

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ST. JOSEPH MENTIONED IN THEMBAAVANI WITH THE EIGHT SATTVAS OF MAN IN NATYASAstra

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Summary : *The purpose of this study is to bring out the similarities between the characteristics of the Nayaka in the Natyasastra and the Nayaka (St Joseph) in Thembaavaani. Thembaavani is a Tamil epic centered on St Joseph. In the Biblical narratives St Joseph was presented so humble, quiet and silent that he goes almost unnoticed. This epic, which begins with the birth of Joseph, and goes on to explain how Jesus, Mother Mary and Joseph were bound together by grace, love and divine power. Thembaavani gives us the closer look at the personality of St Joseph. St Joseph stands out in his virtues. It states that the eight sattvas of the hero mentioned in Natyasastra is quite pertinent and valid to the Nayaka of Thembaavani. Thus the artist could very well incorporate the Christian heroes in the thematic presentation of classical forms.*

Keywords: Mary, Natyasastra, Nayaka, Sattva, St Joseph, Thembaavani, Veeramamunivar

Introduction :

Every epic or drama will have a main character, the hero who takes the leading part. In Indian theatre he is known as a *Nayaka*. There are many treatise speak about the different types and characterists of *Nayaka*. One among them is Bharata's Natyasastra. In Natyasastra, *Nayaka* has been defined by Bharata as, "One who relieves himself from any contingency and triumphs over all hurdles and appears to be the protagonist amongst all the other male characters of the play." Bharata goes on to explain in the chapter "*Samanya Abhinaya*" how these heroes suppose to represent their temperament in the plays by giving us the eight acting emotions of man. In this article I am going to discuss about the eight *sattvas* with St Joseph the hero of the Tamil Literary work "*Thembaavany*".

Thembaavani :

Thembaavani is a Tamil Classic written by Veeramamunivar, an Italian missionary who came to India in eighteenth century. Though he was an Italian he mastered the Tamil language and has contributed so much to Tamil Literature by giving us *Kavaloor Kalambagam*, *Thonool*, *Vethiyar Ozhukkam*, *Paramartha Gurkathai* and so on. He too has translated *Thirukural*, *Thevaram*, *Thirupugazhl*, *Thonool* and *Aathichudi* into European languages.

Thembaavani is a poetical work which describes the life of St Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus Christ. This Literary work is divided into 36 contos. Thembaavani comes with such a beautiful meaning: *themba* + *ani* which means the unfading garland or *then* + *pa* + *ani*, the ornament of poems as sweet as honey.

Eight aspects of male's sattva in Natyasastra :

According to Bharata the acting emotions of men are following eight

1. Sobha: Skill, bravery, energy, contempt for mean things and emulating best qualities.
2. Vilasa: A bold look in the eyes, gait like that of a bull and speaking with a smile.
3. Madhura: By understanding the reasons, firmness in all the situations.
4. Sthairya: Sticking to the ways of dharma, *artha* and *kama* whether the consequences are good or bad.
5. Gambhira: No change of expression whether in anger, sorrow or fear.
6. Lalita: When in love, feeling, without deliberateness, tender and charming.
7. Audarya: Charity and large- heartedness, sweet towards friends and enemies.
8. Tejas: Not tolerating, even at the risk of one's own life, humiliation and insult by others.
(Adya Rangacharya,1987)

Analysis about the characteristics of our Nayaka, St Joseph with the eight sattvas:

1. Shoba:

In Natyasastra, Bharat speaks of *shoba*, as a brilliant character, who is well versed in skills and brave in character.

“Joseph, whom the heavenly regions revere, received a plant of honey-filled flowers” (M. Dominic Raj, 2019) “On account of prosperous blessings received without limit, and flourishing, He had a rare and glorious disposition of cordial charity, being named ‘Joseph’ (M. Dominic Raj, 2019) These two verses from the prologue of *Thembaavani* speaks about St Joseph as he was the one whom the heavenly regions revere, he received from God prosperous blessings and it continues to say that he grew eminently with abundant knowledge of doctrine. Thus we come to know that he is one of the perfect examples for *Sobha*.

2. Vilasa:

Vilasa speaks about the graceful appearance of the person. “Of the heart polished with clarity and beauty, and because of that, revealing the blessings flooding in him, he grew and glowed.” (M. Dominic Raj, 2019) “Strewing joy all around and becoming lovable to everyone, he was A graceful youth like a picture drawn by sprinkling gold; considering And feeling that his sparkling beauty, like lightning strewn over it, Was uselessly splashed on him, he avoided the sin of attachment to it.” (M. Dominic Raj, 2019). These two songs from *Thembaavani* section 4 presents in crystal clear the beauty of the foster father of God's Son.

3. Madhura:

It reflects the charming character of the person in the way he understands the things and firm in his decisions. St Joseph is a marvelous example of the integrated person. He is great in front of god and in front of humans not because of knowledge, power or worldly wealth; he is great on account of his innocence, his delicacy, his abandonment to god, and his docility to whatever Divine Providence offered him or asked of him. As a faithful servant Joseph took care of Incarnated Word and accomplished his mission on earth. In the thirty-sixth section 'The Coronation', the third boon was given to St Joseph for the care and concern he has shown to his Holy family. Veeramamunivar says this as follows "O one of grace exceeding the limit of the ocean of compassion! you took outstanding care, with a loving grace beyond imagination, of the mother taking into consideration the fact that she had delivered the Lord: hence, you shall give people the gift of obtaining the companionship, grace, succor and support.... It is for this reason that I have given you the third gem." (M. Dominic Raj, 2019)

4. *Sthariya:*

It speaks about a man who is just. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit: she will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Bible- Mathew 1:20-21). Mathew goes on to say that being a just man Joseph unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. After the message from God's angel in the dream, he obediently accepts to take Mary as his wife. Lets see some of the examples from *Thembaavani*.

