



THIRUKKURAL EXPRESS

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**Ilakkuvanar's Thirukkural Mission:
A Force for four Decades (1933-1973)**

Ilakkuvanar's Thirukkural Mission: A Force for four decades (1933-1973)

Prof.S.Ilakkuvanar, an unsung hero in the battle against suppression of linguistic human rights, ever remains as an embodiment of Tamil heroism in the history of Tamilnadu.His role as an indomitable warrior in the fight against imposition of Hindi, domination of Sanskrit and aggressive encroachment of English in the fields of Education and administration deserve immediate attention of scholars for proper documentation so as to record his due place in the annals of history.

While carrying on his crusade for the cause of Tamil on one hand he also strived his every nerve to propagate the maxims of Thiruvalluvar, the vivid portrayal of Tamil culture and civilization by sangam classics and the knowledge of Tholkappiyam as a classical treatise on Tamil language and literature. His multifaceted personality as an orator, journalist, translator, poet and educationist helped him achieve his target.

At a very young age of 23, while he was a college student, Ilakkuvanar started his Thirukkural mission after a thorough reading of Thirukkural and its commentaries which compelled him to propagate this secular scripture for the benefit of the people. While he was a Vidwan intermediate student at Raja's college, Thiruvaiyaru (1933) he began his mission. At weekends he went to the surrounding villages to propagate the lofty ideals of Thiruvalluvar. He willfully took this noble task of propagating Thirukkural so as to motivate the people to alleviate their worries and achieve progress in their lives. He took a vow to carry on this propagation of Thirukkural throughout his life just like a Christian missionary, not expecting any benefit from this, but at the same time never to get afraid of any difficulties faced due to this preaching of Thirukkural. Till his demise at 1973 September 3, he had conducted thousands of Thirukkural classes on week-ends, hundreds of seminars and conferences at many places in Tamilnadu, to introduce, instruct and enlighten people on various aspects of Thirukkural.

He started his teaching career at the then Thanjavur District board high schools. From the very beginning of his career, he made it a custom to celebrate Thiruvalluvar day during Navrathri (dasara) holidays. During those days, Ilakkuvanar might be the only teacher to conduct Thiruvalluvar day as a public function with the co-ordination of students, teachers and parents. It never ended till his retirement. The venues changed but the spirit and enthusiasm to introduce Thirukkural and celebrate the magnanimity and genius of Thiruvalluvar never decreased. During those days only few people understood Ilakkuvanar's intention to propagate the ideals of Thiruvalluvar. As Ilakkuvanar was an ardent admirer and sincere follower of Periyar E.V.R., many persons with a paranoid approach misunderstood the meetings as a sort of propaganda for E.V.R.'s self-respect movement. When he authored and published a book titled, "Who is an able minister?", with an intention to explain the division of amachuiyal (The chapter about ministers) in Thirukkural, paranoid onlookers thought Ilakkuvanar has criticized the congress ministers. Even without having a glance of the book, they sent telegrams to the Premier (Chief Minister) that Prof.S.Ilakkuvanar has done a great mistake by indulging in politics and blaming ministers. They went to the extent of demanding the dismissal of Ilakkuvanar from his Professor post.

The then Premier Kumaraswami Raja sent Rupees Two by Telegraphic Money order and requested to send the book immediately. A couple of days after the Premier received the book, he sent a letter to Prof.S.Ilakkuvanar, appreciating him for his analysis of Thirukkural in a new angle. Those who had sent telegrams and expected Ilakkuvanar's dismissal got disappointed. This event is mentioned to disclose the circumstance and sequence of the past under which Ilakkuvanar propagated Thirukkural.

Periyar hailed the Thirukkural as a valuable scripture which contained many scientific and philosophical truths. He also praised the secular nature of the work. Periyar praised Thiruvalluvar for his description of God as a formless entity with only positive attributes. He also suggested that one who reads the Thirukkural will become a Self-respecter, absorbing knowledge in politics, society, and economics. According to him, though certain items in this ancient book of ethics may not relate to today, it permitted such changes for modern society.

