

## Meat-Eating: Thiruvalluvar's Perspective

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Food has its own role to act as a stimulant in the minds of the people to nourish themselves both physically and spiritually. Food plays very important role in the lives of the mankind to energize in and around them. This paper explores the role of food in the lives of the mankind with reference to Thirukkural.

Thirukkural is one of the oldest books in Tamil Literature. In Thirukkural, Valluvar talks about the moral values and ethics that may be followed by human beings in their lifetime to gain serenity. Valluvar has written 1330 couplets under 133 topics which cover among other things non-violence, non-meat eating and so on. Valluvar, in chapter: 26 Spurning Meat, talks about the importance of not eating meat. This chapter is taken for analysis in this paper by the researchers to present Thiruvalluvar's point of view and how he views not eating meat as one of the tools to make good what he considers as depletions in society.

In the couplet – 251,

How can someone possess kindness, if one eats meat  
from another body to grow one's own body?

According to Valluvar, it is not the right thing to kill any living being for one's own survival in the world.

In the couplet – 252,

One, who doesn't value money can't be wealthy;  
one, who eats meat, can't be compassionate.

The poet says that one who does not value money cannot be wealthy, similarly the person who eats meat cannot be considered compassionate toward other living beings. Thiruvalluvar

probably considers this as a basic step to become compassionate to all including humans and other living beings. He does not declare that all those not eating meat are compassionate towards and love humans and other living beings.

In the couplet – 253,

The heart of one who has eaten, and relished flesh is like  
the heart of one leading an army: it cannot be compassionate.

The poet reports that the person who leads the army will not have any compassion for his/her enemies. Likewise the person who eats meat cannot have compassion in their minds towards the sufferers.

In the couplet – 254,

Compassion is exemplified by not killing; and the lack of it, by killing:  
to eat meat so obtained, is not virtuous.

Valluvar says that people who eat meat cannot understand the meaning of the phrase ‘not killing’ and it is not virtuous to kill animals and eat their flesh. Once again, we notice that the emphasis here is from the point of view of not eating meat, but there is no declaration or assumption that persons who do not eat meat are not inclined to kill others or other living beings. Since the chapter is focused on avoiding meat eating, Valluvar focuses on its virtue in some exclusive manner.

In the couplet – 255,

Survival of species depends on not being eaten;  
those who eat them...hell will not split its mouth to spit them out.

The poet’s religious assumptions and beliefs are clearly presented in this couplet. From his religious point of view. Does Valluvar seem to believe here in the cycle of endless births, deaths and rebirths as part of the process of liberation/salvation?

In the couplet – 256,

There won’t be anyone selling meat for the sake of earning,  
if the world stops killing for the sake of eating.

It is interesting to note that Valluvar the poet identifies the inter-relationship between commercialism or economic activity and meat eating. It is clear that even in his days there was

commercial activity of selling meat. His solution to stop this commercial activity is that people should begin stop eating meat.

In the couplet – 257,

Meat is the wound of some body;  
if one gets this realization, stop eating it.

Valluvar wants his readers to realize that meat is the product of the wound of some body i.e., it is considered as dead body of some living being. So, if the meat-eating person realizes that meat-eating is causing wound, he/she may opt not to eat meat. Note the emphasis here is loving all beings around us.

In the couplet – 258,

Those who have wisdom, free of flaws, would not  
eat a body, freed of its life

The poet himself gives the solution for the problem of eating meat. Through this couplet he conveys that anyone who decides not to harm anyone will not eat meat and he/she can free himself/herself from the flaws of life.

In the couplet – 259,

To desist from killing a life and eating it is better than  
doing a thousand rituals, offering oblation.

Valluvar talks about the boon that can be attained by anyone who stops eating meat. Sages involve themselves in conducting rituals for the sake of the welfare of the country and even the people in the family life also work for the welfare of their family and the country. By doing such rituals they may receive boon from the higher worlds. But becoming a non-meat eater could enable individuals to receive such blessing more easily. So the poet through this couplet asks on the readers to desist from killing a life and eating it.

In the couplet – 260,

To one who doesn't kill and refuses meat, all lives will  
fold their arms and pay obeisance.

Finally, the poet concludes by saying about the blessing the person who does not harm any living in any form, i.e. not killing any animal or not eating any animal, will receive. All the lives in the whole of creation will fold their arms and pay respect for such people.

Through these couplets we see Valluvar's theological position in relation to religious beliefs, social practices, economic activity and individual effort to gain blessings.

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### References

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