

# SOCIAL LIFE IN *TIRUKKURAL*

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## Introduction

The name "*Tiruvalluvar*" means "the great man of the *Valluva* community" and the title "*Kural*" signifies the metre of the poem. Both the author and his work have borne no proper or distinctive names. Nor is anything reliable known either of his parentage, or of his career. But the work exists or is extant as a whole, unadulterated by schismatics and unimpaired or untampered with by copyists in the procession of ages. That the poet was a keen observer of nature, animate and inanimate, a diligent student of ancient classics on *akapporul* and *purapporul*, on rhetoric and dialectic on morality and statecraft, on agriculture and medicine, on folk-lore, tree-and-plant-lore, and on sex psychology and erotic diplomacy, and was a practical thinker and reformer, is beyond all cavil or question<sup>1</sup>.

The family is the primary unit of social order and with a benevolent king as its head, the society ensures peace and harmony. *Valluvar* has eulogised the family life in tune with the highest moral tradition. *Valluvar's* conception of social order is to be gleaned from the division on '*Kudimai*' and other parts of '*Porut Pal*'. The modern meaning of the word '*Kudimai*' is citizenship, but at the time of *Valluvar*, it meant 'coming from a good family'. Fortunately, even the conservative commentator *Parimelaigar*<sup>2</sup> has accepted good family as common to all the four castes. There may be high or low families in all castes. And hence, in the social order contemplated by *Valluvar*, there is no place for the caste system. Many foreigners are naturally surprised at this school of thought of an Indian.

## Education

Read in conjunction with the reference of *Cankam* classics, there is a clear indication that the system of education was highly individualistic, and the pupils went in search of teachers. They were willing to worship a learned man irrespective of his birth. However, there is no evidence to suggest that pupils resided with their teachers as in the *Gurukulam* system. Nor is there any prescription of *Brahmacharya* for the students. *Valluvar* has for-

mulated three chapters, relating to Education, 'Kalvi' or Education, 'Kallamai' or Absence of education and 'Kelvi' or learning by listening. Only deserving books should be learnt; learn them thoroughly without any shadow of doubt: what is learnt should be put into practice (*Kural* 391).

The learning of alphabet and numerals is likened to the eyes in importance (*Kural* 392). Various other interpretations have also been given to 'En' and 'Eluttu'. They are considered to denote arts and sciences, humanities and sciences, logic and mathematics. 'Eluttu' has also been interpreted as Tamil literature by the learned commentator *Sivagnana Munivar*<sup>3</sup>. Only the learned could be said to have eyes, the uneducated are blind (*Kural* 393). Learned men meet with pleasure and when they depart, there is an anxiety to look forward to the nearest opportunity to meet again (*Kural* 394). The more you learn the more your intelligence increases (*Kural* 396).

The idea that learned men can thrive at any place and time is deep rooted in *Cankam* poets. We have already referred to the catholic message of *Kanian Pankunran*<sup>4</sup>. All the villages in the world are ours and all are our kin. Another *Purananuru*<sup>5</sup> poet has compared learned men to skilled carpenters and the world to a tine forest. The craftsman can easily cut the wood to its size and so also, the learned can go and thrive any where in the world. They can find food in whatever direction they may go. *Valluvar* sums up these sentiments and questions, why don't some people learn even until their death, when it is well known that to the learned any country becomes his own and any town his own? (*Kural* 397).

If one learns well in this birth, his scholarship will stand by him in good stead in his subsequent births (*Kural* 398). Education is a deathless asset, other riches are not real (*Kural* 400). There were only individual schools of learning, and no formal system of education organised by the State. When *Valluvar* refers to the educated, it means education under a teacher. *Valluvar* was aware of the fact that one may be highly intelligent though not educated. But such intelligence without education is of no use as the learned world will not recognise it (*Kural* 404). As soon as the uneducated intelligent person comes into contact with a learned man and enters into conversation with him, he will discover his ignorance (*Kural* 405). The ignoramus merely exist, and are useless like chaff (*Kural* 406). A handsome person without education is compared to a beautiful doll (*Kural* 407).

