Makers of Indian Literature

TIRUVALLUVAR

S. Maharajan

Tiruvalluvar, who lived about two millennia ago is perhaps the greatest thinker and poet sage of Tamil Nadu and has, through his *Tirukkural*, dominated the literary landscape of Tamil Nadu for over 2000 years. He is the most translated of Tamil poets and G.U. Pope has called him "The Bard of Universal Man", while Albert Schweitzer declares, "There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find such lofty wisdom."

S. Maharajan (1913-1982) born at Trichirapalli, Tamil Nadu was a scholar in Tamil and English. He joined the State judiciary in 1943, after practicing as an advocate for eight years, and was elevated to the High Court of Madras in September 1969. After retirement, he was Chairman of the State Official Languages (Legislative) Commission, of the Expert Committee to promote translation of foreign classics into Tamil and vice-versa. As the Chief of the judicial service in Pondicherry for four years, he was responsible for the introduction of Indian legal system in the erstwhile French courts. Among the 15 books authored by him are translations of Shakespeare's works. Apart from his mastery of *Kamba Ramayanam*, he had been lecturing on the mysticism of Saint Tirumoolar. He was the president of the Tamil Isai Sangam.

In this monograph he has revealed his intimate knowledge of the subject and his scholarly and critical competence for writing on Tiruvalluvar.

Line drawing: Maniam Selvan

SAHITYA
AKADEMI

ISBN 978-81-260-5321-6

www.sahitya-akademi.gov.in

₹ 50/-

TIRUVALLUVAR

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Śuddhodana the dream of Queen Māyā, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

TIRUVALLUVAR

by

S. Maharajan

Sahitya Akademi

Tiruvalluvar: A monograph in English on Tiruvalluvar, eminent Indian philosopher and poet by S. Maharajan, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi: 2017, ₹ 50.

Sahitya Akademi

Head Office

Rabindra Bhavan, 35, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi 110 001
Website: http://www.sahitya-akademi.gov.in

Sales Office

'Swati', Mandir Marg, New Delhi 110 001
E-mail: sales@sahitya-akademi.gov.in

Regional Offices

172, Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar
Mumbai 400 014

Central College Campus, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Veedhi
Bengaluru 560 001

4, D.L. Khan Road, Kolkata 700 025

Chennai Office

Main Guna Building Complex (second floor), 443, (304)
Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai 600 018

First Published: 1979

Second Edition: 1982

Reprint: 2017

ISBN: 978-81-260-5321-6

Rs. 50

Printed by Sita Fine Arts Pvt. Ltd., A-16, Naraina Industrial Area
Phase-II, New Delhi 110028

CONTENTS

APPENDIX

1

INTRODUCTION

Though Tiruvalluvar lived about 2000 years ago, it does not seem he is dead. He is a contemporaneous presence in the Tamil country, influencing men's thoughts and urging them to bring their conduct into greater and greater conformity with the high ideals he set before them.

None would disagree that he has shaped Tamil literature as no other Tamil has done. He has dominated the intellectual and literary landscape of Tamil Nadu, and never since his time has any man risen to the moral and spiritual height that came to him. There was no one like him before or since. Except, perhaps, Kambar.

He came to think, surely, of mankind as including persons who spoke other languages than Tamil. He taught in the same language as Plato or Aristotle, Confucius or Rousseau did in respect of ideas, in respect of conceptions of right and justice. What did he think of mankind? And what does it matter what he thought of mankind? It matters because therein resides the quintessence for prosperity and peace in the social order, a quest, which still eludes us. If he was right, the rest of us were wrong.

Tiruvalluvar's mind is so extraordinary that we would feel grateful and thrilled to see human life through his eyes. He contemplates the grand spectacle of the phenomenon of Man in its earthly and cosmic contexts and sees it in all its totality in the clear day-light of unclouded faith. He locates whatever makes for disharmony in personal relationships and maps out a detailed code

of conduct, which would bring about harmony within the individual and harmony without. He focusses on the emotional reverberations caused by human conduct on every aspect of human relationship, between, say, son and father, husband and wife, citizen and State, and Soul and God.

As one visualises the architectonics of the Tirukkural with its 133 Chapters and 1330 Kurals, and as one grasps it whole, one is reminded of Arnold's description of a Poet:—

> Leaned on his gate, he gazes, tears
> are in his eyes, and in his ears
> the murmur of a thousand years,
> before him he sees life unroll,
> a placid and continuous whole.

Not only does Valluvar see life unroll as a continuous whole, but also does he see with the eyes of a Seer what impedes the further evolution of Man and how the impediments can be removed. He has eyes that miss nothing, eyes that can twinkle with humour and wit, sarcasm and mischief, eyes which glow with righteous indignation and sparkle with certain and lofty wisdom, eyes which can make men fidget and women blush, eyes which grow misty with tears for the poor and sting the wicked.

Apart from his effort to embrace the human condition in its totality, he communicates his luminous insights in the pure perfection of poetry. He achieves supreme emotional effects, sometimes through drama and sometimes through lyric. He is a cunning technician, who, by prodigious self-restraint and artistic vigilance, super-charges his words with meaning and achieves an incredible terseness and an irreducible density. His commentators have, therefore, to squeeze every word and persuade it to yield its last drop of meaning. The success of each commentator has depended also upon the expertise, which he has brought to bear upon the original.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer in his book on "Indian Thought and its Development," appraises the Tirukkural and observes, "There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims, in which we find such lofty wisdom". M. Ariel, the great French Savant, in a letter to Burnouf, published in the Journal Asiatique (November-December 1848) speaks of Tiruvalluvar's great work as "a masterpiece of Tamil literature, one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought". Again, he says:—"That which above all is wonderful in the Kural is the fact that its author addresses himself, without regard to castes, peoples or beliefs, to the whole community of mankind; the fact that he formulates sovereign morality and absolute reason; that he proclaims in their very essence, in their eternal abstractedness, virtue and truth; that he presents, as it were, in one group, the highest laws of domestic and social life; that he is equally perfect in thought, in language and in poetry, in the austere metaphysical contemplation of the great mysteries of the Divine Nature as in the easy and graceful analysis of the tenderest emotions of the heart".

The Italian Jesuit missionary, Fr. Beschi (De. 1742) translated most of the Kurals into Latin, and in his commentary, he compared the Kurals of Tiruvalluvar with the maxims of Seneca. The celebrated Englishman, Dr. G. U. Pope translated the Kural into English and published the same in 1886. In his introduction to the English translation, Dr. Pope has compared the Tirukkural to Propertius and to Martial and the Latin elegiac verse. In his commentary on the Kural Dr. Pope has quoted analogous passages from authors like Horace, Aeschyles, Dante, Shakespeare, Brownning, Wordsworth, Manu, Burgin and Catullus and adds that what Archbishop Trench said of Saint Augustin is equally true of Tiruvalluvar:—"He abounds in short and memorable, and if I might so call them, epigrammatic sayings, concentrating with a forceful brevity, the whole truth, which he desires to impart, into some single phrase, forging it into a polished shaft at once pointed to pierce, and barbed that it shall not lightly drop from the mind and memory".

Poetess Avvayar, who is reputed to have been the sister of Tiruvalluvar and who must consequently have watched Valluvar in his songsmithy, says in a Tamil song:—"Valluvar bores an atom, pours the seven seas into its cavity, and cutting the atom, offers its cross-section to us in the shape of the Kural". *

Rightly has Dr. G. U. Pope hailed Tiruvalluvar as the "Bard of Universal Man" and here are the songs in which Dr. Pope celebrates the universality of Tiruvalluvar:—

Sage Valluvar, Priest of thy lowly clan,
no tongue repeats, no speech reveals thy name;
yet, all things changing, dieth not thy fame,
for thou art bard of Universal man.

And still thy 'book' above the waters wan,
virtue, true wealth and joy, and being's aim
in sweetest mystic couplets doth proclaim
where winds sea-wafted palmy forests fan.

Haply undreamed of 'visions' glad thine eyes
in realms beyond thy fabled 'seven fold' birth
And clouds of darkness from thy spirit roll;
While lands far-off have heard with strange surprise
faint echoes of thy song, through all the earth
men hail thee brother, seer of spotless soul.

* English translations of all the Kurals and other Tamil poems cited in this monograph have been rendered by the Author of this monograph.

2

THE TIMES AND TEACHINGS OF TIRUVALLUVAR

What kind of Tamil Nadu is it that gave Tiruvalluvar his catholicity and universality of outlook, his wisdom, inspiration and language? There is reason to believe that he lived between the third and the first century B.C. During this period, the dynasties of the Chera, Chola and Pandya Kings, ruling over different parts of Tamil Nadu, had wide international contacts with countries ranging from Egypt, Greece and Rome in the west, Burma, Malaysia and China in the east, Ceylon in the south and the Himalayan kingdoms in the north. A representative of the Pandya King attended the coronation of Emperor Augustus in Rome, as mentioned by Strabo, a Greek who wrote his *Geography* in the first century A.D. R.B. Dixon, the celebrated archaeologist and historian, asserts that Tamils had extensive trade with Malaya, North Borneo and Northern Philippines even in the first millennium B.C. and that trade led to colonisation and conquest of those countries by the Tamils. According to Paul Pelliot, there is evidence in Chinese literature of diplomatic relations between the South Indian Coasts and the Chinese empire as early as the 2nd century B.C. A Chinese writer, Pan Kou, who lived at the end of the 1st century, mentions the fact that in the time of the Hua Emperor, the Chola King sent embassies to China *(vide* K. M. Panikkar, 'India and China'—Pages 17 & 19). Greeks were employed as palace guards at Madurai, the

capital of the Pandya Kingdom. The pearls that were available on the coastal areas of the Pandya Kingdom were world famous and attracted western merchants, who used to barter western wine for Indian pearls, rice and peacocks. Karikal Chola, a Chola King, invaded Ceylon and brought Gajabahu, the Ceylonese prince, as a prisoner along with 12,000 Sinhalese and engaged the prisoners in the construction of a Dam across the Cauveri river. A spirit of maritime adventure and curiosity characterised the Tamils.

Internally, the life of the Tamils was incarnadined with intermittent war among the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas.

Whilst Saivaism and Vaishnavaism were the indigenous religions, they became exposed in the 3rd century B.C. to three new religions, which invaded Tamil Nadu, and those were Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic Brahmanism. Along with their religious tenets, these religions brought new linguistic influences to bear upon the Tamils. Prakrit, Pali and Sanskrit were the languages in and through which the new religions conducted propaganda in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu was dotted with *Pattimanrams* or great debating assemblies in which sensational, metaphysical and religious debates took place. Greek, Roman and Egyptian thought had also intermingled with the thoughts of the Tamils in those great debating assemblies. The champions of different religions vied with one another in obtaining political influence and patronage and were trying by their intellectual and spiritual promises to woo the Tamil kings and win them over to their own denominational religions. The protagonists of each religion claimed to have supernatural powers to cure diseases, wipe out sins and secure bliss for its adherents in this world and the next. The performance of severe austerities, self-immolation and a denial of the reality of this world, marked the teachings of the invading religions. Vedic Brahmanism, in addition to its life negation, preached the caste system and advocated different Dharmas for the different castes. Even in its method of punishment for crimes, it was highly discriminatory, prescribing for the crime of murder the punishment of death for the Sudras and that of banishment for the twice-born. While the invading

religions regarded existence as something sorrowful and advocated renunciation of the world and its activities on the basis that the world itself is an illusion and existence itself something sorrowful, the Tamils had built up an independent value system of their own long before the 3rd century B.C. It was strongly egalitarian in character, ethical in temperament and emphasized what Albert Schweitzer would call "World and Life Affirmation", which urges men to serve their fellowmen, Society, the nation, mankind and indeed all that lives with the utmost love, whereas 'world and life negation' takes no interest in the world and regards man's journey through the earth, "either merely as a stage play in which it is his duty to participate or only as a puzzling pilgrimage through the land of Time to his Home in Eternity". The indigenous system of values was under attack and was in danger of mutilation or even extinction. The intermittent peace in Tamil Nadu was thus riven by great disputations about it and about.

