



Action-Oriented Values Indicated by the Thirukkural

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Abstract:

The Thirukkural, one of the most enduring ethical texts of Tamil literature, presents a comprehensive value system that emphasizes purposeful action as the foundation of individual and social well-being. Spread across its three sections—Virtue (Aram), Wealth (Porul), and Love (Inbam)—the text consistently underscores that right action, rather than mere intention or belief, determines moral worth and human fulfillment. The Kural advocates values such as diligence, discipline, responsibility, social justice, non-violence, leadership, and self-governance, portraying them as essential drivers of meaningful action. Through concise aphorisms, it frames action as both a moral imperative and a practical necessity for sustaining family life, governance, economic prosperity, and personal character. Its teachings call for proactive engagement in worldly duties, ethical decision-making, and compassionate conduct. Thus, the Thirukkural provides a timeless, action-oriented ethical framework that integrates personal virtue with social responsibility, making it a universal guide for constructive human behavior.

Keywords: Purity, Virtuous, Renunciation, Non-Killing, Gratitude

1. Introduction

The statement by Bharathi, "Among the languages I know, nowhere is there one as sweet as the Tamil language". is proven true by his own proclamation honoring the Three-Part Sage: "The land of Tamil Nadu, which gave Valluvar to the world and gained great fame". Thirukkural is the only work to date that has been translated into over fifty languages. Since the Thirukkural has been translated into the most languages, it is notably hailed as the 'Universal Veda' (*Ulagap Potumarai*). This article aims to analyze the forms of action defined in this work from the perspective of "Action-Oriented Values Indicated by the Thirukkural."

Purity of Mind

Purity of mind is described as the primary focus of the *Arathuppaal* (Book of Virtue). If virtue (Dharma/Aram) is the foundation for all actions, then the mind is the foundation for virtue. Valluvar points this out in the following Kural:

Right action is purity of heart-and-mind—all else nothing but noise (Kural: 34)

This means that only when a person's mind is pure in their personal life can they be pure in their public life. Thus, happiness will arrive when one lives by the path of virtue. Conversely, deviation

leads to sorrow. He explains that one's mind, when established in the pure path of virtue, paves the way for a joyful life.

2. Virtuous Deeds

Is virtue an action, a word, or a thought? It is all three. Thought is the basis for the actions we perform and the words we speak. Purity of thought is the strongest support. Furthermore, the Prime Poet (Valluvar) states in the Kural below that virtue is living without allowing these four—jealousy, excessive desire, anger, and harsh words—to enter one's conduct:

"Virtue consists in not allowing oneself to be led by envy, greed, anger, and harsh words" (Kural: 35)

In life, virtue should not be measured by the highs and lows that arise due to ignorance. Virtue can be known through the purity of the thoughts in the mind and the feelings of pleasure and pain that arise in the heart. However, it cannot be known by external status or differences. Therefore, Valluvar states that the actions of virtue should not be measured by saying that the bearer of the palanquin is carrying it because he did not perform virtuous deeds, and the rider seated upon it performed virtuous deeds. It cannot be said that the bearer suffers and the rider enjoys. This is understood through the Kural

Inquiring about virtues' benefits? See that between The rider and bearer of a palanquin. (Kural: 37)}

Giving (Egai) and Renunciation (Thuravu)

Life should begin with the householder's life (*Illaram*) and conclude with the life of renunciation (*Thuravaram*). The householder's life is about protecting oneself and sheltering others. This requires earning wealth, hospitality, sharing food, and protection. Youth is the best time for all these actions. This is because in old age, one may not have the wealth to earn, share, or give charity to others. Therefore, it is appropriate to live a life of renunciation during that time. Thus, it is necessary to know what should be adopted and what should be rejected in these two ways of life. One must also compare and know which of the two is superior. Valluvar states that the householder's life is superior, provided one researches which life benefits others more, leads one's dependents and others to live well, and does not stray from the path of virtue:

"A householder's life, conducted with a sense of duty and without straying from righteousness, is more powerful than the ascetic's penance" (Kural: 48)

The sweetest action in the householder's life is having children (*Makkal Perru*). Education paves the way for actions that others will praise. It is the foremost duty of parents to select and provide the best education for their children. The children also have excellent duties to perform for their parents, which are:

"A father's duty to his son is to make him stand foremost in the assembly of the learned," (Kural: 67), "A son's help to his father is the praise that others give by saying, 'What great penance did his father do to beget such a son?'" (Kural:70)

These mean acting in a way that others praise them.