Much emphasis has been laid on learning through listening by *Valluvar* in the chapter 'Kelvi'. Modern educational theory also takes note of this fact by including lectures, seminars and discussions in its methodology. But the lecture method has fallen on evil days, it is now supposed to be least effective and should be restricted to the minimum. Psychologists also

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hold the view that the span of attention varies from individual to individual and that long lectures are likely to have only marginal effects on the listeners. Visual images<sup>6</sup> have a better chance of creating an indelible impression on the audience.

Ancient methods were two-fold in nature, learning and listening, '*Kalvi*' and '*Kelvi*'. *Valluvar* has laid equal emphasis on both. Knowledge by listening is the supreme wealth (*Kural* 411). When we have nothing to feed the ears, the stomach also must be given something (*Kural* 412). Those who have got ear sense are compared to the heavenly angels (*Kural* 413). If one is not able to learn by oneself, it is better to listen and learn (*Kural* 414). There is no use of having the ear holes without gaining knowledge; by such intense listening, two holes are bored again (*Kural* 418). In grammatical convention of *Purattinai*, '*lrumpal Kanci*'<sup>7</sup> it is stated that unless accustomed to listening good things in life, the ear holes are useless and are like holes created by arrows. In *Patirruppattu*<sup>8</sup> there is a reference to long and sharp listening '*Netu Nun Kelvi*'. The quality of humility comes only to those who have learnt a lot by listening (*Kural* 419).

The theory of intelligence prepared by *Valluvar* is to be gleaned mainly from the three chapters; intelligence or *Arivutaimai*, idiocy (*Petamai*) and assuming idiots '*Pullari vanmai*'. The Tamil word '*arivu*' means both knowledge and intelligence. *Cankam* classics and their learned commentators<sup>9</sup> frequently refer to the subtle and penetrating intellect, '*Nunman Nulai pulam*'. *Valluvar* was the first to examine its true nature, to determine its relation with learning and to bring out its scope for development and the limitations on it.

*Valluvar* accords a supreme place for education in his social order. Education is not to be denied to weaker sections of society; In Sanskrit tradition, education was considered to be the monopoly of Brahmins, even though education is prescribed for the ruler, it has got an universal appeal. In *Cankam* classics, we find poets from all walks of life. There are great poets like *Kabilar*<sup>10</sup> from the Brahmin community. The astronomer poet *Kaniyan Punkunran*'s<sup>11</sup> universal philosophy is well-known. The crowned Pandya Kings<sup>12</sup> have written poetry; the hamples farmer<sup>13</sup> has also contributed his own mite to *Cankam* literature. Even the gypsy *Kuramakal Ilaveyini*<sup>14</sup> has a poem to her credit. It is this structure of society that must have prompted *Valluvar* to rise above considerations of caste while laying down his theory of social order in general and of education in particular.

### Character

Character is the resultant of soul-heritage in its transmigration acted on by culture. Literally it is the writing of culture on the blank slate of the mind (*tabula rasa*) while conduct

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is the outward manifestation of the cultured soul or the thoroughly cultivated will, or its graceful and refined behaviour shown by outward marks of cruelty in the ordeal of society. It is the proverb 'A tree is known by its fruits and a man is known by his actions'. Conduct is life honourable and respectable. The poet says that manners are the fruits of a loyal nature and a noble mind. Manners are said to make man: his evil manners will live in brass while his good are writ in water. Self-reliance, self-sacrifice, obedience, moral courage or true heroism, high ideal, perseverance, moderation in views and aims, punctuality, method and thoroughness are the distinguishing marks of good character, while good conduct is testified by love of nature, by prayer, by economy, by temperance, by life-object and by good manners.<sup>15</sup>

*Valluvar* has advocated a casteless society but not a classless society. While surveying his contemporary society, he found that only a few were rich but many were poor, suffering intensely. *Valluvar* was not able to think of a plausible explanation for this social injustice. And hence, he took refuge in the concept of *Purva Punniya* or the good that has been done in the previous birth. Those who have done '*tabam*' are rich, and those who have not done '*tabam*' are poor (*Kural* 270).