Internally and externally, it was an age of great ferment in Tamil Nadu; the dominant Tamilian of the age was a charge of energy exposed to conflicting views and ideologies; he was boundless in ambition, longing to develop his capacities, given to violence of action and speech.

As it was a period of disputations, religious, and philosophical, orators developed in the Tamil Country and resorted to all the tricks of successful eloquence. They excelled in passionately presenting one side of a question, sometimes suppressing the truth and suggesting the falsehood. Rhetoricians stalked the country and stirred the air of Tamil Nadu with ingenious fallacies and pernicious shibboleths. Pali and Sanskrit were struggling for supremacy over Tamil, the language of the people. In fact, Pali appears to have succeeded in becoming the administrative language of the Pandya Kingdom. The protagonists of Tamil, it is reasonable to presume, agitated for the restoration of Tamil as the administrative language of the Pandya Kingdom. Vices, cruelties and violence must have been the by-products of this conflicting age.

The voyages of conquest and discovery expanded the horizon of the Tamilian mind. All the influences of those exciting times operated upon the Tamils.

Excessive theological debates led men from superstition to reason, from the denominational religions to the quintessence of spirituality. The III Tamil Sangam was a literary Academy, which had 49 members, and sat at Madurai, the capital of the Pandya Kingdom, and like the Academic Francaise, with its 48 members, stood sentinel over the Tamil language, guided its growth and reflected through its productions, the cream of Tamilian thought. This Academy enjoyed such prestige throughout the Tamil world that no new literary production would pass muster unless it received the imprimatur of its approval.

There was a large body of Sangam poetry, which preceded Tiruvalluvar's Kural. Tholkappiam, a well-known Tamil Grammar, had been produced in the 2nd century B.C. and there was Agathiyam, a grammar which had been compiled even earlier. These are the germs and antigens that made Tamil Nadu big with Tiruvalluvar. What Tiruvalluvar did was to preserve, codify and enlarge the value system of the Tamils after assimilating into it the best in the thoughts of Buddhism, Jainism and Vedic Brahmanism. Valluvar, who lived amidst the conflicts of dogma, achieved his intellectual enfranchisement by rising above the trivialities of controversy of his times and seeing the principles that unified and synthesized all religions. He had the wisdom to see the part in the light of the whole and the insight and the faculty of grasping at once the essential out of the non essential, the eternal out of the temporal and the whole out of the part. He attacked the most powerful customs of the age with a force unparalleled in poetry. He had the courage to declare:—

> By birth all men are equal;
> it is by the differences in their action
> that their worth is rendered unequal. (972)

He was charged indeed with a colossal energy of affirmation. In support of his affirmation of life, he argued that the world is real, because such eternal verities as compassion formed an integral part of earthly existence.

The sun of warm humanism and intense love and compassion shines over the entire work of Tiruvalluvar. Says Tiruvalluvar:—

> The loveless ones belong all to themselves;
> the loving ones
> belong to others—their bones and all. (72)

This is a remarkable exposition of love in its self-sacrificing and redemptive character. Valluvar proceeds to ask:—

> Of what avail are the outer organs
> to those
> who don't have love, the inner organ of the body. (79)

The dominating theme of Valluvar throughout his work is that love is the highest manifestation of the human spirit and that living in accordance with love is the highest virtue accessible to man. In fact, he lays stress on this truth in the following Kural:—

> Existence has its root
> in the very nature of love,
> and those who have no love
> are but skeletons covered over with skin. (80)

It is Valluvar's view that an act of love must be spontaneous and shall not be in expectation of a compensating reward in the future life. According to him, an act of love is to be valued for the present joy it gives. He says:—

> To beg is evil
> even if it were declared a virtue,
> but to give is good, even if by giving,
> future heavenly bliss is denied. (222)

The spontaneity of love is further explained by him in the following Kural:—

> In what way can the Earth recompense the clouds,
> which, without any thought of return,
> shower benevolence upon the Earth! (211)

It will be found that Valluvar evolved a commanding synthesis of the best in every religion, selecting from each the doctrines which he found most wholesome, and dovetailing it into the Tamilian system of spiritual and ethical thinking. This synthesis has been effected so adroitly that it has not come into apparent conflict with the quintessence of any religion. The result is that the adherents of every religion began to claim Tiruvalluvar as a practitioner of their own religion.

Of all the competing claims made by the different claimants, that made by the Christian scholars seems the quaintest. The wrong notion that compassion, love and active service to fellowmen were not preached by any pre-Christian thinker seems to be the basis of this claim. Stephen Neill, a distinguished English theologian, gives the quietus to the Christian claim in the following words: "Dr. Pope's enthusiasm for this Tamil author has led him, however, into quaint speculations as to possible Christian influences in this great work. 'We are quite warranted in imagining Tiruvalluvar, the thoughtful poet… whose one thought was to gather knowledge from every source… We may fairly, I say, picture him passing along the sea-shore with the Christian teachers and imbibing Christian ideas, tinged with the peculiarities of the Alexandrian School, and working them into his own wonderful Kural' (G.U. Pope: *The Sacred Kural,* 1886, III). I am afraid that we are warranted by nothing other than a powerful and pious imagination, spreading its wings beyond the limits of what sober scholarship will underwrite. The literary critic uses the word "impossible" with caution—so many unlikely things have proved to be true. But I must confess

that I regard any Christian influence in the Kural as so *unlikely as to border on the impossible"* [vide *Bhakti; Hindu and Christian* (1974)—Stephen Neill—Pages 43 and 44]. Another reason which reinforces this conclusion is that Tiruvalluvar lived in pre-Christian times. In certain respects, he not only anticipated Jesus Christ but also went beyond his teachings, as will be shown later.

The Age of Valluvar

It is difficult to fix with any degree of precision the age of Valluvar. In the world of Tamil scholarship, the age of Tiruvalluvar has been a theme for wildly differing speculations. But there is some literary and historical evidence in this behalf, which is not conclusive but only indicative. *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* are two wellknown epics of the Sangam age. Ilango Adigal, the author of *Silappathikaram* and Sathanar, the author of *Manimekalai,* were contemporaries, and there is internal evidence in these two epics to attest to that fact. According to Sathanar, the Chera King Senguttuvan built a temple for Kannagi, the heroine of *Silappathikaram.* In the 3rd Canto of *Silappathikaram* it is reported that Gajabahu, the King of Lanka, personally attended the worship at the Kannagi temple along with the Chera King Senguttuvan. The question arises, when did Gajabahu live? The *History of Ceylon* (Volume I, Part 1, pages 183-185) shows that there had been two kings by the same name Gajabahu; one ruled Ceylon from 114 to 136 A.D., whereas the other ruled Ceylon in the 12th century A.D. Most Tamil scholars agree that *Manimekalai* and *Silappathikaram* were written in the 2nd century A.D. and the Gajabahu, who worshipped at the temple of Kannagi, is the Gajabahu of the 2nd century A.D. In *Manimekalai,* Tirukkural has been quoted with adoration and the author of the Tirukkural is referred to as 'Poyyil Pulavan', (the poet who is free from untruth). In Silappathikaram also, several Tirukkurals have been quoted with reverence. Some Sangam works, which demonstrably belong to the 2nd century

A.D. refer to Tiruvalluvar as the 'Divine Poet'. These evidences show that Tiruvalluvar must have lived sometime before the 2nd century A.D. In those days, dissemination of information was necessarily tardy. It may not be wrong, therefore, to assume that it would have taken one or two centuries for the reputation of Tiruvalluvar to be established so firmly that Sathanar of the 2nd Century should have called him 'The Divine Poet'. According to Dr. M. Rajamanickanar, Tiruvalluvar must have lived at some time between the 3rd Century B.C. and the 1st Century B.C. *(vide* his *History of Tamil Language and Literature,* page 123). His cautious and wideranging estimate may be accepted.

3

TRANSLATIONS AND CITATIONS

Tirukkural, the work of Tiruvalluvar, is the most translated, the most cited, and the most citable of Tamil literary works.

An arrestingly astute couplet of the poet was explained in English to Dr. Graul, a great German Scholar; and he was so much taken up with it that be learnt the Tamil language in order to enjoy the Kural in the original and then proceeded to translate it into German in 1854 and into Latin in 1856. Here is my rather inadequate English translation of the Kural (No. 1091) that startled the German Scholar:—

> Two are the looks
> the in-drinking eyes of this maid have—
> the one that makes you ill
> and the other that cures you.

After translating a good portion of the Tirukkural, Dr. Graul declared, "No translation can convey any idea of its charming effect. It is truly an apple of gold in a net-work of silver."

In about 1730 A.D., Books 1 and 2 of the Kural were translated into Latin by Fr. Beschi, one of the greatest of European Tamil scholars. Fr. Beschi came to Tamil Nadu as a proselytizing missionary and he had the unshakeable conviction that all Pagans were destined to go to Hell. After translating the Kural and steeping himself in the lofty and ennobling sentiments of Tiruvalluvar, Fr.

Beschi felt constrained to concede that the tongue of Tiruvalluvar, that sang these aphorisms, could not have gone to Hell, even though, being a Pagan, he must have gone there!

M. Ariel, a great French Savant, translated in 1848 some fragments of the Kural into French and he referred to an earlier French translation of the Kural made by some unknown author in 1730 A.D. and kept in the Bibliotheque Nationale of France.

The translation of the Kural into the European languages seems to have gone a long way to dispel from the minds of European thinkers, especially European missionaries, their misgivings about the character and culture of the Indian people. Rev. Dr. J. Lazarus, a missionary himself, proclaimed, "The Kural cannot be improved nor its plan made more perfect. It is a perfect mosaic in itself. A slight change in the size, shape or colour of a single stone would mar the beauty of the whole. It is refreshing to think that a Nation, which has produced so great a man and so unique a work, cannot be a *hopeless despicable race.* The morality he preached could not have grown except out of an essentially moral soil". Fr. J. Lazarus added by way of caution to his fellow missionaries, "To those, therefore, who labour for the consolidation of the Tamil people, the Kural must be a work of peculiar and intense interest."

