even though *Tirikaṭukam* narrates religious, conditional, and metaphysical assumptions on many ethical virtues, it could rarely find the aforesaid characteristics of hospitality (Velupillai 2004, pp. 75-78).

Conclusion

It is worthy to note that phrases and words related to hospitality are devoid of religious, conditional, and metaphysical assumptions in *Tirikaṭukam*, a book which emerged in the *aṇaṇerikkālam* in the history of Tamil literature. In this period, the influence of Vedic tradition, Jainism, and Buddhism had been experienced and *patiṇenkkīlkkāṇakku* works reveal this truth. It could be found that ethical teachings of the aforesaid traditions encompass conditional, metaphysical, and socially hierarchical characteristics. On the contrary, the virtue of hospitality in *Tirikaṭukam* seems to be devoid of such features and it expresses positivistic and materialistic aspects at large. In this background, it is amazing that even though *Tirikaṭukam* had emerged during this period, it expresses unique features of the hospitality of early Tamils intact.

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