It is good to learn even if it means that one has to worship his teacher. When the teacher is in need of help, timely assistance must be provided. The teacher should also be given adequate financial assistance. Even if one has to strive for pleasing the teacher in all these ways, it is good to learn. Even the mother is likely to distinguish between her sons on account of education or the absence of it. The four-fold caste system loses its lustre when one belonging to the lower caste is learned, high caste people will go to him for learning and worship him. And hence in *Purananuru*, the relationship between the teacher and the taught is likened to the deity and the devotee. *Valluvar* employs a different simile. The teacher and the taught are compared to the rich and the poor. Even if one has to adopt a humble posture before the teacher as the poor before the rich, it is good to learn (*Kural* 395). According to *Valluvar*, the dignity of the educated transcends caste barriers. A learned man belonging to a lower caste is superior to an uneducated one of the higher caste (*Kural* 209).

Prudence is wisdom applied to practice or sagacity in applying means to ends. As virtuous actions are life's aims, due consideration of the ways and means of accomplishing the ends in view becomes necessary. The work of life is judged by its moral value, and success in life depends on the doing of a right thing at the right time, at the right place, by a right person, in a right manner. In this view providence is foresight or wise economy which makes for progress or advancement or prosperity.<sup>16</sup>

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Before proceeding to act, let every one weigh expenditure, return and profit (*Kural* 461), and think over it himself with his chosen friends (*Kural* 462). It is rashness to risk everything and lose all, tempted by cupidity (*Kural* 463), to undertake a thing when the issue is not clear (*Kural* 464) and without forming mature plans (*Kural* 465). It is ruinous to do an unfitting thing or to leave a fit thing undone (*Kural* 466). All ventures must be made after mature consideration; else they will bring disgrace (*Kural* 467). In doing a thing method is more than multitudinous help (*Kural* 468). However good an action may be, it is determined by the habitudes or dispositions of men for whom it is done (*Kural* 469). The world's esteem or approval must be the aim of every doer of good work (*Kural* 470).

In our social behaviour, we are apt to find fault with others frequently, but the key to social harmony lies in the realisation of one's own faults (*Kural* 190). The English proverb 'Tell me your friends, I will tell you who you are' is only too true. According to *Valluvar*, our intelligence and nature is afflicted by our friends, just as water acquires the quality of the earth on which it stands or flows (*Kural* 453). *Kuruntokai* has laid down the dictum, 'Action is the soul force of all men', '*Vinaiye Atavark Kuyire*'<sup>17</sup>.

The action oriented philosophy of *Valluvar* derives its strength from *Puram* traditions. He has prescribed numerous rules for men of action. Here most salient features of his dictums are surveyed. Think well before beginning to act and it would be degrading to think after launching the programme of action (*Kural* 467). The positive and negative aspects of action, omission and commission are recognised in *Kural* 466. Before embarking on a plan of action, the pros and cons must be weighed, loss or gain must be assessed. Troubles in the middle must be anticipated (*Kural* 461). Another golden rule of action is that even while doing good, wrongs may be committed unless it is close in accordance with the nature of those to whom such good is done (*Kural* 469).

All this shows *Valluvar's* deep insight into human nature and stands eloquent testimony to his utilitarian and pragmatic approach towards the formulation of his philosophy. The proper time and place for the execution of action is also to be taken into consideration (*Kural* 484). In human relations, it is impossible to find people who are perfect in everything, by nature human beings are imperfect, they have their merits and demerits. *Valluvar* offers the most practical counsel. Examine the merits and faults of an individual, judge the predominating element and if merits are more numerous than faults, accept him (*Kural* 504).

Stress has also been laid on having good relations with relatives in the chapter on '*Curram talal*'. Even though it is meant for the king, it will equally apply for other citizens.

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Forgetfulness destroys one's fame and hence, it has to be avoided at all costs. The evil that accrues on account of forgetfulness is codified in the chapter on '*Pocavamai*'.

In the action-oriented and positive way of life of the ancient Tamils, they had two words testifying to their hard working nature - '*muyarci*' or endeavour and '*Unartal*' or striving hard. One has to aim at high and noble things only; it does not matter if by chance there is failure to achieve (*Kural* 596).

The planned structure of *Kural* in itself is a clear indication that *Valluvar* wanted to project the positive aspects of life. The first major division dealing with ethical rules contains only 34 chapters, the first four being introductory. Among the 34 chapters, 20 chapters deal with family life and only 14 chapters are allotted for ascetic way of life. This had led Albert Schweitzer<sup>18</sup> to remark that life negation is a distant cloud in *Kural*.