There was a notion among the European Christian missionaries that humility, charity and forgiveness of injuries are virtues which have not been preached by the non-Christian nations. Rev. Dr. G.U. Pope, who translated the Kural into English in 1886, exploded this prejudice and observed, "Grant says that humility, charity and forgiveness of injuries are not described by Aristotle. Now these three are everywhere forcibly inculcated by this Tamil moralist *(Tiruvalluvar).* The Kural owes much of its popularity to its exquisite poetic form. The brevity rendered necessary by the form gives effect to the utterances of the great Tamil "Master of Sentences". They are the choicest of moral epigrams. Their resemblance to gnomic poetry of Greece is remarkable as to the subjects, their sentiments

and the state of Society when they were uttered. Something of the same kind is found in Greek epigrams, in Martial and the Latin elegiac verse. There is a beauty in the periodic character of the Tamil construction in many of these verses that reminds the reader of the happiest efforts of Propertius."

Rev. Percival, a perceptive English critic, proclaimed: "Nothing certainly in the whole compass of human language can equal the force and terseness of the sententious distichs in which the author conveys the lessons of wisdom he utters."

It is, therefore, no surprise that Tirukkural is the most translated of the Tamil works. It has been translated into Latin, German, French, Dutch, Finnish, Polish, Russian, Chinese, Fiji, Malay and Burmese and into such Indian languages as Sanskrit, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, Telugu and Malayalam. There are in fact as many as 82 translations of the Tirukkural in foreign languages.

The thoughts of Valluvar have dominated the intellectual scene of the Tamils for over two millennia. The Tamil people regard the Tirukkural as the Tamil Veda. The Tiruvalluvar Malai *(The Garland of Tiruvalluvar)* is a compilation of Panegyrics sung partly by the contemporaries of Tiruvalluvar and partly by those who came long after him. Kapilar, who might have been a contemporary of Tiruvalluvar, sang as follows:

> The droplet of water
> that is tinier than a grain of *Tinai,*
> reflects the tall and stately palmyrah tree;
> equally vast is the tiny Kural's
> range of reflection.

Pavanar, another poet said:

> Vishnu came in the form of a Dwarf,
> and growing taller and taller,
> took two giant steps
> and measured the whole of the Universe;
> the omniscient Valluvar, with the two feet of his Kural,

has measured all the thoughts
that have ever crossed the mind of Man.

Tothamanar said:

The Brahmins stand by the four Vedas,
but they would not reduce the same to writing
lest the evocatory power of the Vedas
should be destroyed;
but Valluvar reduced his scripture to writing
and its potency will not be impaired, whether it is recited
by the mighty or the weak.

Mankudi Maruthanar in his poem says:

The Kural is a scripture,
which is easy to recite,
but difficult to comprehend;
the more it is reflected upon by men without evil,
the more it would melt their hearts and minds.

Vannakkam Satbanar said:

If we examine Sanskrit and Tamil,
it would be difficult to judge
which is greater than which;
for Sanskrit possesses the Veda and
Tamil possesses the Tirukkural of Valluvar.

Avvaiyar said:

May that Lamp of Spiritual Truth,
(the Divine Poet, Tiruvalluvar)
burn bright for ever, as he does today,
and dispel the darkness from the human heart.

Theni Kudi Kiranar has, in a rare song, expatiated upon the effect of Tiruvalluvar's thoughts on his contemporaries. Evidently

Tiruvalluvar lived in times when there was great conflict of ideas and a good deal of dialectical warfare, and in the resulting confusion, people had mistaken the false for the true. Tiruvalluvar tore the mask of Truth from the face of Untruth and exposed its falsity convincingly to his contemporaries. He also re-enthroned Truth, which had been over-powered by falsehood, and was lying in the dust, unrecognised. It is this transformation that Theni Kudi Kiranar refers to in a song, which may be translated as follows:

> The Divine Tiruvalluvar by uttering the Tirukkural
> worked a transformation in the minds of living men,
> and it was this:—that which was false and
> belonged to the realm of falsehood
> was demonstrated by him to be false,
> and that which was not false, but was true and
> belonged to the realm of truth,
> was proved by him to be luminously true.

In the poetry of the third Sangam, which lasted for 300 years till the end of the 1st century A.D. Tirukkural has been quoted with great reverence and approval. Kambar, who was the greatest Tamil poet and who lived in the 9th century. A.D., assimilated the ideas of the Kural and wove them into the fabric of his poetry after giving them an original twist of his own. Most of the major Tamil poets including those of the 20th century have in several ways celebrated in song their indebtedness to Tiruvalluvar. Kural has so deeply penetrated the thinking of the Tamils that even unlettered Tamils may be heard quoting the Kural. When Dr. C. N. Annadurai, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, directed selected Kurals to be inscribed on the panels of nationalised buses, a Member of the Tamil Nadu State Legislature asked him cynically, for whose edification are these Kurals inscribed on the buses? Is it for the benefit of the bus crew or the bus passengers? Dr. Annadurai retorted, 'It is for the benefit of all those who have eyes to see'. Dr. Xavier S. Thani Nayagam has drawn attention to the earliest record of a non-Indian use of the Tirukkural, which is to be found in Fernao de Queyroz's

Conquest of Ceylon in which the Franciscan Missionary Fra Joam de Vila Conde, in a religious debate at the Court of Bhuvanaika Bahu of Kotte, Ceylon (1521-1551) cited the Tirukkural in support of the doctrines which he preached: "Read one of the books you have which you have maliciously hidden, composed by Valuer, *(evidently Valluvar)* a native of Melipur *(Mylapore)* and the contemporary of St. Thomas. There you will find the union of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son, the Redemption of Man, the cause of his fall, the remedy for his faults and miseries and finally the preservation of his state." This quotation shows that the Kural was so popular even in Ceylon as to attract the notice of the Portuguese Missionary Joam de Vila Conde.

4

THE PERSONALITY OF TIRUVALLUVAR

There is no contemporaneous record from which we could reconstruct the personality of Tiruvalluvar. But there are good many legends about him, which have been handed down from generation to generation, and there is also some internal evidence in his work, from which one may perhaps visualise what Tiruvalluvar was like.

According to legend, Tiruvalluvar was a weaver by profession. 'Valluvar' is the title of a caste of men who were either soothsayers or priests, and who used to mount upon the backs of elephants and proclaim royal notifications by tom-tom. 'Tiru', which is the prefix to Valluvar, connotes in Tamil anything that is holy. Tiruvalluvar means the holy man belonging to the Valluva community and the Tirukkural means the 'Holy Couplet'. Neither of these words is a proper noun, and a French author noting this anomaly, remarked, 'This is a book without a name by an author without a name'.

It may however be taken as certain that Tiruvalluvar lived in Mylapore *(town of peacocks),* which is a part of the present city of Madras. Nowhere in Tamil Nadu, except in Mylapore, is there a temple dedicated to the memory of Tiruvalluvar. The poet's home, it may be fancied, was a place near this temple, around which, according to Rev. G.U. Pope, "there still lingers a strange oriental beauty, and which has probably not changed much since the time when the passer-by might have heard the click of the shuttle mingling with the low chaunt of his melodious words…. There is

a sacred tank still with a belt of cocoanut palms and leaf-covered houses, in anyone of which the poet might have lived".

The sea-shore is close by and we can imagine Tiruvalluvar walking hand in hand with Greek, Roman, Buddhist, Jain, Vedic, Vaishnavaite and Saivaite philosophers along the sea coast discussing the eternal verities of life and the nuances of the art of living. Savants and sages from far and near used to visit Tiruvalluvar, sojourn with him, bathe with him in the sea close by, discuss with him, sitting on the pial of his house, and eat with him the simple and the wholesome food served by Vasuki, Valluvar's wife. He had a great genius for friendship and parting with the enlightened men after their sojourn with him for some days gave him great anguish. One day after seeing off his friends and standing in the street corner till they had disappeared in the dim distance, Valluvar came back with a heavy heart, sat on the pial of his house and brooded over the departure of his friends. Then he decided good-humouredly to befriend, not the cultured and the enlightened, but only the fools and the idiots. **In** one of his Kurals, he supports this decision with the following words:—

> Supremely sweet is the friendship of fools;
> for
> when they depart
> you shed not a tear. (839)

One Margasahayam was struck with the simplicity of Valluvar's living and the loftiness of his thought. He, therefore, proposed that Valluvar might marry his daughter, Vasuki. While willing to marry her, Tiruvalluvar wished to put Vasuki's temper to the test. He told Margasahayam, "If Vasuki will take this quantity of sand and boil it into rice for my meal, I will take her as my wife". Vasuki unquestioningly took the basket of sand given to her and proceeded to boil it in the conviction that the holy man's wishes would materialise. A miracle was wrought on her behalf, and as she brought the baked sand, it became the rice for which Valluvar

had asked. At once, Valluvar accepted her for wife and lived with her in joy and peace.

Their married life was the embodiment of all the house-hold virtues to which the Kural refers in ennobling terms. According to the Kural, the ideal householder leads on earth a dedicated life, keenly conscious of his duties to the living and to the departed; his wife, who is his partner in life and who is the author of all his glory, lives a modest and frugal life, adores her husband as her God and guards her chastity with unsleeping vigilance.

Apparently, the couple had a number of children, who were treated as the treasures of the home. Their prattling voices were music to their parents, more musical than the lute and the flute. Tiruvalluvar loved children with great tenderness. He sang:—

> To touch the body of children
> is pleasure to the body;
> to listen to their babble
> is pleasure to the ear. (65)

The cooked food that the children's tiny fingers had played with became transmuted into ambrosia for the parents, and the one aim of the father of the family was to make the children worthier than himself. Affection permeated the family.

Valluvar's house had an open door and he welcomed with smiling face and with sweet speech every guest and shared with him his meal. Courtesy in speech, gratitude for every little act of kindness, justice in all his dealings, mastery of everyone of his impulses, quickness in the performance of every duty, purity, patience, and a forbearing disposition, marked his daily life.

His heart was free from envy and he was moderate in his desires. He spoke no evil of others. He refrained from unmeaning words; he dreaded the touch of evil; he was liberal in benefactions. This is a picture of an ideal householder which Valluvar portrays and of which, according to legend, Valluvar was an exemplar.

Years after the marriage of Valluvar, a stranger came to his cottage and asked the question, "Which is greater—domestic life or

a life of asceticism?" The sage made no verbal reply to the question but he entertained the stranger as his guest for some days and left him to see his domestic life for himself and find an answer to his question.

One day while Vasuki was drawing water from the well, Tiruvalluvar suddenly called her and the obedient wife came forthwith leaving the bucket hanging midway in the well. The stranger was surprised that the power behind the bucket could defy the laws of gravity.

Another day as Vasuki brought to her husband his morning meal of cold rice, Tiruvalluvar complained that it burnt his fingers. Vasuki did not argue; she took her husband on trust and began to fan the cold rice.

Another day in the glare of the noon-day sun, Tiruvalluvar let fall his shuttle and called for a light to search for it. The obedient Vasuki promptly lit a lamp and brought it to him.

The stranger, who watched all these incidents, found a decisive answer to his question: Where one could have a wife like Vasuki, domestic life would be the best. Where the wife is the reverse of what Vasuki was, the life of the ascetic should be preferred.