To popularize Thirukkural, he organized a two days conference at Chennai on 15/1/1949 and 16/1/1949 which was attended by all the eminent scholars of Tamil at Tamilnadu,irrespective of their political affiliations.Navalar Somasundara Bharatiyar,T.P.Meenakshisundaram,A.chakravarthi nayanar, Thiru.Vi.Ka.,Ka.Appadurai,Thirukkural V.Munusamy and Prof.S.Ilakkuvanar were among the participants.

Ilakkuvanar appreciated the initiative of Periyar and requested him to conduct such conferences in all the districts of the then Madras state.Periyar accepted Ilakkuvanar's proposal to conduct such conferences in all the districts of the then Madras state, and he gave the opportunity to Ilakkuvanar to conduct in Ramnad district at Virudhunagar. He had founded a Thirukkural forum at Virudhunagar under the Presidentship of V.V.Ramasamy, his college correspondent.

Ilakkuvanar mobilized a very larger gathering than the first conference and eminent scholars from all the parts of the then Madras state. The resolutions passed by Ilakkuvanar which got the approval and acceptance of the gathering were futuristic.

1) From high school up to college, Thirukkural should be compulsorily introduced as a compulsory subject. Shakespeare is prescribed as a full-fledged paper for degree courses at college and competitive examinations for government jobs. Just like Shakespeare, Thirukkural should be introduced in these examinations.

2) Legislators and Heads of Institutions should be well versed in Thirukkural. Scholarship in Thirukkural should be made an essential qualification to adorn these positions.

3) Government should take necessary steps to announce a day as Thiruvalluvar day and announce it as a public holiday.

4) This conference requests Thiruchirappalli All India Radio station to announce news about meetings and conferences on Thirukkural and broadcast the lectures.

The above resolutions wholeheartedly accepted by the scholars in the conference, which were considered as dreams of Ilakkuvanar then, have become realities.

The demand for the announcement of a specific day as Thiruvalluvar day has a long history, and that history cannot be narrated in a few pages. Kazhi.Siva.Kannuppila and Va.subbiah founded a "Thiruvalluvar day academy" (Thiruvalluvar thirunaal kazhagam) to reiterate the need to fix a day for celebrating as Thiruvalluvar day. The role of Kaa.Po.Rathinam from Eezham should also be mentioned here. Eventhough a long debate was going on about a probable date, Tamil scholars decided to fix 2nd Thai (the day next to pongal) as Thiruvalluvar day. Thai first i.e. on Pongal, the Tamil New Year or Thiruvalluvar year begins.

Ilakkuvanar's dream to introduce Thirukkural as a compulsory subject got a partial success as the then Education minister Avinashilingam introduced Thirukkural as a compulsory subject in High schools.

As per the verdict of Justice R.Mahadevan, from 6th standard to 12th standard Thirukkural was introduced as a compulsory subject and 108 chapters of Thirukkural (Araththuppaal and Porutpaal) were distributed class-wise so that a student entering High school should learn all the 108 chapters without fail.

In Malaysia, from 15th March 2015, Thirukkural was introduced in the syllabi of High schools and universities.

It is needless to elaborate the importance Thirukkural had gained today throughout the world. International organizations like U.N., Indian national organizations like Parliament of India utilize Thirukkural at apt occasions.

Ilakkuvanar's prolonged propoganda of Thirukkural cannot be described within a few pages. But if a few examples are cited, it will be enough evidence.

Ilakkuvanar was the first scholar to give a series of lectures on Thirukkural. For one year he gave lectures on Thirukkural every Sunday at Pudukottai. This was during 1952 to 1953 by the efforts of Annalaar P.A.Subramaiyanaar, who founded a Thirukkural academy for this activity.

Periyar E.V.R. appreciated this new venture and told that only Mahabaratham and Ramayana enjoyed such publicity.

Ilakkuvanar was the only Professor to run a journal propogating Thirukkural. He conducted a fortnightly named KuralNeri in Tamil as well as in English. KuralNeri was also published as a daily newspaper for six years from June 1966 to December 1966. It was edited and published by

The only English fortnightly for spreading Thirukkural was edited and published by Dr.S.Ilakkuvanar and now the mission continues through this publication.

Prof.K.N.Chitsabesan who was a colleague of Ilakkuvanar during his tenure at Thiyagarajar College has consented to be the Chief Editor adorning the Honorary Editorial board. He is spreading the message of Thirukkural throughout the world. Without expecting name or fame he is working continuously to enlighten people on Thirukkural. We should be thankful for this international celebrity who makes people laugh away their worries by his timely wit and thought-provoking humour through his lectures and make people learn the maxims of Kural in an easy way.

Dr Chandrika Subramanian, Solicitor and Barrister, Australia & Founder Tamil Valarchi Manram, Sydney had given her consent to adorn the Honorary Editorial board. Her multifaceted personality as a reputed attorney, popular journalist, and acclaimed author of many books in English and Tamil on various subjects, Translator, orator and social reformer deserve accolades and laurels. We are elated to have her contribution in this Thirukkural mission. Your role as readers is the most important one. Please read and give your valuable feedback to kuralvirtual@gmail.com. Please share this journal with your friends, colleagues and relatives. Your articles on Thirukkural in new angles are also welcome.



The Essence of Artificial Intelligence as Expounded by Thiruvalluvar in Thirukkural

Part 1: Learning is the foundation of intelligence -Prof.Vidya Manian

The author Dr. Vidya Manian is a Professor in the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering and Bioengineering at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, USA. She teaches machine learning and artificial intelligence methods for data discovery. She has graduated three Ph.D. students and currently advises ten doctoral students. She has twenty journal publications in forefront journals such as IEEE transactions, Sensors, Computers, Genes, and Frontier journals. She has 50 conference publications and book chapters in signal, processing including hyper spectral image processing. She is the principal investigator of grants from federal agencies and has contributed extensively to the education of minority under-represented Hispanic students in the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. She continues her academic and spiritual service through research activities in machine learning and artificial intelligence and exploring the hidden knowledge in ancient Tamil literature. Her father-in-law Sri K. Lakshminarayanan, a devout of Tamil language, diligently followed the instructions of Thiruvalluvar and gave the Thirukkural book to her as a guide for life. She considers it a blessing from him to now be writing on this treasure trove.

In the universe, human beings have proven to be a matchless organism among the infinite life forms that inhabit the planet. Over aeons of time, human beings have developed an intelligence that has evolved and generated peerless discoveries from the fire, invention of the wheel, automobiles, communications, up to today's fastest satellite communications that has shrunk the world smaller day by day. Modern day civilization is wrought with many advancements whose counterparts have been already discovered in some form or other in the Ancient Indian civilization. The likes of the Aeroplane can be found in the pushpaka vimana in the Ramayana, whereas Purananooru mentions about unguided missiles i.e.valavan eva vaanavoorthi . While the modern day scientists investigate science through what appeals to the senses, ancient seers out of the strength of their austerity alone arrived at great Truths which are not yet discovered today. It can be said that only a small percentage of the wisdom of the ancient seers has come to light through modern scientific investigational approach.

Today we have another revolution in technological growth that is happening at a rapid pace and is foreseen to advance the world in several spheres in what is called 'Artificial Intelligence -a modern approach'. Is this a modern approach, we are yet to determine that by taking a deeper look at the Thirukkural written by the Tamil exemplar Thiruvalluvar. He is the only seer who expounded on deep truths of human life, livelihood and virtuous living through his Tamil literary work Thirukkural which has been translated into 41 world languages. Why is this book chosen here to explore a most modern paradigm of Artificial Intelligence? The word Artificial may be a latest terminology, but intelligence, especially human intelligence is as old as creation itself. And it is Thiruvalluvar who has expounded on it in several chapters in his literary work Thirukkural.