On the other hand, 70 chapters are devoted to political and social structure in '*Porut Pal*'. As many as 11 chapters deal with plan of action, selection of personnel management, overcoming hurdles and tireless efforts. In sharp contrast to the fatalism of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist schools of thought, *Valluvar* has laid down that even destiny could be overcome by constant and tireless efforts. Even where the fate stands against getting benefits, hard work earns its due wages (*Kural* 619). Lack of luck is not a disgrace, but lack of will in taking efforts is (*Kural* 618).

One should not lose heart, thinking of the uphill task, as greatness can be achieved by striving hard (*Kural* 611). Abandoning a task in the middle should be avoided, as the world will abandon such weak persons (*Kural* 612). The fact that if one wants to be of help to others, one should be of an enterprising nature, has been stressed in three couplets. Tireless effort leads to accrual of wealth; lack of effort brings in poverty (*Kural* 616 and 617).

*Valluvar* also adopts this simile and asks us to be brave in facing difficulties and hurdles (*Kural* 624). When you are facing hurdles, please smile as you will meet with success next time (*Kural* 625). However, *Valluvar* has emphasised that all actions should be based on ethical considerations. In his chapter on purity of actions, he declares that poverty is no excuse for wrongful acts committed. Even to satisfy the hunger of one's mother, one should not commit wrongs (*Kural* 656). *Cankam* poets<sup>19</sup> have cautioned against doing things which we may later on regret. *Valluvar* also cautions against doing regrettable acts, after having committed wrongful act, refrain from regretting next time (*Kural* 655).

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*Valluvar* is most emphatic that there is no place in this world for those who have no wealth just as the other world is denied to those who have no grace or mercy in their hearts (*Kural* 247). The *Uraiyur* poet *Madukannan Catanar*<sup>20</sup> while singing of the praise of the Cola king, *Nalankilli*, has emphatically asserted that money can confer worldly benefits as well as providing means to the other world. Worldly pleasures or '*Inbam*', material welfare or *porul* and Dharma or '*Aram*' all these could be derived from wealth.

However, it was left to *Valluvar* to bring out the true relationship between wealth and other moral concepts. Love or '*anpu*' with whom we are connected is the most fundamental concept-charity begins at home. Love is the mother of mercy or grace which is love shown to people with whom we have no connections. Wealth or '*Porul*' is the foster mother who alone can usher in both these qualities. Without the aid of the foster mother, wealth, here has no scope for the growth of mercy (*Kural* 757). This idea is also reiterated in a different manner in *Kural* 760.

## Friendship

Highest traditions of friendship have been set up in Tamil Society in ancient times. There is the classical instance of the poet *Picirantaiyar*<sup>21</sup> and the Cola king, *Kopperun Colan* who developed intense form of friendship without seeing each other but by hearing about each other. When the king decided to lay down his life by fasting due to an accidental wound he received at his back, *Picirantaiyar* felt so much that he also wanted to give up his life along with his friend. For the first time they met when *Picirantaiyar* went to communicate his desire to die along with him. This ideal friendship between a poet and a king has inspired the thoughts of subsequent ages. Deriving inspiration from this, *Valluvar* has defined, that true friendship does not even need introduction nor opportunity to move together (*Kural* 785). Friendship between good men is like the waxing moon, and that of bad men waning moon (*Kural* 782). The more one moves with good men, the more one's friendship increases just as the ever increasing pleasure one derives from a good book (*Kural* 783).

The object of friendship is to point out the faults when a friend goes astray and not to laugh with him by cracking jokes (*Kural* 784). There is a reference in *Kuruntogai*<sup>22</sup> and *Kalittogai*<sup>23</sup> also to this effect. Despite precautions indicated by a friend, if disaster befalls him, one should share his friends misfortune (*Kural* 787). Just as the hand hastens to set right the slipping garment, one should hasten to remove the difficulties faced by a friend. Having laid down the highest and noblest traditions of friendship, *Valluvar* cautions that we should be careful about the choice of our friends. He has devoted three chapters to this

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aspect. '*Natpu araital*' deals with the method of choosing friends. '*Tinatpu*' expatiates on the ills of bad friendship. '*Kuta Natpu*' is a kind of feigned friendship by enemies for tactical reasons. This applies to political affairs more than to human affairs.

*Valluvar* has thought about the other extreme of friends taking undue advantage. In his chapter, '*Palamai*' it is laid down that long association of friendship should not become an excuse for trespassing the limits. *Parimelalakar* in his interpretation of *Kural* 801, has explained well what such overacting means. He says that friends however close should not be taken for granted; without consulting them, one should not act on their behalf. Taking things without asking and lack of courtesy or humility should be scrupulously avoided.

### Speech

It is easy to say, but difficult to perform (*Kural* 664): *Purananuru*<sup>24</sup> also refers to the pledges and vows taken by men are likely to be forgotten sooner than expected. However, the tongue was a more formidable weapon in those days in political, diplomatic and social spheres. *Valluvar* has formulated a chapter on the ability of exposition. The speaker's ability to communicate should be such as to attract even his enemies and to cement the ties of friendship of well wishers (*Kural* 643). An *Akananuru* poet<sup>25</sup> has also spoken of the ability of speech that could win over even enemies. Brevity of speech is also emphasised in *Purananuru*<sup>26</sup>. Diversity of knowledge is coupled with brevity of speech. *Valluvar* goes a step further and asserts that only those who are incapable of explaining a few things with clarity are fond of multiplying words (*Kural* 649). Scholars who are devoid of the ability of communicating by means of speech are like bouquet of flowers without fragrance (*Kural* 50).

The speech must be suitable to the audience to whom it is addressed. *Valluvar* has laid down the rules for the study of audience in his chapter on '*Avai arital*'. Among a group of fools, we should not try to show our intelligence, only before an enlightened audience, we should attempt at an exhibition of our intellect (*Kural* 714). Warning against stage fear has been given in the chapter on '*Avai ancamai*'. A scholar should have no hesitation in speaking on what he knows. Only such a person can be accepted as a true scholar (*Kural* 722). Of what use, is the sword to cowards? Of what use, is the bookish knowledge to those having stage fear? asks *Valluvar* (*Kural* 726).

### Status of women

The status of women in society in the order of things envisaged by *Valluvar* is in tune with the spirit of the times in which he lived. He has sung of the glory, of the chaste

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woman in 'Illaraviya!'. 'There is no one greater than a woman provided she is chaste' (Kural 54). Valluvar was willing to grant more or less on equal status for women in 'Illaraviya!'. Of course, this was severely restricted because a chaste woman was expected to worship her husband even in preference to Gods. M. Varadarasanar<sup>27</sup> has attempted to give a far-fetched interpretation to this chapter so as to bail out Valluvar from the strictures of not having given equal status to women. He would have us believe that Valluvar is cautioning against the advice of women who want to promote family prosperity at the cost of public life. It is quite clear that Valluvar held the view that it was obnoxious for a man to be governed by his wife and that he has ridiculed such hen-pecked husbands in unmistakable terms in this chapter.

## Health

Health is not merely diseaselessness or painlessness but more. Health of body and health of mind are the two divisions of the subject. The human body is a standing miracle. It is constituted like the glorious rainbow. 'There is but one temple in the Universe' says Novalis, 'and that is the body of man'. *Mens sana in corpore sana*, i.e., a sound mind in a sound body, shows the intimate relationship between the two. "The *mens sana* which in conjunction with the *corpore sana* we rightly put forward as the chief pledge and earnest to earthly happiness, must also be *mens pura* unprofaned by indulgence of irregular and illicit desires." The sanitary conditions of health are pure air, pure water, sound and timely sleep, wholesome food, clean clothing, good climate, high and dry habitation and congenial work. "Our ancestors" writes Sir John Lubblock "lived more in the country, more in the open air, more in agricultural operations. We are to a much greater extent concentrated in cities, work much more in houses, shops and factories; our occupations are sedentary and stooping and are a greater tax on the brain and nervous system." While our vitality is affected by insanitation, by excitement, by fret and worry, cheerfulness, good humour and peace of mind promote it. When we are out of sorts, things get on our nerves, the most trifling annoyances assume the proportions of a catastrophe".<sup>28</sup>

