

## Thiruvalluvar's Literary Imagination, Universality and Ideological Positioning for Today's Nation Building

**Mrs. K. Ramya Devi**

---

---

*Thirukkural* is a classic couplet or aphorisms written by 'Thiruvalluvar', a poet and author of this classical and universally appealing work of art. This masterpiece is 2000 years old, still applicable and relevant to the modern world. The intricacies of the human nature are analyzed by the author in a most efficient way.

The book is structured with 133 chapters, each chapter containing 10 couplets each. The book is divided into three sections –

- Aram (Book of Virtue – dealing with virtues independent of the surroundings)
- Porul (Material or Artha – virtues with respect to the surroundings)
- Inbam (Joy or karma)

The first book contains 37 Chapters out of which first four contributes the preface note or invocation of God, next 20 chapters are dedicated to Ill – Aram or the house-holders Dharma and next 13 on Thuravaram – the path of renunciation.

The Second book contains 70 chapters out of which 20 chapters deal with the kings and their duties. The next thirty-two chapters deal with other themes of the state and the final thirteen chapter deals with miscellaneous themes like

The third book contains twenty-five chapters out of which first seven chapters speak about pre-marital love and the remaining marital love.

Every work of art reflects its contemporary situation and lifestyle and deal with the concerns that affect that particular situation. But *Thirukkural* has thousands of couplets stating the past, present and future application of each virtue. It explores all the individual, cultural, social, political aspects of mankind.

There are many ideologies discussed in this classical work of art.

This is the Tamil literature's most quoted book and this by no means a long winding poem, it is the shortest but sharpest virtues that has penetrated the soul of each native of the language. No literary work stands as a rival to this; *Thirukkural* is a book that stands complete on

its own virtues. The book deals with almost everything under the sun necessary for the survival of mankind. Some of the important concepts include –

- Domestic virtue
- Hospitality
- Speaking sweet
- Gratefulness
- Impartiality
- Self-restraint
- Righteousness
- Patience
- Shunning Envy
- Against covetousness
- Against Slander
- Brevity of speech
- Help/charity
- Undesirable conduct
- Power of speech/Action
- Ruler's strength
- Friendship
- Wisdom
- Correction of faults
- Getting elders' help
- Ignorance
- Hatred
- Abstaining from liquor
- Honour, greatness and perfectness
- Poverty
- Sense of Shame
- Love

Thiruvalluvar has a lofty imaginative power that helped him to manifest the perfection he had in his mind for humanity. Any nation building activity starts from self and home. The author expounds on the topic of individual virtue, family virtue and thereby improving the social performance of Mankind.

### **Individual virtue**

Any nation is constructed by its citizens and their individual traits. Each person personally contributes to the growth of the nation directly or indirectly. For every individual, Thiruvalluvar offers many traits that make them a distinguished individual on earth –

*Things hard in the doing will great men do;  
Things hard in the doing the mean eschew.(26)*

The great men will do the things that are difficult to be done, but the mean cannot do them.

*Spotless be thou in mind! This only merits virtue's name ;  
All else, mere pomp of idle sound, no real worth can claim. (34)*

Let him who does virtuous deeds Let him who does virtuous deeds be of spotless mind, to that extent is virtue, all else is vain show.

### **Virtue of Gratitude**

*Kindness shown by those who weigh not  
What the return may be;  
When you ponder right its merit,  
'Tis vaster than the sea.( 103)*

If we weigh the excellence of the benefit that is done without calculating the return, it is larger than sea.

### **Speaking pleasant words**

*A pleasant word with beaming smile's preferred,  
Even to gifts with liberal heart conferred (92)*

When a man encounters others with a smile on face and sweet words is always better than a material gift given ever.

### **Staying unbiased**

*If, right deserting, heart to evil turn,  
Let man impending ruin's sign discern(116)*

If the heart of the man's heart is turning towards evil and if truth departs from him, he can confidently say to himself – “I shall perish” .

### **Patience**

*Forgiving trespasses is good always ;  
Forgetting them hath even higher praise (152)*

It is good for any man to bear with the criticism of others or their trespasses even when there is opportunity for him to revenge them. But if he can forget that, it would be even better.

### **Back-Biting**

*If each his own, as neighbours' faults would scan,  
Could any evil hap to living man? (190)*

If one can scan and find the mistakes in their own as they scan in others, there can be no evil happening to mankind.