Here, we are entering an adventurous expedition to unravel the myth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as envisioned by Thiruvalluvar. First of all, let us define AI as per current day definition: the intelligence demonstrated by machines in performing tasks such as speech recognition, visual perception, decision-making, and translation between languages is called Artificial Intelligence. The main tenet of AI is to impart human-like perception, analysis, reasoning, and judgement to machines in the way of algorithm that can be coded into a software for robotics technology, decision support systems in medicine, security, and defense.

In this article, we shall touch upon the fundamental concept of AI, which is learning. Thiruvalluvar has described the essential qualities of intelligence or arivu in chapter 43 Arivudaimai in 10 verses. In these verses, he expounds on learning and listening, experience in life, mental acumen and mental faculties that save humanity. Learning is the basic paradigm in artificial intelligence, the likeness of which can be deciphered from Thirukkural verses. The machine learns by different methods such as observation, data gathered from sensors, and data provided by several sources.

Thiruvalluvar has mentioned learning in verse 425:

Wisdom embraces frank the world, to no caprice exposed;

Unlike the lotus flower, now opened wide, now petals strictly closed-425

உலகந் தழீஇய தொட்பம் மலர்தலுங்
கூம்பலு மில்ல தறிவு.
Ulakam Thazheeya Thotpam Malardhalum
Koompalum Illa Tharivu.

By Arivu, Thiruvalluvar has referred to learning, he says in this verse that the learned stand at the altar of worldly wisdom with a balanced mind, be it bloom or gloom. Thiruvalluvar also emphasizes the importance of learning.

In verse 427 he says:

The wise discern, the foolish fail to see,
And minds prepare for things about to be-427
அறிவுடையார் ஆவ தறிவார் அறிவிலார்
அஃதறி கல்லா தவர்.
Arivutaiyaar Aava Tharivaar Arivilaar
Aqdhari Kallaa Thavar

This translates as 'the learned use their senses to judge and foresee causes and effects; the uninitiated lack that knowledge'. Learning plays a key role in the development of modern AI systems, without learning the system does not gain any knowledge that can be applied to solving the problem at hand.

We also see how Thiruvalluvar emphasizes learning as the key to intelligence. Subsequently, we shall delve deeper in to how thousands of years ago Thiruvalluvar indeed has talked about the different modes of learning. (continued).

Thirukkural and Interpersonal Skills

-Prof.(Mrs.) S. ARASI

Mrs.Arasi Sivarajan is Head of the PostGraduate and Research department of English at the prestigious Pachaiyappa's College,Chennai. Her special fields are: Black American women writers, Folklore and Children's literature. She is a voracious reader, prolific writer, powerful orator and dedicated Teacher.



Let's start at the very beginning of man's history in the time of his living style. When man moved from being a hunter-gatherer and started to live in groups and families, communication became an inseparable tool, to stay together and live together in peace. He started to communicate to show his emotions, express ideas and to share knowledge in the groups. At times the communication turned out to be unsuccessful. So he invented the lubricant called interpersonal skills that would enhance the communicative wheels to move smoothly. Thiruvalluvar's "Thirukkural" has been a source of never ending knowledge guiding us in various fields of life right from the date of its publication. In Kural, these skills I have chosen to be are the choice of words, good companionship, wisdom shared by friends, emotional intelligence, role of good friends and their importance etc. Valluvar in his everlasting aphoristic writing Thirukkural has expounded these interpersonal skills. My aim is to explain it with the following select couplets.

A word with its power to make or mar the situation comes in the first and foremost place, choice of words helps in smoother transactions and enhances relationship. Valluvar rightly points out the way in which words are to be chosen. It is like choosing the good, sweet and ripe fruits among the unripe ones

இனிய உளவாக இன்னாத கூறல்-
கனி இருப்பக் காய் கவர்ந்தற்று. (100)

iniya uḷavāka iṇṇāta kūral
kaṇi iruppak kāy kavartarru.

When pleasant words are easy, bitter words to use,
is, leaving sweet ripe fruit, the sour unripe to choose.

After man learnt the technique of choosing the right words for the right place, he became diligent enough to be a person whose wisdom full and ripe is able enough to guide the King himself in his reign. As the Bible quotes in Proverbs 11:14 "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety".

அறனறிந்து மூத்த அறிவுடையார் கேண்மை
திறனறிந்து தேர்ந்துகொளல்.(441)

araṇarintu mūtta arivuḍaiyār kēṇmai
tiraṇarintu tērtukoḷal

As friends the men who virtue know, and riper wisdom share,
Their worth weighed well, the king should choose with care.

Having stood by time and tide the good counsel of the person filled with knowledge, man now has to hold on to the good and never leave as to lose a person, who has the capability to choose words and give good counsel is more dangerous than facing limitless foes whose sole intention is to destroy. The destruction of losing a friend who is capable enough to give great counsel is more dangerous.

பல்லார் பகைகொளலிற் பத்தடுத்த தீமைத்தே
நல்லார் தொடர்கை விடல்.(450)

pallār pakaikoḷalir pattaṭutta tīmaittē
nallār toṭarkai viṭal

Than hate of many foes incurred, works greater woe
Ten-fold, of worthy men the friendship to forego.

He now understood the binary nature of things in this world which reminded him that when good counsel exists he should be aware of bad company too that will pull him down. Thus, Words, good counsel, and their companionship is always fruitful, at the same time we should also know that equally destructive is the effect of bad company.

நல்லினத்தினூங்குந் துணையில்லை தீயினத்தின்
அல்லற்படுப்பதூஉம் இல்.(460)
nallinattinūṅkun tuṇaiyillai tīyinattin
allarpaṭuppatūm il

There is no greater help than the company of the good; there is no greater source of sorrow than the company of the wicked.

Having learnt words of quality, with good counsel at his side man now has to establish himself as being capable enough to take a stand for himself, in other words "To Respond or To React?" A question that comes to our mind for which Valluvar rightly puts it that we ought to face vexations with an enduring smile with kindly face which will become the most excelling grace of any man.

ஒறுத்தாற்றும் பண்பினார் கண்ணும் கண்ணோடிப்
பொறுத்தாற்றும் பண்பே தலை.(579)
oruṭṭārrum paṇṇiṅār kaṇṇum kaṇṇōṭip
poruṭṭārrum paṇṇē talai

Patiently to bear with, and show kindness to those who grieve us, is the most excellent of all dispositions.

Companionships of such nature that has the responding nature are to be bound so close that they become inseparable and act on instinct as would the reflex actions of a hand while the vesture slips away.

உடுக்கை இழந்தவன் கைபோல ஆங்கே
இடுக்கண் களைவதாம் நட்பு.(788)
uṭukkai iḷantavaṅ kaipoḷa āṅkē
iṭukkaṅ kaḷaivatām naṭpu

(True) friendship hastens to the rescue of the afflicted (as readily) as the hand of one whose garment is loosened (before an assembly).

Finally, all the interpersonal skills would teach him that when moving with the higher authorities he should hone his skills so fine that it should be like as we warm ourselves before a bonfire neither too close nor too far and thus we should know the distance to be maintained.

அகலாது அணுகாது தீக்காய்வார் போல்க
இகல்வேந்தர்ச் சேர்ந்தொழுகுவார்.(691)
akalātu aṇukātu tīkkāyṅvār pōlka
ikalvēntarc cērntoḷukuvār

Who warm them at the fire draw not too near, nor keep too much aloof; Thus let them act who dwell beneath of warlike kings the palace-roof.

This last Kural can be applied to the man – woman friendship that exists and shows the extent to which each other can depend at the same time have their separate families intact.

These few Kural couplets guide us the way to live our life more successfully and happily in compatible bond with our fellow beings. "No man is an island..." Every individual lives in a society, which influences his life, and in turn each individual along with others influence the society. Knowledge is generated and flourishes in a socio-cultural milieu.

