

ABSTRACT

Thirukkural is a poetic composition of great antiquity in Tamil literature. Many great minds have shed their powerful radiant light on this gem and justifiably famous classic of Tamil literature.

Thiruvalluvar, the author, diagnoses the intricacies of human nature with such penetrating insight, perfect mastery and consummate skill absorbing the most subtle concepts of modern psychology, that one is left wondering at his sweep and depth. His prescriptions, leavened by godliness, ethics, morality and humaneness are sagacious and practical to the core. They cut across caste, creed, clime and age and have a freshness which makes one feel as if they are meant for the present times.

1. Introduction

Interest in "Thirukkural", treatise par excellence on the art of living, has been rekindled by our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after his release of the translation of the book in Thai language at the "SawaasdeModi" event at Bangkok, Thailand, on 1st November 2019. Presented below are a few of the two line couplets, relevant to wealth, money, taxes and other matters relevant to economics, that are meaningful even today! Starting with the kural quoted by Mr. Modi at the event:

Kural 212:

தாளாற்றித்தந்தப ரொளலெலவ மதக்கார்க்கு
வலேன ண்மசை யெதற்ப ரொட்ட.

"Good men put forth industry and produce wealth not for themselves but for the use of society".

Wealth is not to be earned for the purpose of self-indulgence or for satisfaction of greed. Wealth should be treated as the citizen's instrument for helpfulness. The Tamil word 'Velanmai' is not just helpfulness, but helpfulness combined with a sense of duty.

Interestingly, poverty need not inhibit a person from helping others. Thiruvalluvar says:

Kural 218:

இடனில்பரவதும் ஒப்பரவிற்கு ஒல்கார்
கடனறிகாட்சியவர்.

It is not necessary to be rich to be helpful. There are ways in which whatever be the position in life, one can help. The essence of social service is in the mind. Under each changed circumstance, a new duty arises and its due fulfillment is what should be attended to. When therefore,

a man loses his material resources, he does not need to think that his capacity for social cooperation has ceased.

In a humorous vein, it is said that we are all here to help others. But one wonders what others are here for! Thiruvalluvar though insists that helping the poor is indeed a gift. Gifts to others are in the nature of business transactions wherein what one receives is expected to be duly returned.

Kural 221:

வறியார்க்க னெறுசுவதசேக மைற்றலெலம
சுறியதெர்ப்ப னைந்துடனெது.

Valluvar highlights in another kural (222) that the very act of giving rewards the giver and receiving a favour causes pain to the receiver. This is inherent in human nature, apart from any consequences as promised in scripture. This is a characteristic instance of the Thiruvalluvar's approach. He always reserves for emphasis some aspect of human living that is not bound with religious beliefs.

What the Thirukkural puts forth is applicable to all humans, irrespective of religion. He infact emphasizes that if one avoids what the world condemns then there is no need to practice what a saint does, such as growing long beards or sharing off the pan on one's head.

Kural 280:

மறித்தன மநீட்டன மவெண்பா உலகம்

பறித்தசு ஒறித்தசு விடன.

The doctrine of karma is made consistent with the inescapable relation between work and wealth. Valluvar proclaims grandly that the wise need not necessarily be prosperous and the prosperous need not be intellectually

*Former Dean, Crescent School of Business, B.S. AbdurRahman University, Chennai.

very capable. (Kural: 374)

Wealth can be retained only by industriousness or hard and continuous work! Procrastination, forgetfulness, languor and sleep will ensure that one's wealth disappears soon. (Kural: 605)

Acquiring wealth is important as it gives worth to even a worthless person, says Valluvar (Kural: 751). But the wealth acquired by discarding compassion in a loveless manner is not to be sought, but to be spurned. (Kural: 755)

In the times Thiruvalluvar lived, tax was levied at 16.6% (1/6th). This along with the produce from ownerless property, transit duties of imports and an internal traffic, besides what is gained in War, were the sources of Government funds. (Kural : 756)

Wealth is the primary weapon against opponents. (Kural : 759)

To summarise, wealth earned with devotion, love and hard work, needs to be shared with the needy. Wealth protects the wealthy and distinguishes them from others by making them worthy in the eyes of the world. Governments should use their wealth to protect the citizens from opponents and ensure that enemies are annihilated either by making them into friends or by overcoming them by one's wealth or

might, that is power of the army.

Post words

Translated from TamilManikkavasagam

"What man said to God: Thiruvagasam. What God said to man: Bhagavad Geeta. What man gave to mankind: Thirukkural".

Thirukkural is not just a "Venba" (a type of poem in Tamil) but a route map to live. It is a lighthouse of knowledge, to guide mankind.

Valluvar has said even a child, born of love, needs a step mother called wealth. (Kural: 757)

It is said that many of Kural's ideas are embedded in Karl Mark's thoughts. But unlike Mark who had Lenin to spread his message, Valluvar did not have such a powerful follower, laments his Holiness KundrakudiAdigalar.

Next only to Bible, Thirukkural has been translated into most number of languages, the latest being Thai language.

Reference

1. C. Rajagopalachari, 1947, Kural: The Great Book of Tiru-Valluvar. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay