

A *Thirukkural* Way of Intellectual Humility

Dr Jayashree Aanand Gajjam

Assistant Professor, Centre of Excellence for Indian Knowledge System

IIT Kharagpur

jayashree1aanand@gmail.com

Abstract

Intellectual Humility (IH) is defined in several ways, sometimes as the opposite of Intellectual Arrogance, or as the construct encompassing certain cognition-specific virtues studied under the Virtue Epistemology branch of Philosophy. In 2015, researchers at the University of Edinburgh developed a Doxastic Account of Intellectual Humility which defined it as a virtuous mean between Intellectual Arrogance and Intellectual Diffidence. Scholars have derived the five most important character traits of an Intellectually Humble person through various theories and experiments, which are given the term the ‘BIG FIVE’.

Thirukkural (‘Sacred maxims’), an ancient Indian classic Tamil masterpiece (*circa* 2nd century BC) written by Saint Thiruvalluvar has long taught us the practice of *aRam*, i.e., Virtues and Ethics. Among all other virtues, the virtues of Intelligence and Humility are considered the greatest aspiration and essence of human life.

The current research undertakes a comparative analysis of the modern theory of IH and the ancient *Thirukkural* and develops its own BIG SEVEN of IH specific to the teachings of *Thirukkural*. This work is an extension of the author’s earlier theoretical work on IH in Sanskrit Upaniṣadic narratives and of experimental research on 140 Indian adults. The final aim of this research is to derive Indian insights on IH, thereby discovering panhuman traits of IH so that they can be implemented in the Indian population for a harmonious future.

Keywords: *Thirukkural*, Intellectual Humility, Virtues, Indian Knowledge System, Philosophy

1. Introduction and Literature Review

1.1. Intellectual Humility: What and Why?

Intellectual Humility (IH) is one of the most studied intellectual virtues in philosophy and psychology. Today it attracts a lot of attention from anthropology, cognitive science, sociology, child development and so on. IH is a mindset that guides our intellectual conduct. It involves several positive traits of character such as being intelligent, seeking deeper knowledge, being a good listener, etc. Even though philosophers disagree about the nature of IH, there is a strong consensus regarding its widespread importance in several phases and situations of human life. IH will bring a

harmonious future, especially in India which comprises people with several different practices. In one of its decisions in 2016, the Madras High Court stated,

“If Thirukkural is taught with all its avenues and dimensions elaborately, students would be equipped with all the facets of life, the probable problems, and solutions. The couplets... will guide them through, even the most difficult times. Thirukkural will give them the inner strength to withstand any storm.”¹

1.2. Theories on Intellectual Humility

Church and Samuelson (2017, p. 15) conducted a study on 116 people in which participants are asked to describe an intellectually humble person, a wise person and an intellectually arrogant person. A total of 101 descriptors are found to describe an intellectually humble person. 112 more people have rated those qualities on a scale of 1-7. Thus, authors finally derive ten main descriptors of an intellectually humble person as follows: being smart, modest, intelligent, humble, intellectual, thinker, humility, love of learning, doesn't brag, and not a show off. On the other hand, a person lacking IH, i.e., an intellectually arrogant person has the following qualities such as showing off, bragging, dogmatism, narcissism, no test in reality, improper pride, social vigilantism, etc.

Folk understanding of IH is a multifaced and multi layered virtue with different moral, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions. In the folk mind, intellect drives curiosity and love of learning in an intellectually humble person, while an intellectually arrogant person links pride with intellect (Church & Samuelson, 2017, p. 20). IH is the ability to overcome intellectual arrogance, a tendency to overestimate one's knowledge and cognitive abilities. Hence, *prima facie*, both intellectual humility and intellectual arrogance are opposite to each other.

1.3. History of the Concept of Intellectual Humility

IH falls under the Virtue Epistemology branch of philosophy that studies the relation between the intellect and virtues. Virtue epistemology focuses on the process by which beliefs are formed by an intellectually virtuous knower. It gives a fundamental role to the epistemic or intellectual virtue concepts. Hence, IH becomes core to virtue epistemology.