Valluvar on Right Conduct

-Dr. R. Prabhakaran, Bel Air, MD, USA

Dr. Prabhakaran was born in Tamil Nadu, India, and migrated to the USA after receiving his bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics from Indian universities. Then, he earned his master's and Ph.D. degrees in Computer Science and an MBA degree in Information Management from US universities. In addition to academic positions, he has also held senior-level management positions in private industries. He has been responsible for managing large supercomputing centers at the NASA Research Center and the US Army Research Laboratory in the USA. He is passionate about the Tamil language and literature and has authored books on Puaranaanuru and Kurunthokai. He has also authored the book "The Ageless Wisdom (As embodied in Thirukkural)," which contains a comparative analysis of Valluvar's ideas with those of modern and ancient scholars and philosophers. He has organized and served as the Coordinator for International Conferences on Thirukkural, Puaranaanuru, and Kurunthokai. He has delivered several lectures on Thirukkural and Sangam literature-related topics in India and the USA.



Introduction

Ethics and morals relate to "right" and "wrong" conduct. Although they are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different. The word "Ethics" refers to the rules provided by an external source, such as the codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions. The term "morals" refers to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong. An individual gets his ideas regarding right and wrong from religion, society, parents, or self-study and observations. Therefore, an individual's morals are influenced by the ethics of the society in which he lives.

Preference of right conduct over life

Valluvar uses the term right conduct to include an individual's principles regarding the ideal way of conducting himself in a given society. Right conduct results in respect, recognition, reward, and self-satisfaction. Although one excels in knowledge and many virtues, there is nothing better than right conduct to help him attain eminence. Since right conduct results in eminence, Valluvar is convinced that if one has a choice between life and right conduct, one should protect one's right conduct more carefully than one's own life. In other words, leading a life without the right conduct is not really worth it. These ideas can be seen in the following kural:

Right conduct should be carefully preserved and guarded. Though one knows and excels in many virtues, right conduct alone will come to one's aid.(kural – 132)

Since right conduct leads to eminence, it should be preserved more carefully than life itself.(kural – 131)

There are people who are really convinced that right conduct is even more important than life itself. During World War II, the US ship SS Dorchester was struck by a submarine's torpedo and started to sink. The lives of the people in the ship were in grave danger. Lieutenants George Fox, Alexander Goode, John Washington, and Clark Poling were chaplains of varying faiths who were stationed in the sinking ship, the Dorchester. When the ship started to sink, the chaplains quickly rallied the troops together and began handing out life jackets and directed people to safety. When the supply of life jackets ran out, they selflessly gave away their own life jackets. Then, the chaplains joined hands, said prayers, and sang hymns as they went down with the ship. The Four Chaplains are also sometimes referred to as the "Immortal Chaplains" or the "Dorchester Chaplains". In order to commemorate their brave and selfless sacrifice, in 1948, the United States Postal Service issued a three cents stamp. There is no doubt that the four chaplains valued helping others to survive as more important than their own lives. Like the chaplains, there are countless other examples of people taking life-threatening risks to save others in trouble. These are people who value right conduct more than their own precious lives.

The concept of honor is closely related to that of right conduct. In fact, one's right conduct is the basis of one's honor. Someone who fails to pursue the right conduct is likely to experience criticism by others, bad reputation, guilt, disgrace, and even loss of honor. In Japanese culture, when someone has failed in his duties or found guilty of a significant crime or suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of an enemy or a competitor, they feel that their honor is at stake. Under these circumstances, it is not unusual for some people to commit

suicide. These people resort to these extreme measures because they feel their honor is more valuable than their own lives. William Shakespeare reflects the same sentiment in his play, *Troilus and Cressida*, where he says, "Life every man holds dear; but the dear man holds honor far more precious dear than life."

Valluvar does not recommend suicide as a remedy for loss of honor or reputation. To him, life is precious. Therefore, it should be protected. But right conduct is more important than life. Therefore, one should protect right conduct more carefully than life.

Right Conduct leads to greatness

According to Valluvar, "A man with an envious nature cannot get riches. So also, a man without right conduct will not achieve greatness. (kural – 135)". Envy is defined as a feeling of discontent or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions. Psychologists believe that there are two kinds of envies: the benign kind and the malicious kind. They say that benign envy is healthy, and it motivates an individual to work hard and obtain those things that he desires. On the other hand, malicious envy is unhealthy, and it leads to indignation, frustration, resentment, and anger. As a result, the one with the malicious envy may not get what he desires, including riches. It looks like, Valluvar had the malicious kind of envy in mind for the kural 135.