Health is conducive to work, physical and mental and work is wealth and therefore health is wealth. Wealth is acquired by right means or wrong, enjoyed well or ill, and spent in good or evil ways, in beneficence or maleficence. The right means of acquiring wealth are agriculture in the first place, and trade and commerce next, and the wrong means are force and fraud. To embrace the former and eschew the latter knits individuals into societies and keeps them up and cements them and brings about solidarity amongst them. Valluvar emphasises good digestion, moderate eating, good appetite as prophylactics and lays stress

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on careful diagnosis, faithful, treatment, proper medicine and expert medical knowledge as the requisites of a doctor.<sup>29</sup>

## Medicine

Not even the famed poet physician of *Purananuru*, *Uraiyr Maruttuvan Tamotarantar*, has said anything about medicine, but *Valluvar* has chosen to formulate ten couplets on medicine. It is surprising to find *Valluvar* has devoted a major portion of his chapter on a proper diet. It should be neither excessive nor deficient. Only after digestion, next course of food should be taken. Food that suits one's constitution alone should be taken. Over eating breeds many diseases. The first seven couplets deal with and reiterate these aspects (*Kural* 941 to 947).

The method of treatment is spelt out in the last three couplets. The diagnosis part is the most important. The disease must be identified first and then its causes analysed. The remedy should be properly chosen and it should be administered in time. The learned physician should bear in mind the dosage for the particular patient in commensurate with the stage of development of the disease at the proper time. The patient, the physician, the medicine and the nurse are the vital factors in the treatment (*Kural* 948 to 950).

## Honour

In *Cankam* tradition,<sup>30</sup> the tiger is credited with the habit of not eating its prey if it falls after its assault on its left side. Next time, it will attack its prey with greater force so as to make it fall on the right side. *Valluvar* behoves us not to do anything beneath our dignity even if it means losing heavily (*Kural* 961). Heroes of *Purananuru* willingly laid down their lives rather than losing their honour. The Chera King *Kanaikkal Irumporai*<sup>31</sup> in captivity laid down his life lest he should lose his honour by drinking the water indifferently provided by his enemies. The Cola King, *Kopperun Colan*<sup>32</sup> also has made the supreme sacrifice as he was wounded at the back by an accident. *Valluvar* reiterates the concept that honour is more valuable than even one's life in four couplets (*Kural* 967 to 970). Further he refers to the peculiar variety of deer which is presumed to die even if it loses hair.

## Greatness of an individual

In his chapter on the greatness of an individual, *Valluvar* stresses the principle that by birth alone no one can claim greatness (*Kural* 972). Nor is greatness gauged by the position one occupies. One may be occupying a throne and another sitting on ground (*Kural* 973).

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Really great people are capable of doing great things (*Kural* 975). In his definition of great men also, *Valluvar* has already stated that the sign of greatness is the achievement of rare deeds (*Kural* 26).

The concept of a gentleman '*Canror*' is deeply rooted in Tamil culture. *Picirantaiyar* has already stated that old age has not affected him as many learned gentlemen lived in his village. *Kaniyan Punkunran*<sup>33</sup> has already outlined the cosmopolitan outlook of a gentleman who considers all the villages in the world as his own and all human beings as his relatives. The far-sightedness of the gentleman enables him to view things in their proper perspective so that he does not wonder at great people, nor do they cavil at small men.

*Valluvar* views the idea of a gentleman as a personification of all good qualities of head and heart (*Kural* 981). He shines by his character and character is not something that could be included in any of the other qualities (*Kural* 982). Universal love, sense of shame, flexibility and adjustable nature, mercy and truthfulness are the five pillars of gentlemanliness (*Kural* 983).

Besides enumerating the qualities of a gentleman, *Valluvar* has devoted a chapter on individual culture. *Purananuru*<sup>34</sup> has already proclaimed that it is because of highly cultured men that this world exists, otherwise it would have been demolished as it does not deserve to exist without them. *Valluvar* has also endorsed this view in *Kural* 996. Individual culture springs from universal love and birth in a good family (*Kural* 992). There is no use of resemblance with human culture (*Kural* 993). Justice and fair play make them useful to others (*Kural* 994). *Valluvar* has used a term '*makkat panpu*' or human culture. In the last four couplets, he has denounced those without human culture. The catholicity of Tamil culture lies at the basis of the human culture proclaimed by *Valluvar*.