There are two main schools of Virtue Epistemology. The **Agent-reliabilism** school put forth by Ernest Sosa focuses on the *reliable* or virtuous or proper functioning of a given agent's cognitive faculties. It applies the term 'virtue' to faculties such as memory, perception, etc. On the other hand, the **Neo-Aristotelianism** or **Responsibilism** school propounded by Linda Zagzebski focuses more on the agent's

¹ In S. Rajarathinam Vs. The Secretary to Government Case case [The Hindu, April 27, 2016].

specific character traits or epistemic *responsibilities* such as open- mindedness, intellectual courage, intellectual perseverance, etc. The latter view thus stresses that agents should be in a position to take reflective responsibility for their true beliefs. It tends to focus more on the agent’s epistemic character and epistemic responsibility (Church & Samuelson, 2017, p. 40).

Any full and robust account of intellectual virtue will have to account for the exposition of both schools, viz., focusing on cognitive faculty virtues as well as character trait virtues. It will be a matter of emphasis how one does it.

1.4. Modern Position on Intellectual Humility

There is no shared or even entirely dominant view of IH in the literature. There is a lack of consensus on what ‘humility’ or ‘intellectual humility’ mean. Intellectual accuracy or intellectual firmness are the words suggested for IH by some scholars. Some others suggest that “IH is proper attentiveness to, and owning of, one’s intellectual limitations”, focusing only on one aspect of it (Whitcomb, Battaly, Jason, & Howard-Snyder, 2015).

IH is a virtuous mean between intellectual arrogance and intellectual self-diffidence or self-deprecation. Being too arrogant/ dogmatic/ servile or being too humble/ timid does not resonate with IH. Intellectual arrogance suggests overestimation of one’s abilities and underestimation of one’s weaknesses. It is deeply rooted in human psychology and is notoriously natural to human beings. On the other hand, an extremely humble person does not value herself correctly as she should. An intellectually humble person values herself, her knowledge, her beliefs, and their epistemic status among her peer as she ‘*ought*’, not too much, not too little. This approximation of IH is called the *Doxastic Account of IH* (Church & Samuelson, 2017, p. 7). According to this account,

‘Intellectual humility is the virtue of accurately tracking what one could non-culpably take to be the positive epistemic status of one’s own beliefs’ (Church & Samuelson, 2017, pp. 7, 25).

It always goes hand in hand with how much people value their beliefs with how firmly they believe in them. In some cases when these two come apart, it is crucial to see whether a person ‘attributes’ a positive epistemic status to one’s own beliefs as he or she ‘ought’ or if a person exercises objective analysis of the situation before and after making a belief, or if she can ‘track’, consciously or unconsciously, the positive epistemic status her beliefs actually enjoy. Tracking one’s opinion about things will give people a chance to reflect on their beliefs, gather evidence, and modify accordingly. Sometimes people imagine far more epistemic status to their beliefs than they actually have. This final version accounts for such situations where someone has been non-culpably deceived. Unlike folk theories on IH, this account suggests IH is not

the mere opposite of intellectual arrogance. It is a virtuous mean between Intellectual Arrogance and Intellectual Diffidence since it allows one not to ascribe too much or too little positive epistemic status to a given belief.

The BIG FIVE According to the Doxastic Account

Intellectual Humility comprises: (a) some general personality traits such as accuracy in reasoning, actively open-minded thinking, rule-based thinking, perspective-taking, need for cognition, need for closure, (b) some personality measures (such as open-mindedness), and (c) other virtue measures (such as wisdom, humility, modesty, etc.) The core concept of IH is ‘awareness of cognitive fallibility’ is a hallmark of IH.

After studying several traits² such as intellectual autonomy, attentiveness, intellectual thoroughness, intellectual courage, intellectual tenacity, narcissism, dogmatism, self-righteousness, social vigilantism and desirability, Leary and researchers (2017) have developed a five-factor model of IH the includes facets of (1) openness to experience, (2) epistemic curiosity, (3) existential quest, (4) need for cognition, and (4) intolerance of ambiguity.