Strength of character and right Conduct

Though right conduct is the most desirable quality, it is not easy to practice it consistently. Valluvar says that only those with extraordinary willpower and strength of character will always practice the right conduct. He also knows that straying away from right conduct may have severe adverse consequences.

People with strong mind do not swerve from proper conduct. They know its breach will spell ruin. (kural – 136)

Impropriety of conduct leads to disgrace and distress

Even men in high positions sometimes fail to follow the right conduct. There are many examples of people who ended up in disgrace despite all their remarkable achievements. In recent memory, there have been two US presidents who ended up in disgrace. It is not easy to become the most powerful man and the leader of the free world. So far, in the history of the world, there have been only 46 people who have risen to the elevated and the most respected position of US president. Two of them slipped from right conduct despite their phenomenal achievements and ended up in disgrace of historic proportion.

One of them was Richard Nixon, the 37th president of the United States of America. In many respects, President Nixon was an able administrator. He ended the American involvement in the war in Vietnam in 1973, brought home the American prisoners of war, and ended the military draft. Nixon's visit to China in 1972 eventually led to diplomatic relations between the two nations and he initiated détente and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with the Soviet Union in the same year. He enforced the desegregation of Southern schools, established the Environmental Protection Agency, and began the War on Cancer. He was re-elected in one of the largest electoral landslides in U.S. history in 1972 when he defeated George McGovern. But despite all these accomplishments, he got himself involved in the Watergate scandal. His 1972 re-election campaign was involved in the break-in and wiretapping at the Democratic National Committee's (DNC's) headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. Nixon, and his administration was involved in the cover-up, and Nixon himself was not very truthful. As a result of Nixon's cover-up and illegal activities, he was investigated and was about to be impeached. He resigned before the actual impeachment proceedings.

Another example of a man in a very powerful position who disgraced himself was President Bill Clinton, the 42nd president of the United States of America. Clinton presided over the longest period of peacetime economic expansion in American history. He passed the Welfare Reform Act and the Children's Health Insurance Program. He was very popular and maintained a very high favorable rating throughout his presidency. But his extramarital activities landed him in trouble. He was investigated and found guilty of perjury and obstruction of justice in a sexual scandal case. He was impeached by the House of Representatives and was later acquitted by the US senate. Thus, a powerful man with a brilliant record of accomplishments ended in disgrace because of a lack of moral character.

Valluvar claims that right conduct is a real virtue, and deviation from right conduct will cause disgrace and distress. The downfall of powerful men like Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton is a warning to others that if right conduct is ignored, the consequences can be catastrophic. Valluvar's warning in this regard can be seen in the following kural.

Men obtain greatness from propriety of conduct. Impropriety of conduct results in untold disgrace. (kural – 137)

Propriety of conduct is the seed of virtue. Impropriety of conduct will always cause distress. (kural – 138)

Secular approach to right Conduct

It should be noted that Valluvar's stance on right conduct is different from that of the religions. Religions invoke the concept of sin to ensure that people follow right conduct. In other words, according to religions, not following the right conduct is a sin. In order to avoid committing a sin, religions encourage people to follow the right conduct. According to Valluvar, one should follow the principles of right conduct simply because it is the right thing to do and not for any religious reasons.