Valluvar and Vasuki lived a peaceful wedded life for a long time. As Vasuki was about to die, a question, which she dare not put to her husband all those years, was troubling her, and Valluvar lovingly coaxed her to formulate her question without hesitation. She said "Ever since our marriage, I have been, at your bidding, placing a cup of water and a needle by the side of the leaf, which I have been spreading out for your meal. May I know, my Lord, why it was." The husband replied, "I wanted the cup of water and a needle because, if you spilt a grain of rice while serving me, I might pick it up with a needle and purify it in the water". There was no occasion, however, for using the needle and the water". As soon as this doubt was cleared, Vasuki breathed her last.

After her death and after cremating her mortal remains, the Divine poet sang a soul-stirring song in lamentation over the death of Vasuki and the song may be translated as follows:—

oh, my beloved, who is sweeter than my daily food,
oh, my darling, who has never once disobeyed me,
oh, gentle one, who chafing my feet, would go to bed
after me and would be the earlier to rise,
art thou gone!
how can slumber ever come to my unslumbering eyes?

We know a trifle or two about Valluvar's personal taste. But then we must not mistake our guess-work for biography. In Kural No. 1191, Tiruvalluvar says:—

The women, who love their husbands and are loved by
them—
it is they who have procured the seedless fruit
of sexual delight. (1191)

When we masticate a fruit like the pomegranate, which is full of seeds, the enjoyment of the pulp by the palate is often annoyingly interrupted by the irrelevant seeds. But when we dig our teeth into the plantain or the seedless grape, nothing intercepts the sensuous pleasure of eating it. That Tiruvalluvar must have compared the empathy between a well-tuned pair to the eating of a seedless fruit would suggest that he had an undoubted preference for seedless fruits.

He was full of benevolence and bonhomie. Addressing a foul-mouthed vituperator, he would tell him with a genial smile:—

Why use foul words
when there is an abundance of sweet words to choose
from?
it is just like going out of the way
to pilfer unripe fruits
when sweet ripe fruits are within your reach. (100)

After arresting his attention by this homely simile, Valluvar would appeal to his selfish interest and say:—

> "Sweet words produce sweet results. Will anyone, who has observed these results, ever use harsh and repellent words?" *(Kural* No. 99)

The gift of laughter seems to give Valluvar an elevation from which he looks at the frailties and incongruities of human life with the universal understanding and forgiveness of Shakespeare. Laughter ensures Valluvar against a sour pessimism. In fact, he advises us to cultivate the divine gift of laughter and adds:—

> To him, who knows not to laugh,
> this infinite universe would,
> in broad day light,
> seem steeped in darkness. (999)

His intense compassion for his fellowmen often brought tears to his eyes and his anger with evil was something to behold. He asks:—"Do you know what is more pernicious than poverty?" Then he pauses for a while and answers the question by saying "It is poverty that is more pernicious than poverty".

He had learnt the all too rarely learnt lesson of pointed brevity in a few luminous words. He would go to the bottom of his question, and then take his seat, like a forensic giant. He understood the laws of social being so well that he could offer the same to us like an ambrosial drink.

In the age-long controversy between environment and heredity, he threw his weight in support of environment. He believed that a man owes the growth of his personality to the environment in which he lives rather than to the genes he has inherited. In his Chapter on the 'Avoidance of Mean Company', he says:—

> Even as water takes on the nature of the soil
> through which it flows
> men take on the wisdom of the environment
> in which they live. (452)

In another Kural, he says:—

> Wisdom, which appears to reside inside the mind of man,
> actually exists in his environment. (454)

Valluvar was generous and considerate, usually cheerful, good-humoured and vivacious; he was capable of warm and steadfast friendship; quick to forgive and forget. He had a flair for epigram, for compressing reams of wisdom in a line.

Tiruvalluvar was a highly sensitive man and he said:—

> The world will regard him as the sanctuary of virtuous sensitivity, who would shrink in shame as much for other's guilt as for his own. *(Kural* No. 1015)

A delicate sense of refinement marks him out. He wrote in Kural No. 1012:—

> Food, clothing and the rest mark all men in common;
> it is only a delicate sense of shame
> which separates the few from the many.

Valluvar was in love with every branch of knowledge. Ideas were his food and drink. He gathered them, savoured them, sampled them and poured them out into his diary and after cogitating over them for years, coordinated them and systematized them and then distilled them into poetry. Seldom have ideas or sentiments been honoured with such painstaking art.

In one Kural he speaks of "Vazhuvam ennum serukku" or the "the magnificent pride in being alive". This reminds us of the Frenchman's "Joie de vivre" (Joy of living).

Legend asserts that Tiruvalluvar came in the prime of manhood to Madurai, to get his Tirukkural approved by the Tamil Sangham (The Tamil Academy of Letters). The Academicians were so strict and jealous that they would not easily accord recognition to Valluvar. They pilloried him with questions but Tiruvalluvar discomfited them by answering their questions with effortless ease.

Ultimately, they said, "Listen, oh, Tiruvalluvar, we will put you to the final test. If the golden bench floating in the tank inside the Meenakshi Temple will accept your book, we will accept it; if it will not, we will reject it". Thereupon they spread themselves out on the floating bench and sat pressing against one another without leaving the smallest space for the Tirukkural. Undaunted, Tiruvalluvar approached the floating bench with the Kural in hand. As soon as he came near, the golden bench stretched itself so that Tiruvalluvar could sit on it comfortably along with his book. Then the book commenced to swell so enormously that it shoved one Academician after another off the bench until the entire Academy was sunk in the tank. The golden bench thus adjudged Tiruvalluvar as greater than all the Academicians put together. Ever since Tiruvalluvar has been known as the divine Poet. What a parable to conjure up and conjure with!

To read the divine poet's Kural as it should be read, it is necessary to appreciate the many-sided genius of its author and his place in the canonical succession of the high priests of thought. One must therefore come back to the Kural in the fullness of knowledge and the ripeness of age. The Tirukkural should be read, not in one huge gargantuan gulp, but in small homoeopathic doses, as one would taste a priceless elixir, in which case the reader will realise that Valluvar's writings call for increased participation in the human adventure and are in themselves a reverential celebration of the joy of life

5

INTERPRETATION OF THE KURAL

The Kural is so terse and profound that it would yield its secret only to those who meditate upon it with reverence; traditionally, there have been 10 Tamil commentators of the Tirukkural. The best known among them is Parimelazhagar. Some of the commentators have been reading into the Kural what they desired to discover. There are certain Kurals, which even the accumulated wisdom of the ancient commentators has been unable to unravel. The late lamented Rasikamani T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, who was the greatest aesthete produced by Tamil Nadu in the 20th Century and who could compare favourably with Saint Beauve of France, has been able to throw new light upon many of the Kurals. Take, for instance, the following Kural:—

Udavi Varaithanru Udavi; Udavi
seyappattar salbin varaithu.

I may translate this Kural as follows:—

The act of kindness is bounded,
not by its own boundaries,
but by those
of the culture of the recipient. (105)

Perhaps, this translation of mine does not bring out the terse and elliptical character of the original text. It was given to the late

Rasikamani to delve into this Kural and bring out the real meaning of it. He used to illustrate the truth embedded in this Kural with an imaginative anecdote:—A rich man, who was a contemporary of Valluvar, died and the rich man's son celebrated the first anniversary of his death by feasting a number of needy and poor Brahmins. After the feast, the Brahmins came out of the mansion one after another. Valluvar stationed himself at the street corner and put a question to each of the outcoming guests, "Did your host give you any money in addition to the feast". The first Brahmin said sourly, "He gave me five beggarly coins". The description of the golden coins as "beggarly" was noted down by Valluvar in his diary—"5 golden coins are equal to five beggarly ones". Valluvar put the same question to the next Brahmin and he said "Well, Sir, he gave me five golden coins". Valluvar noted, "In this man's estimate, five gold coins are just equal to five gold coins". The third man answered, "I am a man in need. The five coins given by that noble man are as precious to me as 500 gold coins". When Valluvar repeated the question to the fourth Brahmin, his eyes glistened with gratitude and he danced with joy and said, "If that gentlemen had kept these coins safely locked up in his box, they would not refuse to remain inside. What a generous giver he is! My wife and I and our dozen children have been starving for a week and these five gold coins will sustain us for a month. I regard this as a gift of five million crowns". Tiruvalluvar noted down these answers and pondered for long over the different values assigned by the different recipients to the same number of coins. Then it flashed upon him that an act of kindness has no intrinsic value of its own and that its value depends upon an extrinsic factor, namely, the culture of the recipient; the higher the culture of the taker, the higher the value of the aid rendered by the giver. This is a truth of psychology, which ranks among the great discoveries and insights of Tiruvalluvar. If after listening to this exposition of T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, we re-read the Kural, it is ready to yield its innermost meaning:—

The act of kindness is bounded,
not by its own boundaries,

but by those
of the culture of the recipient (105)

Rasikamani used to say that for 1000 years after the Kural was written, nobody in Tamil Nadu understood this Kural till Kambar, the Emperor of Tamil Poesy came on the scene in the 9th Century A.D, and quoted this Kural in his Ramayana, but with a twist characteristic of his genius.

Kambar makes Visvamitra tell Rama and Lakshmana the dramatic story of Mahabali. Lord Vishnu took the form of Vamana, a dwarf, and went to the Court of the King, Mahabali, and said, "Give me three feet of land, if you have it". "Granted", said the generous king and confirmed the gift by pouring water over the outstretched palm of the dwarf. As soon as the water touched his palm, the dwarf grew taller and taller, and with his raised foot, measured the three worlds and having outcompassed the Heavens and finding no room to put it in, brought it down on the head of Mahabali, wiped out his ego and absorbed him in its Ultimate Substance. In this context, Kambar quotes Valluvar and explains "The dwarf's figure grew taller and taller and outcompassed the Heavens, like the little help rendered to a great personage", Three feet donated by Mahabali, though very small in extent, had been expanded by the Infinite Donee to the dimensions of the whole cosmos, ultimately destroying the giver himself. Kambar gives thus an exquisitely ironical twist to the Kural of Valluvar, at the same time showing that he had fully understood the dimensions of this epigrammatic Kural. If this Kural had to wait for a thousand years before it could be understood and appreciated by Kambar, Kambar's re-interpretation of the Kural had to wait for another thousand years before it could be understood and appreciated by the Rasikamani.

Another Kural, which could not be understood without the loving interpretation of T.K.C., runs as follows:—

"Love supports virtue alone," say the fools;
it supports vice as well. (76)

The commentators have been saying that love helps us to extricate ourselves from vice. But T.K.C. gave a different interpretation and illustrated it by an incident of common occurrence. A habitual thief was required to attend a police station at 6 a.m. every day. Having half a dozen children and his wife starving at home he would go running 30 miles to a distant place in the night, see a festival crowd sleeping in the open, risk his life by stealing into the crowd and robbing the women of their jewels, run back to his village with his booty and after depositing the same, he would be back at the police station on time to make his appearance. What is it that has given him the courage, the skill and the adroitness to go on this escapade staking his very life? It is undoubtedly his love for his starving wife and children. According to T.K.C., Tiruvalluvar says in this Kural that love is at the bottom, not only of virtue, but also of vice.