The main characteristics of *Cankam* classics are its secular nature and its positive, even a militant attitude towards life. *Valluvar*'s philosophy of life assertion is intimately connected with the main springs of ancient Tamil culture. In *Kural*, the strident voice of life-assertion is no where so self-evident as in his chapter on 'bettering one's family' (*Kuti Ceyal vakai*). *Valluvar* has enjoined us to constantly try for the betterment of our family. There is nothing greater than the vow to strive hard and not to rest until the aim of bettering one's family is achieved (*Kural* 1021). A clear intellect with untiring efforts is needed for such achievements (*Kural* 1022). Even the Gods will hasten to the aid of those determined to raise the status of their families (*Kural* 1023).

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In day to day life, it is seen that only some take the responsibility while others do not.

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*Valluvar* observes that responsibility is placed on the shoulders of those who can bear it. In war only a few are able to withstand the onslaught of the incoming army (*Kural* 1027). The able hands on whom responsibility is placed should not think why they alone should strive hard while others in the same family are not doing anything. Nor should they be afraid of adverse seasons like winter and summer (*Kural* 1028).

*Karikannan*<sup>35</sup> of *Kaviripoompattinam* has employed the simile of the Banyan tree, which sends out its young shoots which take root and prolong the life of the tree when the original trunk decays and dies, to bring out the fact that younger generation must take the responsibility when the older ones pass away. *Valluvar* adopts a variation of this simile to teach the same lesson. The axe of sorrowing decay will break and pull down the family tree unless there is some one in the family who can shoulder the burden of maintaining it.

### **Poverty**

*Valluvar's* ideas about poverty, begging and alms giving are to be studied together. Poverty was accepted as an aspect of life. There was no movement for the abolition of poverty. It was considered as a duty of the kings and chieftains to remove hunger and mitigate the sufferings of poverty. *Valluvar* thought some are born rich due to their good deeds in previous birth and many are born poor due to their bad acts in their previous birth (*Kural* 270). Helping the poor is good in itself even if there were no heaven (*Kural* 222).

In his chapter on poverty, *Valluvar* brings out its tragic effect in the first five couplets. Learning and philosophy are of no avail under the tragic impact of poverty (*Kural* 1046). Even a mother looks down upon the poverty of her son if it is not for the sake Dharma that poverty was caused (*Kural* 1047). Poverty is worse than fire and death. *Valluvar* advocates renunciation of worldly pleasures as a remedy for poverty (*Kural* 1050). As *Kural* has enjoined upon family people to feed the saints who have renounced worldly ties, *Valluvar* thinks he has found a solution to poverty. The modern notion of reduction of disparities in income and wide dispersal of the wealth of the society was alien to *Cankam* classics and to *Kural* as well.

### **Conclusion**

*Valluvar* concludes, his thoughts on society by issuing a strong warning to be beware of bad men in society. Only in form, bad men resemble human beings, but they are unparalleled in doing mischief. (*Kural* 1071). They have none of the fear and anxiety of good men to do evil, in this, they are better placed than good men (*Kural* 1072). Just as the sugar-cane yeilds

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its juice only when it is crushed, only under duress, bad men oblige. A word of request will be enough for good men (*Kural* 1078). Bad men will not hesitate to sell themselves at the time of crisis (*Kural* 1080).

*Valluvar* has thought about a wide range of social problems and has devoted more chapters to society than to other aspects of life. There have been stray thoughts in *Cankam* classics. *Valluvar* was the first systematic thinker on all topics under the sun. It was he who was the first social reformer who wanted to do away with social evils like drink, prostitution and gambling. On the positive side, it was he who codified the views on education, agriculture, medicine etc. Expanding the action oriented philosophy of the ancient Tamils, *Valluvar* laid down the methodology of action in several chapters. The main contribution of *Valluvar* is the development of life assertion into an unified system of philosophy.

*Valluvar* has extracted the numerous and stray moral thoughts from the vast literature that he had before him, codified them as positive and negative rules of conduct, discarded regional peculiarities, refined their ingredients so as to have an universal appeal and classified them under several chapters which were never known before. In plan as well as execution, *Valluvar* is most original but most of the raw material is taken from tradition. In the overall evaluation of *Tirukkural*, there is a perfect balance of tradition and individual talent; the solid foundations of *Valluvar's* philosophy are to be found in Tamil tradition and culture, although the superstructure built by him is his own.