

Enduring Love, Enduring Sorrow: A Study of Emotional Continuity in Arirang and the Tirukkural

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Abstract

This paper examines the common emotional ground of love and separation in Arirang, a Korean folk song and in Pirivattaramai (Separation Unendurable) in Chapter 116 of the Tirukkural. Both traditions have their own linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts, but they both express a human experience of longing that is transcultural and transcendent. Often Korea's unofficial national song, the Arirang is in several regional versions, each expressing sorrow, yearning and the pain of separation in natural imagery, through mountains, rivers and faraway roads. Likewise, the verses of the Tirukkural on separation illustrate the sophisticated emotional psychology (aga ilakkiyam) of Tamil tradition: love-in-separation (pirivu nilai) becomes an art of poetic endurance. Using a comparative approach and an emotional perspective, this paper reveals that Arirang and Tirukkural use rhythm, metaphor, and culture symbolism to make separation not only a painful experience but also a state of spiritual depth. The paper proposes that the Han concept in Korea resonates with the Tamil concept of steadfast love (anbu) that persists in the absence of. The research is of value in the bridging between the two traditions as it sheds light on the universality of emotional expression and commonalities of the human condition in Asian folk and ancient poetics.

Keywords: Arirang, Tirukkural, Han, Tamil Poet.

Introduction

Love and grief are shared human experiences, and the way it is described in literature and music gives us an understanding of the cultural understanding of love, morality and emotional endurance. Arirang is the representative song of Korea (Ko, 2016). They are widely sung in South Korea, North Korea, and Korean communities in foreign countries today (Kim, 2010) as a cheering song (The Korean Times, 2012) playing a role in unifying the Korean people. The Korean unofficial national song – Arirang, a folk song includes the sorrow of leaving home, and of history's sufferings, and is well known as a vehicle of collective grief, through its repetition of melody and images of hills, roads and the passing of lovers. Likewise, the Tamil Tirukkural is an ancient (more than 2000 years old) ethical and poetic work, which expresses the ethical and emotional aspects of love. In Chapter 116 (Pirivattaramai – Separation Unendurable), he explores the inner reality of separation, the enduring nature of missed and unfulfilled love, and the development of patience and moral fortitude in the knowledge that all suffering is inevitable. This

paper will place both texts in their cultural and historical context, specifically with regards to the emotional aspects of separation. It compares Arirang with the Tirukkural to examine various cultural approaches to the experience of love and loss, the role of symbolic imagery in evoking emotional depth, and how endurance gives meaning, both moral and aesthetic, to the experience of suffering.

Literature Review

There are studies comparing the Korean and Tamil in the field of trade, cultural, economic and traditional aspects (Kannan, 2011, Arokiyaraj, 2021). The Arirang has been examined in previous research for its function as a collective memory and cultural identity, which has been correlated with feelings of grief (Han), historical trauma (Dozier, 2020; Ro, 2018), or memory and nostalgia (Ro, 2018; Dozier, 2020). Its unusual repetitive melodic framework is emphasized as a way to sustain the emotional experience and build communal catharsis. The Tirukkural is known for its short, witty and profound aphorisms in the study of Tamil literature. Subramani (2010) and Venkatachalam (2015) bring to light the ethical and emotional maturity of Tirukkural, its discussion of love, separation and patience. Chapter 116 focuses on inevitability of separation and fragility of human bonds, and on fostering endurance – personal and moral.

Although few comparative studies on Korean and Tamil literature, cross-cultural affect theory, which explores the universal emotional themes across cultures from the viewpoint of emotions has been conducted (Ekman 1998). This study is based on this scholarship, but it is a focused comparison between Arirang and Tirukkural chapter 116 that does not involve linguistic or narrative similarity.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis is based upon the two complementary concepts, Korean Han and Tamil emotional endurance (porumai). Han is a culturally-internalized experience of longing, which is shared in the form of story, song, and memory. It includes the feeling of loss, remorse, and longing for justice or for the person to be reunited. Unlike this, the Tamil concept of emotional endurance is one of moral and psychological tolerance, moral control of desire and attachment, and development of inner strength to cope with the inevitability of separation. The study is an interdisciplinary exploration of the communal and the personal aspects of emotional suffering, as it is expressed in song and in verse, and as it reflects similar human experiences of love, loss, and resilience.

Methodology

Comparative textual analysis is used in this research, which compares the contents of certain verses in Tirukkural Chapter 116 with the different versions of Arirang used in different regions (Jeongseon, Miryang, Seoul). The analysis is carried out in three steps:

The selection of Corpus: The researcher translated ten verses from Chapter 116 of Tirukkural into English (Appendix A). Arirang's three regional versions (Appendix B) were examined thematically.