6

WORD-WORSHIP

No thinker, ancient or modern, has, like Valluvar, pointed to the precise and discriminating use of words as a means of spiritual illumination.

In the Chapter on eloquence, Valluvar says:—

> Utter not a word
> without making sure
> there is no other word to beat it. (645)

Adherence to this injunction calls for a new discipline of a very arduous and vigilant kind in the use of words. Before reducing a thought to words, Valluvar would require us to marshall before the mind's eye all the apparently synonymous words available in the language for the expression of the given idea, make a survey of the same and reject the words incapable of expressing all the nuances of the idea, let the remaining words compete with one another in the function of expression and finally choose just that word, which beats all others in putting across the idea in all its subtlety. In this process of choosing, the thinker would have to forbid himself the use of many a seductive but imprecise word, and in a spirit of yogic concentration, ferret out the inevitable word and then use it. Valluvar was keenly aware of the esoteric connection between language and thought and he knew that even as thought influenced language, language could influence thought. He also knew that

when words were chosen with so much care and deliberateness, those words would contain something of the wordless in them and such words would become the gates through which one could enter Silence. When words express what Silence conceives, they become the guides to meditation. Valluvar regarded the abuse of words as a sacrilege. When words express, not the chatterings of a distracted or frivolous mind, but the deeper silences of the soul, they would lift the speaker and the listener alike to a plane of spiritual awareness. Consequently, Tiruvalluvar called upon speakers to cultivate a reverence for words—a word-worship. In Kural No. 644, Valluvar makes a declaration of his faith:—

There is no greater virtue
    and indeed, no greater Wealth,
than the ability
    to use words
with the fullest cognizance of their power.

Even Marcus Aurelius, who, advocated sobriety of speech, did not go so far as to say that the skill and discrimination involved in the use of the inevitable word constituted the greatest human virtue.

It is not everyone, who, in the struggle for self-expression, acquires perfect mastery over words, and Valluvar refers with acid scorn, to those men, learned and unlearned, whose tragi-comic lust for words is out of all proportion to their ability to use them.

Those who have learnt not
    to utter a few faultless words
lust, alas!
    after myriad-worded speech. (649)

Men, who know not
    to communicate their learning to their listeners
are like flowers
    which spread not their perfume
even after they blossom. (650)

In the chapter on "Understanding of the Audience", Valluvar describes those, who choose their words according to the character of their audience, as "those men of purity who know the genius of words" (Kural No. 711). The men, who employ words with an intimate awareness of their meaning, are, according to Tiruvalluvar, "the benevolent men who know the gait of words". (712). "Pre-eminent among all the acts classified as good is the act of reticence, which restrains a man from rushing to speak first in an assembly of elders". (715). In Kural No. 716, Valluvar reinforces his tremendous concern for the right word by saying that a verbal error committed by a speaker before a gathering of erudite scholars is as bad as going astray from the path of virtue.

The learning of the learned
    will shine all the brighter
before men,
    who are unerring
in the choice of words. (717)

Conversely, men who can speak penetratingly before an august assembly, would not care to speak even inadvertently before an assembly of fools (No. 719).

Valluvar must have been holding discourses before a variety of audiences; insensitive and unresponsive audiences angered Valluvar into asserting with remorseful indignation,—

To discourse before men,
    who are not intellectually your equals,
is like
    draining nectar
        down the drain (720)

One wonders if the soap-box orator and the tub-thumper of the Hyde Park variety infected the public life of Tamil Nadu 2000 years ago. For Tiruvalluvar devotes one whole chapter of 10 Kurals to the paramount need for abstaining from uttering unproductive and wasteful words and slogans. He admonishes the speakers of his times in these terms:—

You may even
utter words productive of evil;
but utter not words,
which are barren and fruitless. (197)

Valluvar knew that an uncritical public opinion was responsible for the growth and development of trash and piffle and non-sensical talk on the public platform. Consequently, he turned his anger from the talkers to their hysterical admirers, and said:—

The one, who applauds empty words,
is miscalled a man;
he must be called the chaff among men. (196)

The Tamil Society, which drew such opprobrium from Tiruvalluvar two millienia ago, must have had something in common with the sophisticated inanities of the current times.

Public speaking is a democratic virtue and flourishes best in a democratic set-up. The Uthiramerur stone inscription of the 10th century refers to the prevalence in Tamil Nadu of elections to various administrative and legislative bodies by resorting to the ballot box; the voter used to inscribe the name of his favourite candidate in a palm leaf and drop the same into pots which were used as ballot boxes. In the 77th Stanza in Ahananuru (of the 1st century A.D.) there is also reference to Kudavolai (the palm leaf ballots dropped into pots). It is, therefore, fairly clear that during the age of Valluvar orators galore stalked the Tamil Country and attempted not only to proselytize men but also to capture the electorate and influence their voting.

Outraged by speeches, which illustrated many of the infirmities Valluvar has vehemently denounced, it is small wonder that Tiruvalluvar, who performed Tapas with words, should have called for a rigorous discipline in the use of words and declared that there was no greater ideal for men than the pursuit of exactness and discrimination in the use of language.

7

SENSUAL LOVE

The third canto of the Kural, Kamathu Pal, has a sensual temperature fusing all life into love. But in the Kurals in this canto, love rises above the coarse physical basis of mutual itching for mutual titillation. A prudish Englishman, who translated the first two parts of the Kural, refrained from translating the third, saying, "It could not be translated into any European language without exposing the translator to infamy". Another Englishman refuted this statement and said, "I am persuaded that it is perfectly pure in its tendency and in the intention of its wise and high-souled composition". Such difference of opinion only illustrates the kind of misunderstanding which enshrouds the central fact of human existence. Valluvar had a wholesome regard for sex and had no inhabitations in his attitute towards it. As he himself says:—

Softer than flower is love
    and but a few
can indulge in its delicacy. (1289)

A lover, who has sunk his soul in the infinite varieties of his beloved, makes this arresting and memorable reflection:—

The more you know,
    the more you know that you don't;
likewise,

the more you enjoy this lass,
the more you know you haven't. (1110)

The idea that the fresh knowledge acquired today reveals our ignorance of yesterday, has been applied by the Sage with incredible propriety to the domain of love, and the lover in his voyage of discovery, finds that yesterday's pleasures are as nothing compared to today's.

A lover and his beloved are in an intoxicated intimacy. Says the lover:—

In one simultaneous moment,
she gives the pleasures
of the senses five—
touching, tasting,
seeing, smelling, hearing. (1101)

In this union, there is no distinction between the enjoyer, the enjoyed and the enjoyment. Naturally, the lover, who has passed from sex into super-consciousness, asks:—-

Is heaven sweeter
than slumbering
on the soft shoulders
of the woman you love? (1103)

Valluvar tilts his kaleidoscope and enables us to see the ever-changing patterns of love. The lover, who is about to go abroad, comes to take leave of his beloved. Unable to bear the prospect of separation, she shouts in anguish:—

Of your decision
not to depart,
you may tell me;
of your hard-hearted return after your departure,
tell those who survive it. (1151)

In Homoeopathy, a medicine that produces a disease is itself given to the patient to cure that disease, unlike in allopathy where the opposite principle is applied. Tiruvalluvar's lover would seem to be aware of both these principles and he says of his beloved:—

The medicine that cures a disease
is its opposite;
but for the malady this girl induces,
she alone is the cure. (1102)

He proceeds to say:—

The friendship between this girl and me
is like that
between the body and the soul. (1122)

A separated lover tells her mate:—

Fire burns you if you touch it;
can it, like love-sickness,
burn you when you keep yourself away from it? (1159)

In her sleep, the sweet-heart is continuously dreaming of her lover; but when she wakes up, the dream is rudely interrupted and her poignant separation is brought home to her.

She laments;

"if that blasted condition of waking were not there,
lovers will, in dreams,
remain for ever inseparate." (1216)

Thinking of her husband, who has gone to a far-off land in search of livelihood, the wife complains:—

While I am asleep,
he lies on my shoulders,
but the moment I awake
he rushes into my heart! (1218)

The different moods of pre-marital love are brought out by Valluvar with great intensity. The hero of a thousand battles falls in love with a slender girl and finds all his hard-hearted courage ebbing away at the sight of the girl, and he complains:—

My majestic manhood,
    at which my foes in the battle field tremble,
how does it break down at sight of this girl
    with the luminous forehead! (1088)

The girl was shy at first sight, but ultimately yielded to the overtures of the lover. She ruminates over it in retrospect and marvels:—

Manifold are the wiles of the stealer of my heart;
    is not his language of surrender
the weapon
    that breaks down the defences of
        maiden-hood! (1258)

At the first encounter, after a long spell of separation between the two, the girl is both angry and aggrieved that her beloved has not met her and she breaks out:—

Those whose hearts melt like fat in the fire—
    how dare they say
"we will stand rooted in separation". (1260)

The girl suspects that her lover's love is not as intense as her own. Addressing her own heart, she says:—

Thou seest his heart clinging to him,
    oh! heart, why dost thou not cling to me. (1291)

The lover, on his part, is no less in torment. He speaks out his anguish in the following Kural:—

I knew not before that thing called Death;
now I know it;
it has the form of a woman with large
and battling eyes. (1083)

He recollects the face of his sweet-heart as it blushed in modesty and he says:—

She wears modesty and the guileless look of the fawn;
why mar her charm
by loading her with jewels. (1089)

He reminisces over her sweet, little gestures that go to strengthen his love. He recollects:—

She looked, and looking, she lowered her head,
that gesture is the thing that watered
our plant of love. (1093)

It seemed as if her modesty was only a device to attract his attention:—

As I gazed at her,
she would gaze downward at the ground,
and as I gazed away,
she would gaze at me
and softly smile (1094)

Sex and jealousy are twin sisters and the girl, who is in love wishes to possess her lover solely and exclusively. But she finds that he is exposed to the gaze of other women, who drink of his beauty. This rouses her jealousy and she complains:—

All women's eyes in common
drink of your beauty;
so,
I would clasp not your promiscuous breast. (1311)

It is a psychological paradox that whenever she is away from her lover, she is thinking only of his faults, but the moment she sights him, all his faults melt away. She observes:—

When he is in my presence
I see nothing in him that is faulty,
but when he goes out of my presence,
I see nothing in him that is not faulty. (1286)

She gives an odd explanation for managing to live in the absence of her lover:—

You know why I live?
To live in remembrance of the days
I lived in union with him. (1206)

As for the lover, his sweetheart's jealousy is expressed by him in the following words:—

I told my beloved
"I love you more than the rest"
and she fretted and fumed,
muttering
"Than the rest? 'Than the rest'?
Than whom? Than whom?" (1314)

This jealous mistress, during separation, beholds her lover's messenger in a dream and waking up, she wishes to express her gratitude to the dream and says:—

With what banquet
shall I celebrate the dream
which brought me
the messenger of my beloved. (1211)

The Kurals in Kamathu Pal mirror forth all the possible facets of sexual love and its temperament.