The fear and confused state of Joseph was explained by Veeramamunivar in section 7 and 8 like this, "Joseph reflecting on them, was seized with overwhelming sorrow, And unable to bear the fire present in him, desired to be separated from her." (M. Dominic Raj, 2019) Further he explains like this "the one with a mind that had a doubt that surpassed even the sea waves, suddenly opening his eyes and seeing..... With a wisdom arising in him.....fell flat to adore Him" (M. Dominic Raj, 2019)

Joseph fell flat to adore him symbolizes that he submitted himself totally to God's will.

5. *Gambhira:*

Gambhira is a *sattva* of one whose inner self is not affected by the happenings of outer world. Fr George Kaitholil beautifully underlines specially the silent character of St Joseph in his book "St Joseph" as follows "The silence of St Joseph was a manifestation of his optimism and trust in God. It was also an expression of his peaceful and loving nature. His silence at critical moments shows how wise and good-hearted he was. His was a fruitful silence that saved him and his family much trouble."

Though Veeramamunivar's epic Joseph expresses himself in word and songs, he always remained neutral to all the happenings in his life. Whenever he received the commend from the Angel of the lord, he just obeys and moves forwards in his life's journey without having any doubt. He remained faithful to his first 'yes' till the end of his life.

In *Thembaavani* section 8 song 5 we read as follows about his first 'yes':

“The one with the mind that had a doubt that surpassed even the sea waves, suddenly opening his eyes and seeing No other phenomenon happening outside him except the light surrounding him immediately rose up with joy and fear, with the wisdom arising in him that overcame the expertise he had of the perfect Scriptures. He understood that in an inconceivable way and without the pure virginity of the mother changing, and like a priceless gem, our father had come as a son in his house, and hence fell flat to adore him.” (M.Dominic Raj, 2019)

6. *Lalita*:

Tender and charming personality is known as *lalita*. Joseph’s love for Jesus and Mary was active, selfless and committed, as all his actions show. Joseph and Mary shared in the same love for Jesus, the Divine Child. They were united in accepting God’s plan and in living up to that plan. In fact, the lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are closely connected, so much so that it would be unfair to speak of one without speaking of the other two. This expression is more visible in Veeramamunivar’s words when he narrates about Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus in the tenth chapter of ‘Thembaavani’.

Joseph asks Mary “can you, with feet more slender than the flowers blooming in the forests, consider coming with me as companion to the thorny territory?” (M.Dominic Raj, 2019) to this the reply of Mary is “our two lives are not separate having been joined together in a rare marriage of desire. Thus, with a joy that is hard to split, let us go to that great city.” (M. Dominic Raj, 2019)

The further lines in Thembaavani will beautifully portray the immense joy of Mary and Joseph as they welcome the Divine Baby in their arms. This joy and love will continue through the entire treatise.

7. *Audarya*:

Audarya speaks of a man who is full of goodness and tenderness with helpful nature. Fr Kaitholil in his book ‘St Joseph The Man Jesus Called Father’ would say “Caring, protecting, demands goodness: it calls for certain tenderness. St Joseph appears as a strong and courageous man, yet in his heart we see great tenderness, which is not the virtue of the weak, but rather, a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love.” (Kaitholil, 2020).

Thembaavani section 31 beautifully says this Joseph’s search and sobbing for child Jesus as follows, “When on that day itself, the mother was searching for her Son, who was Like an excellent, red ruby, in that vast city, while weeping and wandering, The master of austerity searched, with love surging, for his eminent Son Along the pathways of the forest that was pouring fresh flowers.” (M.Dominic Raj, 2019)

8. *Tejas*:

whatever may the hindrance be it is the undying spirit of a person who has a strong determination to accomplish the task. Pope St John Paul II once said, “St Joseph is a man of

great spirit. He is great in faith, not because he speaks his own words but, above all, because he listens to the words of the living God. He listens in silence. And his heart ceaselessly perseveres in readiness to accept the truth contained in the word of the Living God.” By obeying the will of God St Joseph too could have faced lot of trials in his life specially the days before the wedding or even whenever he had to journey from one country to another. The Divine Mystery was not revealed to everyone. He was not affected by the insults, ill treatment of his own kin or the challenges that came along his way. For this spirit of St Joseph he was rewarded with the fourth gem about which we read in the last section of *Thembaavani*.

“O one holding the lovely banner of victory! You flawlessly conquered the devils, putting to shame their revenge carried out through the maturing In their minds of the ancient hatred they possessed because of their having been cast out from heaven like thunderbolts that get split And fall from a full-fledged cloud; hence, in order that the brood of devils that attack people with their full-blown rage might run away, I have given your felicitous name the power of a javelin – that gift is signified by the fourth gem that blazes to perfection set in gold.” (M. Dominic Raj, 2019)

Conclusion :

Reading the verses of ‘Thembaavani’, one will clearly understand the nobility, goodness and holiness of St Joseph. He was a perfect earthly father for Jesus spiritual spouse and guardian of Mary, her true companion in good times and bad. He adorned himself with all the eight sattvas: Sobha, Vilasa, Madhura, Sthairya, Gambhira, Lalita, Audarya and Tejas and stands out as a real hero, the Nayaka of this Great Christian Epic.

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