### **Soft Skill - Skill of Presentation**

*By rule, to dialectic art your mind apply,  
That in the council fearless you may make an apt reply. (725)*

One should select and learn the book in an effective manner, so that he/she can pick up a debate or query in a gathering confidently.

### **Mind-reading**

*Who knows the sign, and reads unuttered thought, the gem is he  
Of earth round traversed by the changeless sea. (701)*

One who can read the mind of the others without uttering a word, he is the best gem in the earth

### **Dignity**

*Bow down thy soul, with increase blest, in happy hour ;  
Lift up thy heart, when stript of all by fortune's power. (963)*

One must bow down their head and be humble in prosperity and lift their heart and don with poverty.

### **Self-control**

*His wrath still blazes, every secret told ; each day  
This man 's in every place to every foe an easy (864)*

One who cannot control his anger and his heart, is always at all places can be easily conquered by others.

### **Bad Company**

*A steed untrained will leave you in the tug of war ;  
Than friends like that to dwell alone is better far (814)*

Being in the company of a bad friend is like believing the untrained horse which would run away in the war. It is far better to stay alone.

### **Wealth accumulation**

*Make money! Foeman's insolence o'er grown  
To lop away no keener steel is known. (759)*

There is no sharper knife to kill your opposed rival's pride, than succeeding by accumulating wealth.

### **Interpersonal skills**

*Midst all good things the best is modest grace,  
That speaks not first before the elders' face. (715)*

Following a modest among the dignified and intelligent crew and being silent before your elders is the best of all best things in life.

### **Political rule and its dimensions**

Politics is an important factor in determining the nation's growth significantly. Thirukkural created almost 2000 years ago has some criteria of how a rule should be.

507 – Access before accepting

*By fond affection led who trusts in men of unwise soul,  
Yields all his being up to folly's blind control.*

If a person chooses an ignorant person for the sake of affection, what needs to be known would remain unknown even for the intelligently strong person.

510 - *Trust where you have not tried, doubt of a friend to feel,  
Once trusted, wounds inflict that nought can heal.*

Selecting before accessing and suspecting after selecting will always result in distress

542 - *All earth looks up to heav'n whence raindrops fall;  
All subjects look to king that ruleth all.*

All other living things look for rain for their survival, while people look for the just rule from the scepter of justice.

545 - *Where king, who righteous laws regards, the sceptre wields,  
There fall the showers, there rich abundance crowns the fields*

Nature doesn't fail in the place where the people remain happy with the ruler.

549 – *Abroad to guard, at home to punish, brings No just reproach;  
'tis work assigned to kings.*

To punish the crime to protect the people and nurture the subject's well-being is not a blot but duty of the king.

552 – *As 'Give' the robber cries with lance uplift,  
So kings with sceptred hand implore a gift.*

The unjust graft exercised on the people by showing the sceptre is nearly a robbery done by pointing the spear.

Apart from the above sample scripts, there is complete chapter dedicated in analyzing the qualities of a minister. It discusses about the qualities of a minister, the necessity for his righteousness, his well-read nature, perseverance, duty of protecting citizens, necessity of meticulous planning are discussed.

Adopting right means, focus on the execution of task, mode of execution, being with the king, compassion a ruler should possess are some other topics that instill a right approach in every reader with respect to building a nation.

Thirukkural is always a mind-blowing work of art when it is read. It is a wonder work-of art in 360-degree dimension. It appeals to all time, all person immaterial of the age, clan, geographical borders, language etc, it discusses about all subject matter.

Social, cultural, economic, traditional aspects that builds a nation is discussed in this wonderful work of art. It also speaks about the intricacies of the marital love and sex. Getting a glimpse of the perfectionism that Thiruvalluvar wanted pave way to the construction of an ideal nation in many ways.

---

---

### Bibliography

1. The sacred 'kural' of Thiruvalluvar nayanar by Rev. G. U. Pope, W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE, S.W. PUBLISHERS TO THE INDIA OFFICE, 1886
2. Thirukkural Thelivurai in Tamil, Saiva sithandha noorpadhipu kalagam
3. Web sources : THIRUVALLUVAR'S OBSERVATION ON NATURE: A STUDY ON THE CLASSICAL TAMIL TEXT THIRUKKURAL by Dr. M. Kalaiarasan.
4. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirukkural>
5. <https://thirukkural133.wordpress.com/contents>
6. THIRUKKURAL-Tamil & English Version-G.U. POPE

---

---

Mrs. K. Ramya Devi  
Assistant Professor  
SCAD Institute of Technology  
Palladam