8

ARCHITECTONICS OF THE KURAL

It is fascinating to study the architectonics of the Kural, which consists of 133 Chapters of 10 Kurals each. These 133 chapters themselves are classified under three broad headings. The first heading is *Arattu Pal,* that is to say, the book relating to *Aram* or duty and it consists of 380 Kurals. The second is *Porut Pal* or the book relating to wealth and it consists of 700 Kurals. The third and the last is *Kamathu Pal* or the book relating to sexual love and it consists of 250 Kurals. Most critics approach the Kural on the unproved assumption that it is founded on the Sanskritic concept of *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha.* Those, who have been propounding this theory, have been hard put to explain why Tiruvalluvar omitted to deal with *Moksha* (Liberation), of which the Tamil equivalent is *Veedu.* A Christian Missionary was so cynical as to say that Tiruvalluvar did not deal with *Moksha* or *Veedu,* perhaps because he thought that the Tamil people were not prepared for the highest. Some others have explained the omission by saying that *Veedu* was not specifically dealt with because it would arise as a natural sequence to the practice of Aram, Porul and Kamam as expounded by Tiruvalluvar. G.U. Pope wondered if Tiruvalluvar refrained from any exposition of *Veedu* or *Moksha* because he resolved to take only the practical view of things. He also supposed that Valluvar was not perhaps satisfied with the glimpses he had obtained of man's future and consequently, waited for the light. The proper inference to draw is that Tiruvalluvar's classification was

based on different principles altogether from those in the Sanskritic classification. The content of Aram, as expounded by Tiruvalluvar, is radically different from that of Dharma as expounded in the Dharma Sastras. Tiruvalluvar does not, like the Dharmasastras, prescribe different Arams for different castes. His concept of Aram is universal in character. He prescribes different duties for the same individual as he passes through different stages of evolution. He prescribes the duties of an individual, as a member of his family, in relation to his parents, wife and children, and as a member of his community, in relation to his fellow members of the community, good, bad and indifferent, and as a citizen of the State, in relation to the ruler of the State. In all these relationships, he is required to manifest loving thought and indulge in right action.

It would thus be seen that the Aram of Tiruvalluvar connotes a purely Tamilian concept which has little in common with the Sanskritic concept of Dharma.

The *Porut Pal* of Tiruvalluvar does not parallel the Artha concept of Sanskrit either. Unlike the Artha Sastra, which deals mainly with the art of Government, only a few chapters in *Porut Pal* deal with the art of Government and with sovereignty, and whenever references are made in the Kural to the King, it is to a King without any divine right, a King who is required never to swerve from virtue and who is expected to refrain from vice. The sovereign is portrayed as an embodiment of the ideals and virtues of the people. Several chapters have been devoted in this section to the self-respect, the truthfulness, the good character and honour of the citizen and the special virtues required for preserving and improving inter-personal relationships in the social polity. It is important to note that Valluvar, after discussing in the first book, the inner spiritual growth of the individual, proceeds to discuss in the second book on *Porul,* the public life of such an individual, vis-a-vis Society. Evidently, it is the concept of Tiruvalluvar that only a man, who has demonstrated by his moral, cultural and spiritual ripeness, his value as an individual, is fit to enter the wider arena of public life and play a fruitful role therein. It will thus be found

that the *Porut Pal* of Valluvar is infused with the spirit of secularism and social ethics, which are a far cry from the divine right theory of sovereignty and the Varnashrama Dharma.

Turning to the third book on *Kamathu Pal,* it is utterly different in content from the Kama Sastras of Sanskrit. It is divided into two sub-sections, *Kalavial* and *Karpial.* Kalavial refers to a marital union unaccompanied by any ritual or sacrament, and preceded by pre-marital love. This is something which is uniquely Tamilian. *Karpial* refers to marital love. Unlike the Kama Sastras, which deal with an objective and scientific analysis of sex and sexual poses, Kamathu Pal of Tiruvalluvar contains a highly poetic exposition of the love between man and woman in its multitudinous aspects and set in different dramatic and lyrical situations. Never before in the literature of the world has the emotion of sexual love been expounded in such diverse fullness or with such penetrating insight. Himself happily married, Valluvar derived a serene satisfaction from drawing tender portraits of lovers. He asks:—

> Can wine, which intoxicates only when drunk,
> intoxicate, like love,
> at mere sight? (Kural No. 1090)

His lover longs to singe himself in the fire of his beloved, and what kind of fire is it?

Tiruvalluvar's lover is baffled and perplexed by this fire:—

> If I withdraw from her,
> it burns me
> if I go close to her, it cools me;
> whence did she obtain this mysterious fire! (1104)

It will thus be seen that there is no parallelism between the Kama Sastras of Sanskrit and the Kamathu Pal of Tirukkural. It is wrong, therefore, to assume that the *Aram, Porul* and *Inbam* classification of Valluvar is in any manner patterned upon or akin to the Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha classification of Sanskrit and further to assume that for some unexplained reason,

Tiruvalluvar omitted to deal in a separate section with Moksha or spiritual emancipation. It seems clear that Tiruvalluvar was more concerned with living fully and richly in the Eternal Now than with metaphysical speculations about the uncertain future. It is not as if he failed to cater to the needs of the human spirit. His chapters in *Arathu Pal* on possession of spiritual grace, abstinence from meat, non-killing, performance of penance, truthfulness, renunciation, eradication of desire and the realization of the Ultimate Truth, give a clear spiritual conation to the secular life of the individual, and would have the effect of bringing Heaven down to the Earth and making egoless bliss a present reality instead of a distant dream.

He says in one Kural:—

> He, who lives on the earth,
> in the manner he should,
> will be placed among the gods dwelling in Heaven. (50)

Tiruvalluvar regarded spiritual bliss as a state of consciousness to be achieved Here and Now and not Hereafter. He, therefore, takes the reader gently by the hand through the various stages of his inner and outer developments until in Chapters 35 to 37 of *Arathu Pal,* he directly deals with the highest illumination, which releases men from pain and pleasure, birth and death. He says:—

> From whatsoever you detach yourself
> you become free from the pain it can cause. (341)

> He, who cuts off the feelings of 'I' and 'mine',
> enters a world
> superior to that of the celestials. (346)

In Kural No. 350, he advocates attachment to God for overcoming attachment to the things of the world:—

Attach yourself to him,
in order that
you may detach yourself from all attachment.

He adds:—

To the clear-sighted,
who have rid themselves of doubts,
Heaven is nearer than Earth. (353)

In the Chapter on *Mei Unarthal* (Awareness of Reality) he says:—

Darkness vanishes from,
and rapture descends upon
the men of spotless vision,
who have extricated themselves from illusion. (352)

Valluvar propounds the theory that those who are bound by attachment and desire have no real freedom, though they delude themselves into thinking they are free. In Kural No. 365, he proclaims:—

The free are those
who are free from desire;
the others are never completely free.

In Kural No. 369, the sage gives the assurance:—

Here on this Earth itself
you will enjoy unceasing rapture,
if you destroy desire,
which is the woe of woes.

He winds up the Chapter on *Avavaruthal* (Liquidation of Desire):—

Achieve a condition in which all insatiate
desire is rooted out;

in that very condition
immortality will be conferred upon you. (370)

It will thus be seen that Tiruvalluvar omitted to write a separate book on Moksha, because, in his vision, Heaven and Earth were not separate compartments, and right earthly conduct could ensure immediate Heavenly bliss, because there was a brotherly nearness of Earth to Heaven.

Turning to the meaning of the word 'Tirukkural', 'Tiru' means 'holy' and 'Kural' means 'anything short'. Each Kural is a couplet, the first line having four metric feet and the second line having three. This kind of couplet is called *Kural Venba* in Tamil.

Venba is a metrical piece consisting of four lines. It is admitted on all hands that it is the most difficult form in which to compose poetry. The Kural, which is a dwarfed Venba, puts even greater restraints upon its practitioner.

"Vers Libre", which is the anti-thesis of the Kural, has been compared to playing tennis with the net down. The "Vers Libertines" by breaking loose from the restrictive influence of metre have sustained a conspicuous loss in the power and capacity of verbal expression. Valluvar, on the other hand, wilfully submitted himself to the tyranny of the specially evolved Kural metre, and by mastering it, achieved maximum tension between matter and form; he supercharged words with meaning by indulging in a kind of concentrated verbal yoga.

The Kural is not a "clanging couplet" like Alexander Pope's, for there are no pompous drum-beats in it. Here poetry had become no rhyming rivulet of gay garrulity but a work of intense and compact art as painstakingly carved as the figures on the rock temples of Mamallapuram. The rhythm of the Kural is rather restrained and noble, sparkling with bold thought and sprightly style. The Kural is not a mechanically sliced inorganic thing. It is rather like a perfectly coordinated organism, which has been alive and kicking for 2000 years.

No wonder, not even Kambar himself has equalled Valluvar in gathering infinite riches in a little nutshell. Here in 1330 couplets

are more memorable lines than in any equal area of literature in any language known to the writer. G.U. Pope was right to say in his introduction to his translations of the Kural, "Nothing, not even a corrupt Greek chorus, so defies the efforts of the student as does very much of the high Tamil poetry. The poetical dialect of Tamil allows every kind of ellipsis, so that a line is often little less than a string of crude forms artfully fitted together. The best compositions are quatrains or couplets each containing a complete idea, a moral epigram. Their construction resembles that of a design in mosaic. The materials fitted together are sometimes mere bits of coloured glass, but sometimes also very precious stones and pure gold. And the design? Why, you walk round it and try to catch it in all lights and feel at first, and often for a long time, as if it meant nothing at all, till you catch some hint, and at once it lies revealed, something to be thought of again and again, some bit of symbolism, it may be, not infrequently grotesque, often quaint, but sometimes also of rare beauty."

9

SOME GLIMPSES OF TIRUVALLUVAR

Laughter and Tears

Tiruvalluvar treats us to the therapy of laughter as well as the therapy of tears.

He knew that a knowing tranquil smile is the beginning and the end of all wisdom. He declares:—

> To those, who have not the faculty of laughter,
> the vast cosmos remains plunged in darkness,
> even in broad day light. (999)

A deep under-current of humour marks most of the sayings of Valluvar. After pointing out that envy is punishment enough for the envious, he asserts that no envious man has ever become prosperous and no man, free from envy, has fallen from prosperity.

He proceeds to examine the rare exceptions to this rule and says with a chuckle in his sleeves:—

> The prosperity of the envious
> and the adversity of the non-envious
> are phenomena worth researching about. (169)

Dowered with a profound natural wisdom, Valluvar notes with a twinkle in his eye the uneducated man's vulgar attempt to pass off his 'learning' and says:—

The illiterate man's lust for words
is verily like the lust of a woman,
who has neither of her breasts. (402)

In Valluvar's view, the virtuous man is one who has received the proper kind of education and all uneducated men, not having been properly educated, are vicious, He would however make a good-humoured exception to this rule and say:—

Even the unlearned may be deemed highly virtuous,
if only
they can keep their traps shut
in the presence of the learned. (403)

In his chapter on Folly, Valluvar shows his poignant contempt for fools. In Kural No. 843, he observes:—

How many sufferings do fools inflict upon themselves!
even their enemies find it hard
to inflict so many.