1.5. What is *Thirukkural*?

One of the most celebrated eighteen didactic works (*‘Patirenkirkanakku’*) of the post-Sangam period, *Thirukkural* (2nd century BC), is known as *Tamiḷ Marai* (*‘Tamil Veda’*). It is a non-religious text, written by Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar, also known as Valluvar. *Thirukkural* is a combination of two words *‘Thiru’* (auspicious), and *‘Kural’* (short poem).³ Written in a short couplet format consisting of two lines in each verse and seven words in each line, it holds a crucial place in literature for its ethical, social, political, economic, philosophical, spiritual, and in general moral teachings. It is known for its universality since it breaks all the barriers of mankind.⁴

The work consists of 1330 verses divided into 133 chapters and three sections, namely, (1) *Aram* (Virtue) comprising of chapters 1 to 38, and 380 verses, (2) *Porul* (Wealth) comprising of 70 chapters i.e., chapters 39 to 108, and 700 verses, and (3) *Inbam* (Love) comprising of 25 chapters, viz., chapters 109 to 133, and a total of 380 verses. The peaceful and tranquil society is the central theme of *aRam*. The second part focuses on political governance, wealth, social and material interests, the duties of the

² The researchers have considered the Big Two Model of Abele and Wojciszke (2013). This model categorises several traits under two broad classes, namely, the agency reflecting the personal growth dimensions of the traits (such as Extraversion and Intellect), and communion reflecting the socialization dimensions (such as Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability).

³ “*Thirukkural* is a synthesis of the best moral teachings of the world” (Emmons E White, A Christian Missionary in South India, 1891-1982).

⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet (1861-1941), has exclaimed that “The ideas of great Saint Thiruvalluvar will apply not only to India but the whole world”.

ideal King, etc. Section three deals with romance and love. The code of conduct it explains to be a good human being and a virtuous citizen made it the most translated ancient book of all time.⁵ It is also called *poyyamozi* (speech that does not become false) and *dheiva nool* (divine text).

The earlier parts of Thirukkural are written in the most recent form of Tamil script which was prevalent around 1500 A.D., the Chola and the Pallava styles are gradually used in the subsequent verses, and lastly the later verses are written in Tamil-Brahmi script (also known as *Dhamili*) that is closely connected with the Brahmi script of Asoka, (Siromoney et.al, 1980). Thus, the writing style makes a progressive transition from period to period.

The text has been studied in ancient and modern India from several aspects such as general humility traits (Mooneegadoo, 2020), wealth and material management (Sinaiah, 2018), the factors of production in socialism and capitalism (Chendroyaperumal, 2004, p. 7), a six-factor model of entrepreneurship (Jain, 2014, p. 2499), a SWOT analysis model for an entrepreneur (Jain, 2015), a conscious-based and spirit-central approach for business ethics (Leelavathi, 2017, pp. 172-173), external and intrinsic business ethics (Muniapan & Rajantheran, 2011, pp. 461-467), ethics and aesthetics for economic outlook (Suganthi & Veda, 2020, p. 4655), ‘Overconfidence Bias’ in behavioural finance (Subramaniam, 2019, p. 114), four-fold goals of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa* resembling *Aram*, *Porul*, *Inbam*, and *Veedu* (Nagarajan, 2005, p. 123), in Human Resource Management (Karunarathna, Subashini, & Weeransinghe, 2019), and for enhancing people’s emotional quotient (Baskar, 2016, p. 16).

1.6. Methodology

The current research derives insights on intellectual humility from the *aRam* section in the ‘Thirukkural’ to formulate the Big Seven Model of IH consisting of the seven most important traits of character.

2. A *Thirukkural* Way of Intellectual Humility

In the introduction section of ‘The Power of Virtue’ of the *aRam* itself, the author equated virtue with heaven and wealth, the greatest source of happiness a man can possess. Virtue is defined as anything that is done with a spotless mind, the mind which is free from malice, desire, anger, and bitter speech. Based on the teaching of *aRam*, the following character traits can be treated as virtues:

1. *Being intelligent and begetting intelligent children*

It is said that the attainment of knowledge leads to a prosperous fate and a prosperous fate produces enlarged knowledge (Kural 382). If one wants a good society to live in, one must raise good children. Because intelligent children will

⁵ The text has been translated in more than 40 languages across the globe, first in Latin by Fr Beschi about 250 years ago, then in French, English and German. Today we have translations of Thirukkural in Urdu, Hindi, Sanskrit, Malayalam, Telugu, Russian, Mandarin, etc.

create a harmonious society reaping great benefits (Kural 72). This verse teaches that everything starts at home. Intelligence is the primary requirement in the construct of Intellectual humility. If one wants a good society to live in, one must raise good children. The peace and tranquility of the society rest on its intelligent citizens.