Verse-by-Verse Analysis: Themes from each of the verses were matched with Arirang and the analysis was done on the emotional content, metaphor, and articulation of separation and longing.

Cross-Cultural Interpretation: The study compares the way each culture deals with feelings of grief, love and endurance and looks at other philosophical and aesthetic values that underlie these elements.

Analysis and Discussion

Love and separation are universal themes in both Arirang and Tirukkural Chapter 116, but both pieces are written from a different cultural perspective. Arirang's repetition of the melody and the

imagery of abandoned roads, hills and sorrows externalize the sadness. This song is a communal lullaby, a lull that echoes within the community, a song that speaks of collective longing and collective memory (Han). Simple, lyrical and repetitive, it is a structure that heightens emotion, and enables listeners to hear the inevitability of the loss and internalize and reflect on it.

The experience of separation is internalized in Tirukkural Chapter 116 and the emphasis is laid on emotional endurance (*porumai*) and ethical reflection. These stanzas express the nature of the experience of separation, its emotional and ethical dimensions, and the development of the art of patience in the presence of inevitable sadness. The intensity of the longing is communicated in a contemplative and disciplined way through symbolism like bangles slipping down, weak arms or fire burning even if not touched.

These variations in style are not a distraction from the main theme: that of love and sorrow being intertwined, of the inevitability of separation, and of the strength needed to bear up against emotional suffering. In Arirang, it is achieved by collective expression and collective lamentation and, in the Tirukkural, by moral and emotional control within. In both, they emphasize that suffering, once recognized and worked through, does not lessen but enrich love and the power of emotional depth and human connection.

Moreover, both texts use symbolic imagery to express abstract emotional states. In Arirang, the landscape becomes a metaphor for distance and separation, and in Tirukkural, objects of everyday experience become a touchable, meaningful construct to explain the nuance of grief. In each of these cases, the ordinary is elevated to portray universal human experiences of love and loss, while acknowledging how cultural expressions influence, but do not determine these experiences. Overall, this thematic comparison demonstrates that love, separation, and emotional endurance is a universal human experience that is not bound by culture or language. In the case of Arirang, sorrow is externalized and communalized, while the Tirukkural internalizes and moralizes it; in both cases, the universal presence of human endurance when it comes to the inevitability of loss bestows cross-cultural continuity on the aesthetic and ethical expression of enduring love.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is the translation of the Arirang and Tirukkural, which might not capture the language nuances and emotions of the original texts. Regional variations, which may provide further insights were not considered, but left out three major versions of Arirang. In the same way, the analysis was restricted to the one chapter of Tirukkural, and not to the range of emotions available in other chapters in the collection.

This comparison can be further expanded in future studies to incorporate aspects of music and performance in Arirang, as well as Tamil folk songs with similar emotional content. Interdisciplinary studies (literature, musicology, cultural history) can provide additional insights into the possible universal human feelings such as love, sorrow and endurance in Korean and Tamil traditions in different languages and art forms.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that Arirang and Tirukkural Chapter 116 convey the concept of enduring love as being bound up in enduring sorrow. The grieving is shifted from the personal and the private to the public and the communal in the case of Arirang, while in Tirukkural it is placed in the moral landscape, the ability to wait, and the capacity to endure. The use of symbolic objects and landscapes is a means for both texts to express the depth of separation, and there are significant cross-cultural parallels in the understanding of love and human resilience in the face of separation. This study tells us that love and loss are felt in the same ways in different cultures,

and that the experience of emotions is universal. The mechanism of endurance—whether it be communal lamento or moral training—is one that lies at the heart of how human beings deal with the inevitability of parting. The analysis highlights the universal human experience of how sorrow can be translated into aesthetic and ethical learning, advancing comparative literature studies and fostering an understanding of love, grief, and strength across the world.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Tirukkural Chapter 116 – Separation Unendurable

1151

Original (Tamil)

செல்லாமை உண்டேல் எனக்குரை மற்றுநின்
வல்வரவு வாழ்வார்க்கு உரை.

Transliteration

cellāmai uṇṭēl enakkuurai marṇuniṇ
valvaravu vālvārkkū urai.

Translation

If there is a way to avoid parting, please tell me; but if it's about leaving and coming back soon, speak only to those who can handle waiting until then.

1152

Original (Tamil)

இன்கண் உடைத்தவர் பார்வல் பிரிவஞ்சும்
புன்கண் உடைத்தால் புணர்வு.

Transliteration

in̥kaṇ uṭaittavār pāṛval pirivañcum
puṇkaṇ uṭaittāl puṇarvu.

Translation

Once, his gaze brought me happiness, but now, even thinking about his departure fills me with unbearable pain.