Effect of impropriety of conduct upon the family

The ignominy of those who failed to follow the right conduct may also affect their family members. There is a reference to such an incident in Tamil literature. Approximately 2,000 years ago, there was a king by the name Nannan who ruled a small kingdom in Tamil Nadu. In those days, it was customary for the kings to declare a particular tree as their royal tree. According to the prevailing custom, the king Nannan had declared a specific mango tree as his royal tree. Cutting the royal tree or its branches or eating that tree's fruit was considered a significant crime. One day, a young girl was swimming in a river adjoining the royal tree. A fruit from the royal mango tree fell in the river. This girl ate the mango fruit that fell in the river. The palace guards noticed that the girl had eaten the fruit from the royal tree. They went and reported the incident to king Nannan. He declared her guilty and sentenced her to death. The girl's father pleaded for mercy and even told the king that as a penalty for his daughter's act, he would donate 81 elephants to King Nannan. But the king ignored the father's plea and asked the guards to execute the young girl. The guards carried out the order. This incident caused irreparable damage to the reputation of the king, his family, and his progeny. Many years later, a poet refused to hug Nannan's offspring Ilaviccikko because he was the descendant of Nannan. In other words, ignominy arising from the ruthless act of Nannan affected his descendants. Valluvar warns that if someone fails to follow the right conduct, their family members may also be disgraced, and their reputation may also be discredited.

Right conduct helps to advance the status and dignity of a family; bad conduct destroys the status and dignity of the family. (kural – 133)

What is right conduct?

Admittedly, Valluvar has demonstrated the need for right conduct and the disastrous consequences of failing to pursue right conduct. But one critical question remains to be answered. What does Valluvar consider as right conduct? Valluvar's answer to this question is as follows:

Those who fail to conduct themselves in harmony with the world are ignorant despite their vast learning. (kural – 140)

So, according to Valluvar, right conduct is what is determined as the right conduct by the world. But there are no uniform standards for right conduct in the world. However, different countries and cultures have their own codes of conduct. Therefore, it makes sense to interpret the word "world" as that part of the world where one lives instead of the whole world. Further, what was considered the right conduct in the past may not be regarded as the right conduct at the present time. For example, child marriages were not unusual in India about two centuries ago. Now, it is against the law, and therefore, it is not right conduct for someone to marry a child. Also, in India, widow re-marriage was unacceptable in the past. Today, it is not uncommon. In the past, having a child out of wedlock was considered shameful and unacceptable by American society. As of 2008, about 40.6 percent of children were born to unmarried mothers, and the number of children out of wedlock is increasing. So, right conduct is a function of the community where one lives and the period in which one lives. Valluvar conveys the same idea in another kural in a different context. He says, "It is wisdom to conform to the ways of the world (kural – 426)."

By stating that right conduct is living in harmony with the world, Valluvar has addressed the question in general terms, and his answer is valid for all parts of the world and for all ages. Valluvar adapts the same technique and keeps his remarks general enough in other contexts also. In the chapter on "Education (Chapter-40)", Valluvar says "Whatever is to be learnt should be learnt flawlessly, and after having learnt, live accordingly (kural – 391)." It should be noted that Valluvar does not specify any particular subject. What people study today is vastly different from what was studied during Valluvar's days. If he had provided a list of subjects to be studied, such a list will have no relevance in the modern educational system. In the chapter on the "Glory of Defense Forces (Chapter-77)", he says, "The defense force which is complete in its components and undaunted by setbacks and capable of gaining victory is the chief asset of a ruler (kural – 761)." The modern weaponry and the various components of the defense forces are entirely different from what existed during the days of Valluvar. If he had mentioned the details about the weapons or the components of the defense forces, his statements would no longer be valid. As in the case of education and defense forces, Valluvar uses generalization so that his ideas regarding right conduct will be valid at all times and in all communities and cultures.

Conclusion

Valluvar considers life as precious, and it should be protected. But, to him, right conduct is more important than life, and therefore right conduct should be protected more carefully than life itself. There are people who risk their lives to help others. The actions of these people validate Valluvar's view on right conduct. Right conduct helps to achieve eminence in one's life. But only those who have the strength of character can pursue right conduct on all occasions. Improper conduct of an individual leads to disgrace and distress not only for him, but also for his family. Valluvar's concept of what is right conduct is not based on any religion. According to him, right conduct is determined by the community and the period in which one lives. Valluvar's approach in adopting the generalizations and avoiding the specifics has enabled his ideas to transcend the boundaries of space and time, and thus his ageless wisdom continues to be universally applicable and eternally valid.