2. *Sweetness in speech or Agreeableness*

Speech must be free of deceit and meanness. Even a single word with an evil meaning or evil intention will change everything good into evil (Kural 138). Kural 210 states that “One should not speak disagreeable things when agreeable are at hands”. It is time and again emphasised that

“The wound which has been burnt in by the fire may heal, but a wound burnt in by the tongue will never heal” (Kural 137 and 139).

3. *Humility*

Humility is considered the jewels of a man, all else are worthless baubles. Humbleness is the essence and meaning of life. A person with humility learns more and improves himself. It yields compassion and gives a person a tranquil mind, gaining him more friends, popularity, and fame. It advises making one’s opponent humble, not by retaliation, but by a positive response.

“In great prosperity, humility is becoming; dignity, in great adversity” (Kural 963).⁶

It is also said that the great people will always humble themselves, but the mean will exalt themselves in self-admiration.⁷

Mahatma Gandhi also says that ‘a humble person is not himself conscious of his humility...’ A true humble person will not boast or brag about his virtue, rather his humility resides in his attitude towards his humility. Some modern scholars argue that intellectual humility is one subdomain of general humility (Davis & etal, 2016), and some argue that humility itself, being the opposite trait of two vices, viz., vanity and arrogance⁸, is an intellectual virtue (Roberts, 2003, p. 236). Since humility allows one to have a low concern for one’s social image, one is devoid of arrogance, dominance or dogma, and rather one is full of good intentions, open-minded, and accepting of diverse conditions.

4. *Knowing one’s limitations*

⁶ Translation by (Siromoney, Govindaraju, & Chandrasekaran, 1980, p. 195).

⁷ (Pope, WH, Lazarus, & Ellis, 1962, p. 118).

⁸ Vanity is an excessive concern to be well-perceived and well-regarded by other people, and Arrogance is a disposition to infer some illicit entitlement from an opinion of one’s superiority (Roberts, 2003, pp. 237, 243).

One must understand one's limitations and conduct oneself within those limits.⁹ Humbleness is advised in one's self-assessment, activities, intellectual dealings (Kural 133), speech (Kural 137-9), and controlling one's senses (Kural 134). A compassionate person will lose his command wealth if he is ignorant about his limitations (Kural 148). A person with social norms and knowing his limitations is anchored by virtues always (Kural 288).

As some modern scholars have argued that 'owning one's limitations' or 'the awareness of cognitive fallibility of our beliefs' (Porter, 2015), and being alert to, admitting to, and being responsible for one's mistakes (Zachry, 2018) is the hallmark of an intellectually humble person.

Great people with humility do not focus much on their achievements, but how many more achievements they have to make, for example, Nelson Mandela, in the last paragraph of his autobiography 'Long Walk to Freedom' says, 'I have discovered the secret that after climbing the great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb'.

5. *Self-control or Self-restraint*

The one who has mastered his senses will be free from the crime of coveting others' property (Kural 181). A mind must be free from desire, envy, and jealousy. Thirukkural is appreciated by Mahatma Gandhi as "*a textbook of indispensable authority on moral life*", for the same reason.

6. *Kindness*

"Even in jest, words of contempt hurt,
Even to foes, the kind are polite." (Kural 105)

It is said to be the greatest of the great wealth for a man (Chapter 25, 26). Kindness towards both people and animals is a mark of a good man.¹⁰ Not destroying life is the sum of all virtues (Kural 331). A kind mind will refrain someone from indulging in crimes, evil, and social sins. Thirukkural is, thus, called *Ulaga pothumarai* ('The universal Veda'), and *Deiva nūl* ('Divine Text').

7. *Gratefulness*

'Being grateful' is greater than virtues. A man can escape even when he has killed every virtue, but there is no escape for him who does not show gratitude towards others who have done good for him (Kural 120).

8. *Being neutral or Impartiality*

⁹ Chapter 13 on this topic is also translated as 'self-control' or 'self-restraint'.

¹⁰ Chapter 26 on 'Abstinence from flesh/ meat' maintains kindness towards animals. It is said that "Not to kill and eat flesh of an animal is better than pouring forth of *ghee* in a thousand sacrifices" (Kural 269).

Not taking either side in the times of debate but resting impartial as the even fixed scale is regarded as the ornament of wise (Kural 128). The same ideas reflect in the modern account of IH in terms of a person being a good listener, who considers all points of view, and who is open-minded and unbiased.