Valluvar regarded the wealthy fool with a special kind of disdain. He says:—

Should a fool gift a thing to another heartily,
it is due to nothing else
than the penance of the recipient. (842)

Valluvar proceeds to say:—

If it is asked, "What is stupidity?"
it is the arrogance which shouts,
"I am wise". (844)

Valluvar, who appreciated the friendship of the great and the wise, seems to have suffered greatly from the company of fools. Valluvar says:—

The entry of an idiot into an assembly of sages
is like putting an unwashed foot
upon a white-washed bed. (840)

As a rule, most of the humour of Valluvar is tinged with pathos, and most often Valluvar laughs through his tears.

Speaking of villains, Tiruvalluvar focusses all his irony and sarcasm upon them. Though they belong to a sub-human species, how like men those scoundrels are! The wonder and profound amazement of Valluvar are reflected in Kural No. 1071.

The wicked look utterly like men;
such close mimics we have never seen.

Schopenhawer refers to this Kural in one of his essays and says such exquisite humour it is rare to come across.

The Jolly Juggler

Occasionally, Valluvar would play with his themes like a jolly juggler, throwing them up into the air, turning them inside out, tumbling them upside down, and setting them on their feet again. He held the Marxist view that even virtue has an economic foundation. In fact in Kural No. 757, he says:—

Compassion, the child of love,
is nurtured
by that loving foster-mother, wealth.

Though he regarded wealth as having no permanent value, he realised that it was the necessary means for the achievement of great ends. Consequently, he pondered deeply over the inequitable distribution of wealth and over the unworthy character of those in whose hands wealth had a knack of accumulating. For instance, he says in scandalized shock:—

Disastrous is the ample wealth
of the man,
who neither enjoys it
nor gives it to the worthy. (1006)

At another place, he appeals to the stingy by saying:—

The wealth of the one,
who helps not the poor,
is like a girl of enormous charm
growing, unwed,
into the loneliness of age. (1007)

He trounces the misers by giving what appears to be advice to the beggars. In Kural No. 1067, he says:—

I beg of you,
oh! beggars of the world,
if beg you must,
beg not of those,
who would not ungrudgingly give.

Here Valluvar makes beggars angle characters through whom he reflects his contempt for the ungiving rich. He shifts the camera to a different angle and takes the snapshot of the manly poor, who are too proud to beg:—

It's worth a million-million
to refrain from begging
even from those
who give with joy and ungrudgingly. (1061)

Next he pats the generous rich on the back by saying:—

Begging is as good as giving,
when you beg of those
who would not think of refusing alms
even in their dreams. (1054)

Getting into the skin of the beggars, the sage says tremblingly:—

Will it come,
today, too— the poverty
that well-nigh
killed me yesterday? (1048)

Now Valluvar's horror turns into incandescent anger as he thinks of the dispensation which necessitates begging:—

If even by begging
one has to make both ends meet,
may the Author of the Universe.
go a-begging far and wide and perish. (1062)

Then he turns to the rich men and admonishes them for failing to derive the great joy which giving alone can bring. He asks:—

Don't they know the joy
that comes from giving—
those hard-hearted boors
who guard their treasure just to lose it? (228)

Valluvar puts the problem of begging against every conceivable background and tries to solve it by appealing, on the one hand, to the self-respect of the beggars, and on the other, to the compassion of the Haves.

He expects the rich to have a sense of contemporary tragedy and to possess an empathetic understanding of the agonies of the Have-nots. Any sensitive soul must feel the humiliation and degradation of the human spirit brought about by circumstances which necessitate begging. In one Kural, the Saint says:—

To be begged is agonizing,
till you give
and see the smile lighting up the face of the beggar (224)

Next he proceeds with delightful sensitivity to measure the power of bearing hunger against the power of appeasing it, the power of the Have-nots to suffer hunger against the power of the Haves to wipe it out.

Kural No. 224 says:

> The most powerful of all powers
> is the power to bear hunger
> but even that power is next only
> to the power of those, who can appease hunger. (225)

Valluvar next speaks of the safety vault in which all the rich should deposit their wealth. Here is the Kural:—

> Wiping out
> the hunger of the Havenots
> is the treasury
> in which the Haves should deposit their wealth. (226)

The sage winds up his chapter on *Eehai* (Alms giving) by directing his scornful invective against the rich whose insensitivity disables them from giving. Says he:

> There's nothing more calamitous than Death;
> but death itself becomes sweet
> once one is disabled from giving alms. (230)

On Monarchy

Valluvar was keenly aware of the fact that the sanction behind all virtue and morality was the might of the sovereign of the State.

In Kural No. 543, he says:—

> That which furnishes basic support
> to virtue and to scripture
> is the sceptre of the king.

He made it clear that the sceptre is not a symbol of brutal might, but a symbol of uprightness and justice.

He says:—

That which secures victory for the king
is not his lance, but his sceptre,
and that, too, if it stands upright. (546)

He further emphasises this concept by saying:—

The King stands sentinel over the Earth
and the Law stands sentinel over the King. (547)

As for the punitive jurisdiction of the King, he says:—

Killing by the king of the murderously cruel
is like pulling out weeds from the tender paddy field.
(550)

Valluvar discourages the King from making collections from the citizens by abusing the power of the State:—

Here are his words of admonition:—

The King that goes a-begging
is like the dacoit, who, armed with a spear,
shouts, "Give". (552)

Speaking of a King, who is unable to maintain law and order, he says:—

"Wealth is worse far than poverty,
in a realm where the King renders no justice." (558)

He calls upon the State to temper justice with mercy and not to terrorize the people. He tells the King:—

Raise the rod high
but let it fall gently upon the criminal, (562)

Of what avail is a tune
if it isn't *en rapport* with the song?
of what avail is the eye
if it doesn't move to and fro with compassion. (573)

Giving advice, which is applicable both to the king and to the citizen, he presses into service a simile and says:—

The flower of the floating plant
is as high as the level of the water;
a man's greatness is as high
as the level of his mind. (595)

Speaking of fortitude, he says:—

He who desires not joy
and says, "Grief is natural",
is never to sorrow subject. (628)

He adds:—

He, who, in pleasure,
exults not in pleasure,
does not, in sorrow,
suffer from sorrow. (629)

On Agriculture

Agriculture is lauded by Tiruvalluvar not only as the noblest of the professions but also as the most fruitful and independent way of life. He says:—

The earth, though rotating, is still behind the plough;
therefore, though toilsome,
agriculture is the noblest toil. (1031)

In the next Kural, he says:—

The plough-men are
the linchpin of the world,
for they give support to all others,
who cannot till the soil. (1032)

He goes further in Kural No. 1033 and says:—

They alone live
who live by the plough;
all others live cringing before others
and eating what they give. (1033)

Seeing those idlers,
who say, "I am a have-not,"
the virtuous dame called the Earth will laugh. (1040)

On Friendship

It is characteristic of self-renewing sages like Valluvar to have mutual and fruitful relations with other beings. They are capable of accepting love and capable of giving it.

Friendship dissolves the rigidities of the isolated self and forces new perspectives. On the other hand, people who have become strangers to themselves, cannot return for sustenance to the springs of their own being; because they have lost their capacity for self-renewal. Valluvar is therefore right to ask:—

Is there anything more difficult to achieve
than friendship?
Is there anything as protective against foes
as friendship? (781)

In his home at Mylapore, he warmed his heart with the friendships of many great sages and philosophers:—

The more you cultivate the classics,
the more delightful they become;
Likwise
the more you move
with men of virtue.
the more sweet becomes
their friendship. (783)

Befriending is not
for the purpose of laughter,
but for the purpose of coming down
heavily upon your friend
when he strays away from the right path. (784)

Affinity of feeling makes for friendship,
and not
frequent intercourse or living together. (785)

Friendship saves you from ruin,
takes you to the right path,
and in adversity, shares your sorrow. (787)

According to Valluvar:—

Even as your hand rushes to hold your dhoti
when it slips down from your waist,
friendship rushes to your rescue
when you are in grief. (788)

Tiruvalluvar thinks that Friendship is tested best in adversity because most friends cluster around you in prosperity and desert you in adversity.

It is with a rueful smile that Tiruvalluvar throws out this gem of wisdom:—

There is some good even about adversity,
for it gives you a measuring rod

with which
you may unstintingly measure your real friends. (796)

Friends,
who are descended out of the true stock of love,
cease not to love
even those who have betrayed them. (807)

Solitude is better
than the company of those
who, like the unbroken colt,
throw the rider down to the ground
in the midst of the battle-field. (814)

Valluvar perceived a telling difference between the friendship of the fool and the hatred of the wise man and said:—

The hatred of the wise man is
ten million times worthier
than the friendship of the fool. (816)

Valluvar strongly discourages the friendship of those, who would love you in private but revile you in public. (Kural No. 820).

In fact there are five chapters in the Kural, in which Valluvar investigates in depth the psychology of friendship, flays the surface of life and shows us its bloody reality.

On Learning

Valluvar, like Karl Marx, Nietzsche and Jean Paul Sartre, was an existentialist, because like them, he held that the *only* knowledge worth having is knowledge that bears directly upon the human experience. According to Valluvar, the entire purpose of learning is to make you live the better. Any learning unconnected with, and irrelevant to living was discarded by him as useless. In Kural No. 391, he says:—

Learn with utter clarity
whatever has to be learnt;
after learning, conduct yourself according to
what you have learnt.

The discovery of numbers and letters in the history of man was a discovery of the greatest importance for human progress. So Valluvar says:—

Numbers and letters are like the two eyes of
the highest of living beings. (392)

It is education that opens the eyes of man, and Valluvar says:—

Those who are said to have eyes are
the learned
but the unlearned have merely two sores upon
their face. (393)

That Tiruvalluvar was not unaware of the modern theory of education can be seen from the following Kural:—

The more you delve into the sandy spring,
the more its water spouts;
likewise
the more men study,
the more their knowledge spouts. (396)

The sage had pity for those, who, though they knew the honour that learning brings, never care to acquire it till their death.

"Any country and any town will become the country and the town of the learned men, and yet why do they not learn even till they die?" (397)

Learning gives joy to the learned and the learned distribute their joy by passing it on to the world. Says Valluvar:—

The enlightened like to see the world
taking part in the joy which learning gives them. (399)

The sage thinks that the uneducated men belong to a different species altogether from that of the educated men.

As beasts are to men,
so are
the unlearned to the learned. (410)

Valluvar was rightly convinced that learning can be better acquired and assimilated through the ear-gate than through the eye-gate.

According to him, to listen to an exposition of truth by a learned man is by far more fruitful than to read it in cold print.

In ancient Tamil Nadu books were not available in print and most works were inscribed and stored in palm leaves. A man might not be able to read the palm leaf script, but still he might be a learned man having heard for long years truths expounded by men of understanding and experience. That is why Valluvar says in Kural No. 411:

The Wealth of wealth is wealth acquired through the ear;
it is the noblest among all the wealths.

Valluvar proceeds to rank food for the stomach very much below the food for the ear.

When there is no food for the ear,
a little food might be given even to the stomach. (412)

Let him, who has no learning,
at least listen to the learned;
it will prove a supporting staff in times of distress. (414)

According to Valluvar, the power of the word differs according to the character of the man who utters it.