1153

Original (Tamil)

அறிதரோ தேற்றம் அறிவுடையார்
கண்ணும் பிரிவோ ரிடத்துண்மை யான்.

Transliteration

aridarō tērram arivudaiyār
kaṇṇum pirivō riṭattuṇmai yāṇ.

Translation

Even the wisest lovers face separation at times, making it hard to trust the strong promise of “I will never leave.”

1154

Original (Tamil)

அளித்தஞ்சல் என்றவர் நீப்பின் தெளித்தசொல்
தேறியார்க்கு உண்டோ தவறு.

Transliteration

aḷittañcal enṛavar nīppiṇ teḷittacol
tēriyārkkū uṇṭō tavaru.

Translation

If the kind one who once told me “Do not fear” now leaves, can those who believed in his words be blamed?

1155

Original (Tamil)

ஓம்பின் அமைந்தார் பிரிவோம்பல்
மற்றவர் நீங்கின் அரிதால் புணர்வு.

Transliteration

ōmpiṇ amaintār pirivōmpal
maṛṛavar nīṅkiṇ aritāl puṇarvu.

Translation

If you truly want to protect, shield us from the sadness of parting, for once a loved one leaves, coming back is never certain.

1156

Original (Tamil)

பிரிவுரைக்கும் வன்கண்ணர் ஆயின்
அரிதவர் நல்குவர் என்னும் நசை.

Transliteration

pirivuraikkum vaṇkaṇṇar āyiṇ
aritavar naḷkuvar eṇṇum nasai.

Translation

For someone who does not care about separation, hoping that their lover will return is a useless dream.

1157

Original (Tamil)

துறைவன் துறந்தமை தூற்றாகொல் முன்கை
இறைஇறவா நின்ற வளை.

Transliteration

turaivan turantamai tūrrākōl munḱai
iraiiravā ninṇra vaḷai.

Translation

Will my bangles, slipping down my weak arms, not show the silent suffering of our parting to the world?

1158

Original (Tamil)

இன்னாது இன்னில்ஊர் வாழ்தல் அதனினும்
இன்னாது இனியார்ப் பிரிவு.

Transliteration

iṇṇātu iṇṇilūr vāḷtal ataninūm
iṇṇātu iṇiyārp pirivu.

Translation

Living in a place without family is hard; yet, being separated from a beloved one is even harder.

1159

Original (Tamil)

தொடிற்சுடின் அல்லது காமநோய் போல
விடிற்சுடல் ஆற்றுமோ தீ.

Transliteration

toṭṭircuṭiṇ allatu kāmanōy pōla
viṭṭircuṭal āṇṇumō tī.

Translation

Fire only burns when touched, but does it, like the pain caused by love, continue to burn even when we are apart?

1160

Original (Tamil)

மறுக்க முடியாத பிரிவின் சோகம் பலர்
தாங்கி வாழ்க்கையை தொடர்ந்தனர்.

Transliteration

maṇukka muṭiyāta piriviṇ cōkam paḷar
tāṅki vāḷkkaiyai toṭarṇṇar.

Translation

Many in this world bear the sadness of unavoidable separation and still find the strength to go on.

Appendix B: Arirang Versions

Jeongseon Arirang

Original (Korean)

아리랑, 아리랑, 아라리오
아리랑 고개를 넘어간다
나를 버리고 가시는님은
십리도 못 가서 발병난다

Transliteration

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo
Arirang gogaereul neomeoganda
Nareul beorigo gasineun nimeun
Simlido mot gaseo balbyeongnanda

Translation

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo
Crossing over Arirang hill, my love must leave me behind
He who abandons me will not even go ten leagues before suffering hardship

Miryang Arirang

Original (Korean)

남춤 보소 남춤 보소 남춤 보소
동짓달 꽃 본꽃이 남춤 보소
아리 아리랑 스리스리랑 아리랑가 났네
아리랑 고개로 날 넘겨주소

Transliteration

Nal jom boso, nal jom boso, nal jom boso
Dongji seotdal kkot bon deusi nal jom boso
Ari arirang seuri surirang ariraga natne
Arirang gogaero nal neomgyeojuso

Translation

Please look at me, please look at me, please look at me.
Look at me as if you're seeing a flower in the cold winter month.
Ari, Arirang, suri surirang — Arirang has begun.
Please carry me over the Arirang hill.

Seoul Arirang

Original (Korean)

아리랑, 아리랑, 아라리오
아리랑 고개로 넘어간다
나를 두고 가시는님은
길이 멀어 다시 못 오리라

Transliteration

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo
Arirang gogaero neomeoganda
Nareul dugo gasineun nimeun
Gili meoreo dasi mot orira

Translation

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo
Crossing over Arirang hill, leaving me behind
The one who leaves me cannot return because the road is too long