The recent research by Koetke et al. (2021, p. 5) suggests that being neutral and impartial is a trait of intellectual humility that allows one to learn new information without being dogmatic, even if the views are counter to one's beliefs, and also allows a person to accurately discern the strengths of the arguments. Being neutral is extremely helpful in several domains such as religion, politics, judicial, music, culture, etc. to retain the peacefulness of the society (Koetke, 2021, p. 6). Zachry et. al. (2018) claim that the trait of being 'unbiased' is facilitated through the enactment of intellectual humility.

9. *Lack of anger*

Lack of anger is considered a prerequisite to virtue. It is said that one who controls his anger, virtue comes seeking to him (Kural 140). Anger is said to be the greater evil and the greatest enemy for the man who cannot control it.¹¹ Anger comes when a person is intellectually arrogant who cannot assess a situation objectively, and can get angry in the face of deep disagreements. It is proven that Intellectual Humility guides our reactions in the face of disagreements, it helps us overcome merely egotistic and self-oriented responses (Miglio, 2019).

10. *Propriety of conduct or Conscientiousness*

Propriety of conduct is said to be the seed of Virtue (Kural 148). Speech that is free from evil, not desiring someone else's wife (Kural 156) and other's wealth (Kural 184), a disposition that is free from envy (Kural 177), inconsistent conduct, and doing fraud to others are some of the virtues.

“The extensive and accurate knowledge is useless if a man acts senselessly through covetousness towards all” (Kural 188).

“The masked men, of the men with the deceitful mind, men with false conduct are said to be like the sportsmen who conceal themselves in the thicket to catch birds” (Kural 28.4).

“One should also abstain from doing fraud to others. It is called as ‘Black Knowledge’” (Kural 297).

“Even thought of sin is sin” (Kural 292).

¹¹ Indian independence activist, politician, writer and educationist KM Munshi (1887-1971) stated, “Thirukkural is a treatise par excellence on the art of living.”

Propriety of conduct with other human beings is also given importance in different cultures, such as African concept of Ubuntu which literally means ‘humanness’ and a person achieves ‘humanness’ through the other person, i.e., a person can genuinely live a human way of life only when she depicts the other-oriented virtues (Metz, 2020, p. 259).

11. *Patience*

Patience is described as bearing with those who revile us, bearing with reproach even when one can retaliate, and bearing with the uncourteous speech of others (Kural 161, 162, 163, 169, and 170). It is said that practising patience will reap greatness for men. It is more difficult to follow than asceticism (Kural 169).

In the IH account, ‘too much’ patience is considered not as intellectual humility but as intellectual diffidence or self-deprecation which is an indication of lack of confidence or intellectual timidity, the opposite of intellectual courage. The Doxastic Account of IH suggests ‘proper pride’ or ‘proper’ patience as a trait of an intellectually humble person. In the ‘Situational determinants of IH’, it is discussed that one must retain one’s position, value oneself as one ‘*ought*’ to, and not overvalue nor undervalue one’s abilities. Hence, *prima facie*, it might be interpreted as the practice of ‘too much’ patience as stated by Thirukkural stands against the modern account of IH. However, patience in a general sense, in times of listening to the opponent’s views, dealing with disagreements, respecting others’ opinions, and stating one’s own opinion with a firm mind and kind words can be categorized under patience.

12. *Not backbiting*

‘Not backbiting’ is considered a higher attribute than virtue. Backbiting others, i.e., smiling with them in their presence and causing them destruction behind their back, is as equal to every sin (Kural 192). Even though a man cannot follow any other virtue, he still can be said as ‘good’ if he does not backbite. Later on, the author brings forth that one should introspect before backbiting. For, such a man will have a clear view of the world. The one who introspects and finds one’s faults, mistakes, or limitations will never backbite others. A person having this ability to view the world objectively will never behave in an intransparent manner.

13. *Not speaking useless things*

“That conversation in which a man utters forth useless things will say of him ‘He is without virtue’.” (Kural 203)

There is no greater evil than speaking useless things in presence of many (Kural 202). Their eminence and excellence will leave them if one speaks words that would

not reap profit or pleasure. Finally, this chapter affirms that “if you speak, speak what is useful. If you speak, speak not useless words” (Kural 210).

14. *Being free from evil*

Being free from evil and not inflicting suffering on others is regarded as the chief of all virtues (Kural 213 and 327, respectively). One should not do evil deeds even through forgetfulness, even when one is poor, and even to one’s enemies, in any case.

“If someone has done evil to him, the proper punishment you can give them is to show great kindness to them”. (Kural 324)

A spotless mind will never give sorrow or do evil things in return. When a person is intellectually humble, he will have forgiving nature towards others, objective assessment of the situation, and respect for others’ views, which does not lead to the idea of doing evil to others.

15. *Benevolence*

‘Benevolence’ viz., doing charity and not expecting anything in return, is also considered a virtue. A man possessed with benevolence is equated with a ‘ripe fruitful tree in the midst of a town’ (Kural 226). To give to the destitute is considered a true/ real charity (Kural 231). It makes a person sensitive to others’ needs and take other’s perspectives.

16. *The Desire for fame/ social status*

It is said that people with fame live without disgrace. One who has fame only lives, not the one who is without any fame (Kural 250). The idea of achieving fame underlies other virtues such as not doing evil, having sweet speech, doing charity, etc., and not overruling them, unlike the extreme ‘desirability for social status’ which is a trait of an Intellectually Arrogant person. Indian framework of ‘desire for fame’ attributes other features such as not doing evil, having sweet speech, doing charity, etc.

“If you appear in this world, appear with fame. For those who are destitute of it will be better not to be born than to be born.” (Kural 246)

17. *Truthfulness*

True words are described as words without the least degree of evil to others. It is said that even if a man does not practice any other virtue, but he can abstain from falsehood, the virtue will be with him (Kural 307) because truthfulness gives one

purity of mind, it leads to every other virtue (Kural 306), and shall never do evil to others.

“Amidst all that we have seen as real excellence, there is nothing so good as truthfulness” (Kural 400).

“Not to destroy life is the one great good. Next in goodness to that is freedom from falsehood” (Kural 333).

The text Thirukkural itself is called *Poyyolli* (‘Words that never fail) and *Vāyurai vālttu* (‘Truthful Utterances’).

Modern scholars have also related the trait of truthfulness with Intellectual humility (Huynh, 2021). The four-facet conceptualization of IH, i.e., independence of ego and intellect, openness to revising one’s viewpoints, respect for others’ viewpoints, lack of intellectual overconfidence, allows one to seek the truth, revise one’s beliefs in the face of evidence.

The BIG SEVEN virtues: A Thirukkural Way

The following are the seven most important personality traits of an intellectually humble person. They are termed ‘The BIG SEVEN’ of intellectual humility:

1. *Gratefulness:*

A man can escape even when he has killed every virtue, but there is no escape for him who does not show gratitude towards others who have done good for him (Kural 120).

2. *Intelligence:*

Intelligence reaps greater benefits for a man, and it is the real wealth (Kural 72).

3. *Humility:*

For a person with humility and pleasing speech, no other external manifestation is needed (Kural 105).

4. *Truthfulness:*

Amidst all that we have seen as real excellence, there is nothing so good as truthfulness (Kural 400).

5. *Conscientiousness:*

Even if a man performs no other virtuous deeds and commits all the vices, it is still good if he does not desire the womanhood of a woman who is within the limits of her own husband (Kural 160). Though you guard nothing else, guard your tongue

(Kural 137). This includes other traits such as sweetness in speech, non-covetousness, being free from evil, etc.

6. *Transparency:*

Even though a man cannot follow any other virtue, or if he commits sin, he still can be said as ‘good’ if he does not backbite (Kural 193).

7. *Kindness:*

Being free from evil and not inflicting suffering on others is regarded as the chief of all virtues (Kural 213 and 327, respectively). “Even in jest, words of contempt hurt. Even to foes, the kind are polite” (Kural 105).