Even better than this is acting virtuously and becoming a good and capable person. The Divine Poet indicates the action of the mother whose heart swells with joy upon hearing her son, who has become such a wise scholar, being praised by others:

"The mother who hears her son called a 'wise man' will rejoice more than she did at his birth" (Kural: 68)

This means acting in a way that brings greater joy than the moment of birth when others praise the son, and also expressing love towards everyone. Because the absence of love will destroy virtue. Therefore, love is a valuable action in life. In the householder's life, the action of honoring guests and voluntarily providing them with necessary assistance is superior to other virtues.

The Poet of Undying Words (Poyyamozhi Pulavar) states through the Kural below that for virtue to flourish, one must seek out good things, perform sweet actions, and express them with sweet words:

"If one seeks out good things to say and speaks sweetly, their sins will diminish and their virtues will grow" (Kural: 96)

3. Avoidance of Harm

The great poet (Valluvar) states that when one inflicts harm upon others, that same harm will automatically come back to the perpetrator. Just as the suffering we cause to others will naturally return to us, that is the nature of virtuous action. This is understood through the Kural:

"If you do evil to others in the forenoon, evil will come to you yourself in the afternoon (Kural: 319)

- **Meaning:** If you cause harm to others in the forenoon (early time), harm will come to you automatically in the afternoon (later time).
- **The Principle:** When one causes suffering, although the recipient's body seems to suffer, the mind of the one who inflicted the suffering will later reflect upon it and endure sorrow. The action of harming others is like a ball thrown against a wall: it hits the wall and then returns to the thrower. This return of the action to the doer is the law of virtue.

4. Gratitude

One should never forget the help received in life. Being indebted to those who have helped, and remaining so throughout life, is the mark of a noble person. The Poet of Truth (Valluvar) states in this Kural that forgetting gratitude is equivalent to a heinous act:

"Though there may be hope for those who destroy any other virtue, there is no hope for him who destroys gratitude for favors received" (Kural: 110)

- **Meaning:** There is salvation even for those who destroy any other virtue, but there is no salvation for the one who destroys (forgets) a good deed done to them.
- **Secrecy of Good Deeds:** Furthermore, the *Aasarakkovai* (a classical Tamil text on conduct) states that noble persons will not publicly speak of the benefits or the extent of the help they have rendered to someone, mentioning:

"those who speak ill of the help they receive" or "those who slander the benefits of help" " (They do not speak of the benefit of the help rendered).

Non-Killing

A life lived without harming other living beings is the most superior life. It is a cruel act to harm and kill other creatures to eat their flesh for the sake of protecting one's own body. The most excellent act among virtuous deeds is not killing any living thing. The sin of killing will cause all other sins to come upon us. The *Maanthaanupangi* (Valluvar) explains this in the Kural:

"Never to destroy life is the sum of all virtuous conduct; the destruction of life leads to every evil" (Kural: 321)

- **Meaning:** What is virtuous action? It is non-killing. Killing brings about all other vicious actions.
- **The Best Path:** Since killing one life brings forth all evil deeds, the best path (the good way) is the practice of non-killing. This is known through the Kural:
- **If you ask what is the good path, it is the principle that cherishes the avoidance of killing any creature" (Kural: 324)**
- **Meaning:** What is called the good way? It is the path that contemplates not killing any living thing.

Thirumoolar's View: Thirumoolar states that even flowers have life. Therefore, among the flowers picked to be offered to God, the Flower of Non-Killing (*Kollaamai*) is the most excellent. He says in his verse:

"For the worship of the Good Guru (who is the refuge), there are many flowers; The bright flower of Non-Killing (not harming even tiny creatures) is superior to all others. The garland is the steady lamp (of pure contemplation) and the enlightened mind (Chittam); The dwelling place of the Supreme Soul is the crown of the head"

In this song, he declares that among the various flowers suitable for the worship of the peerless wise guru, Lord Shiva, the primary one is the flower known as Non-Killing (not harming even tiny organisms).

5. Conclusion

Virtue (Aram) is the basis for all actions. However, the mind is the basis for virtue. When the mind is established in pure virtuous actions, it paves the way for a joyful life. It is important to note that thought (intention) is the basis for all the actions we perform. It is noteworthy that the householder's life (*Ilvarhkai*) is the most superior, provided one researches which life benefits others more, leads one's dependents and others to live well, and does not stray from the path of virtue by adhering to virtuous deeds oneself. It is essential to act virtuously and thereby become a good, and especially, a capable person. It is important to note that a life lived without causing harm to other living beings is the most superior life.

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