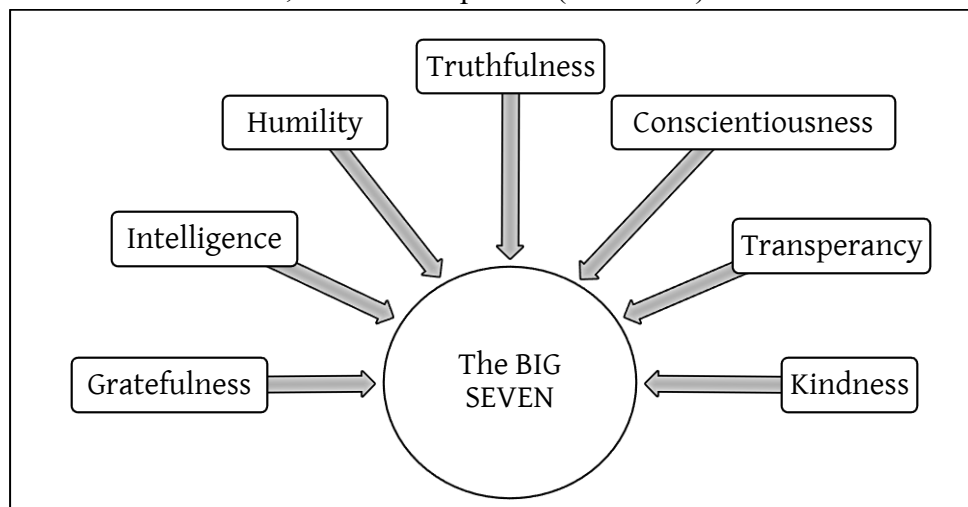


Figure 1: A Thirukkural Way of Intellectual Humility: The Big Seven

An intellectually humble person cannot overstep general traits of virtue/ humility. They are the fountainhead of or pre-requisite to IH. These virtues anchor a person’s behaviour whether she is intelligent, a good listener, respectful, kind in speech and so on. These seven distinct traits include all other virtues that are not enlisted explicitly. They are non-hierarchical, non-sequential, and not mutually exclusive. At any given time, any one dominant trait can be displayed based on the situation. These character traits are universal to mankind. Some of them may have situational, cultural, and geographical determinants, however, the general folk minds will always regard them as virtues of IH. The Big Seven does not mean the other virtues are less important.

3. **Intellectual Humility in Future India: A Way Forward**

Intellectual Humility in any given individual, like many other virtues, is a combination of nature and nurture, i.e., it combines both heritable traits that are handed down from the genetic coding of one’s parents, and environmental influences or life experiences, and socialization process that form individuals. Researchers do not agree about which trait has the higher or lower estimates of genetic influence. However, it is clear from many studies (Coppola, 2021, p. 12) that heritability plays some role in a person’s

personality that develops IH in later life. Some traits such as modesty and deliberation are more malleable to environmental influence,¹² and may be acquired by training, and not a fixed personality trait.

The world needs more people who can recognize their failures, are sensitive to their own intellectual limitations and who think that it is *possible* that their views may be mistaken. The world needs more Intellectual Humility. India, which is a country with a young population having different preferences about their clothing, food choices, thinking, belief systems, religious practices, etc., it has become crucial to impart intellectual humility among them. Many traits mentioned in the Thirukkural can be used in education¹³, leadership, business and academia, to imbibe a sense of inclusivity, humility, and respect for others. It will reap greater benefits for a futuristic India.

4. Conclusion

Resorting on the teachings of the virtues in the *aRam* section of the ‘Thirukkural’ and to the modern philosophical and psychological discussion on Intellectual humility, this article derives the seven most important personality traits (‘The Big Seven’) an intellectually humble person can possess, *viz.*, gratefulness, intelligence, humility, truthfulness, conscientiousness, transparency, and kindness. Intellectual Humility allows us to learn new things, disagree humbly, take others’ perspectives, and compromise. It dissociates one’s ego and intellect. Imparting Intellectual Humility in oneself increases the level of tolerance leading to the well-being of a person and the development of the nation at large. This research may stand as a guideline for devising different methods to impart intellectual humility among the Indian population for a harmonious future.

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¹² The Nature Vs. Nurture debate suggests that the virtue of Intellectual Humility is 36% of hereditary and there are 64% of chance that this trait can be imparted with instruction, and other environmental influencers. (See <https://www.coursera.org/learn/intellectual-humility-theory> for more details.)

¹³ Mamotra Bhakti, based on her personal experience while doing a fieldwork for religion in India, emphasises time and again that intellectual humility is extremely beneficial in academia, especially in fieldwork (Mamotra, 2020, p. 67). The author claims that it imparts self-reflexivity that allows one to connect with oneself, and also with one’s interlocutors.

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“Thirukkural is considered to provide the code of conduct for the humanity of the planet for all time, which makes the past meet the present and created the future.”

-APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India (1931-2015)

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