He says:—

> The words that fall from the lips of the man of character
> are like a supporting staff
> in slippery ground. (415)

Valluvar was aware of the fact that listening to another with concentration is as difficult as making a cogent speech. The art of listening has therefore to be cultivated; otherwise what is received by the one ear will pass through the other without making any impression upon the mind. So says Valluvar in Kural No. 418;

> The ear, which has not been bored open
> by continual listening,
> listens not, though appearing to listen.

Tasting a thing by the mouth is something which man shares with the animal. So Valluvar indignantly asserts:

> Those boors, who know
> only to taste with the mouth,
> but not to taste with the ear—
> what does it matter if they live or die? (420)

Villainy

Valluvar distils his hatred for the villain in the following Kural:—

> The villains look exactly like men;
> such close mimics
> we have never set eyes upon. (1071)

He sarcastically envies the villains for their utter freedom from compunction:—

> Richer are the villains
> than the practitioners of virtue;

for their hearts suffer from no qualms of conscience.
(1072)

The villains have no scruples and nothing can move them except fear or hope of gain. Says the Kural:—

Fear is the one thing that is a restraining influence
upon the villains,
and next to fear, hope of gain
sometimes restrains them. (1075)

Valluvar says the fruit tree is tended by men because it does not secrete its sweetness but yields it up in the form of fruits, but the sugar-cane stores all its sweetness within its body and people have therefore to crush it and extract its sweetness. Kural No. 1078 says:—

The great will become helpful to you,
the moment you speak out to them your grievance;
the villains will become helpful,
like sugar-cane,
the moment you crush them.

The contempt that Valluvar has for villains is as intense as his admiration for the Sages:—

For what are the villains fit
except to sell themselves
while in trouble? (1080)

Friendship with evil men gives the shudder to Valluvar, evidently because many of them had wormed their way into his heart and ultimately betrayed him. Here is a gem of a Kural, which has precipitated from his bitter experience:—

It is horrid even in dreams
to hobnob with men,

in whom there is a dichotomy
between their deeds and their words. (819)

Valluvar's Similes

Valluvar is famous for his analogies and similes, which are incredibly original. Addressing ministers as to how they should behave with fickle-minded kings, he says:—

Behave with them as you would whilst
warming yourselves at the fire;
if you go too near,
the fire will burn you,
if you go too far,
it will cease to protect you from the cold. (691)

It is found that a man, who occupies a high office, is adored, but the moment he vacates that office, those adoring him start despising him. Valluvar finds an extraordinary simile to explain this phenomenon.

When the hair remains rooted in the head, it is tended with great devotion, but the moment it falls down from the head, it becomes an object of contempt and is swept rudely away.

Valluvar says:—

Like unto the hair,
that has fallen from the head,
is a man
who has fallen from his status. (964)

As a linguist, Valluvar knows that the sound "a" is the substratum of all other sounds. As he thinks of the genesis of this world, an uncommon simile passes across his mind:—

All word-sounds have their genesis
in the sound—'a';

likewise
the whole of the world has its genesis in God. (1)

Purity of Means

Valluvar did not think that pure ends could be achieved by impure means.

Wealth attained by proper means
and without foul practice
will generate virtue as well as joy. (754)

Valluvar insists on our remaining constantly in the company of men of purity in order that we may acquire purity of mind and purity of action. (455)

This Kural occurs in the Chapter on Avoidance of bad company.

In the Chapter on 'The manner of Accumulation of Wealth', the poet says:—

Let the man cast off from his embrace all wealth,
which comes not out of grace or love. (755)

In his chapter on 'Impartiality', Valluvar says:—

The wealth of the man of justice
will, without frittering away,
stand even his posterity in goodstead. (112)

10

VALLUVAR AT THE WORLD VEGETARIAN CONGRESS

The World Vegetarian Congress having its Headquarters in Holland sent in 1961 a goodwill mission to India. The mission consisted of Oxford Dons, French Savants, Dutch and German Scholars. They were confirmed believers in vegetarianism and the object of their visit to India was to receive inspiration from the land of vegetarianism. After visiting several places in India, they came to Coimbatore and convened a public meeting. The author of this monograph, who happened to preside over the meeting, quoted a Kural expounding the basis of vegetarianism. At the end of the meeting, the European Savants rushed to the platform and shouted, "This is the 151st meeting we have held in India. At each meeting a vegetarian Indian presided and as a rule, had nothing to say which could inspire us. On the contrary, those men were pessim and said the future of vegetarianism in India was bleak, but the Kural you have quoted throws a new light on vegetarianism and inspires us to stick to it". The Kural that captivated the European visitors was the one on non-killing. Usually the merits and demerits of vegetarianism are canvassed from the economic, hygienic, medical and cultural points of view. Valluvar went to the bottom of the question and said, "Unless we eschew violence from our minds and hearts, we cannot show compassion to our fellow creatures". Violence is disruptive of the unity of life, and subversive of the reverence for life, without

which there can be no peace on the earth. Virtue has, therefore, to be defined broadly so as to exclude all irreverence for lives. If man practises non-killing, not mechanically, but out of genuine respect for all life, he practises a supreme virtue, but if man resorts to killing, whether the victim of the killing is man, bird or beast, he shows an irreverence for life which would form the basis of all other vices, such as theft, dacoity, rape and murder. This idea has been most pithily put by Valluvar in Kural No. 321, which can be translated as follows:—

What is virtue except non-killing?
for
killing brings in its train
all the other vices.

The representatives of the World Vegetarian Congress left Coimbatore, saying that their Indian visit had been worthwhile, because they had heard the voice of Valluvar lending a new dimension to vegetarianism.

11

VALLUVAR'S BLUE PRINT FOR THE EVOLUTION OF MAN

Tiruvalluvar has a fascinating blue print for the evolution of Man. He knows that the average house-holder is usually self-centred and narrow in his vision. He must, therefore, dangle before him an ideal which he would think worth achieving. He places before him the ideal of *'Puhazh'* or fame and prescribes certain virtues by practising which the house-holder can achieve fame.

By the time the house-holder has achieved fame, he has, by practising the prescribed virtues, become less self-centred and more fit to work for a higher ideal than fame. At this stage Valluvar places a greater ideal before him. He wants him to become a man possessing perpetual inner joy and peace. For that purpose, he wants the house-holder, who has achieved fame, to become a contemplator, a meditator, a man of sacrifice, a renunciant who will be in perpetual joy. After he achieves this ideal, he becomes fit to play a significant and fruitful role as a member of the community, as a citizen of the State and as a universal man. At this stage Valluvar places before him the ideal of the sage or the Superman and calls upon him to achieve this ideal by practising certain loftier virtues.

It would indeed be edifying to study how Tiruvalluvar takes us kindly by the hand and persuades us, by resorting to all the tricks of psychiatry, to rise from a lower stage to the higher, till at last we achieve the ideal of becoming a Sanror.

It is difficult to translate the Tamil word 'Sanror' into English because 'Sanror' is a man who possesses many different but great virtues. According to Tiruvalluvar, 'Salbu', that is to say, the virtue of the Sanror consists of a group of five distinguished virtues namely, universal love, sensitivity, helpfulness to all, compassion and truth speaking. (Kural No. 983).

What are the qualities of the 'Sanror' as conceived by Tiruvalluvar? He would be a man so full of love that he would love even his enemy. In Kural No. 987, Tiruvalluvar asks:—

> Of what avail is your Salbu,
> if you do not do good
> even to those who have done you evil.

This goes farther than the doctrine of "turning the other cheek". Sanrors would be clear-sighted and, therefore, firm in their determination to maintain their ideals. Even if the final deluge swirls around them, the Sanrors will stand upright and unshakeable. (Kural No. 989). It is the view of Tiruvalluvar that only the moral dynamics of the Sanrors enables the earth itself to bear its huge burden. Says the Kural:—

> The earth will cease to bear its burden
> if the Sanrors deteriorate in their virtues. (990)

The Sanrors will not be distracted by the frolics of the ego. In fact, they will have achieved the egoless condition by wiping out the delusions of 'I' and 'Mine'. They would, therefore, have the magnanimous quality of accepting defeat even at the hands of inferiors. (986)

As has been pointed out elsewhere, Tiruvalluvar thinks that every man must be sensitive enough to realise that it is his duty to raise himself to the level of a Sanror and that it is the duty of every Sanror to do all those good acts which time and place require him to do.

Before becoming a Sanror, the individual is required to undergo probation, first as a house-holder, and then, as a self-denying renunciant.

What, according to Valluvar, are the virtues that the house-holder must practise? He has given a very broad and unconfusing definition of virtue:—

> All virtue consists in being mentally free from dirt;
> all else is pompous show. (34)

How are we to keep the mind free from dirt? Kural No. 35 says:—

> Virtue consists in acting
> in eradication of four evil qualities,
> namely,
> jealousy, covetousness, anger and evil speech.

These are qualities which are difficult to eradicate. But Tiruvalluvar tells us that unless we do so, we cannot achieve happiness or fame. (39)

Dealing with the married life of the individual, Valluvar says that if it is marked by love and virtue, it would receive an ennobling quality and fulfil itself. (45)

The house-holder, who is frequently called upon to discharge the onerous duties laid down by Valluvar, is made to look upon these duties as interesting because Valluvar tells him frequently:—

> The man, who lives the life of a house-holder
> as it ought to be lived,
> will be placed among the gods of Heaven. (50)

The duties of the house-holder will be frustrated if he does not have a virtuous wife. The wife is described by Valluvar as the lifemate of the husband. In the Chapter on the virtues of the wife, Valluvar regards chastity as the highest of all the virtues and says:—

She, who possesses chastity,
will develop miraculous powers.

Another Kural says:—

A woman, who, while waking up from sleep,
worships not God, but worships her husband, ……
when she says, 'Let it rain',
it will rain. (55)

Kural No. 57 says:—

It is chastity that can give protection to a wife
and not any protective custody.

The wife is the queen of the home and her role in married life is supreme. That is why in Kural No. 53, Valluvar asks:—

Whatever do you not possess,
if your wife is eminent in virtue?
if she be without virtue,
whatever can you be said to possess?

The right kind of married life breaks down the barriers between the couple and gives them training in the noblest acts of self-sacrifice and selfless love. The entry of children into the home expands the circle of the home and consequently the ambit of selflessness. When the child of a stranger puts its dirty hands into a cup of coffee, you feel repugnant, but when the dirty fingers are those of your own children, they add a new dimension to the taste of the coffee they have dabbled in. Rightly did Valluvar say:—

The gruel that has been dabbled in by the tender
hands of children
is sweeter far to their parents
than divine Nectar. (64)

The prattle of the children is music for him, superior indeed to that of the flute and the lyre. They, who have not heard the sweet prattle of their own children, say, "The flute is sweet and the lyre is sweet". (66)

In this atmosphere of love and devotion, the children are brought up in the family.

Now Valluvar delineates the responsibility of the father in bringing up his child and says:—

> The father's duty towards the son
> consists
> in making him sit in the front benches of a learned
> assembly. (67)

and the son should co-operate with his father in the discharge of his duties. The son's ideal should be to become a Sanror.

> The mother who hears her son has become a Sanror
> will be happier, at that moment,
> than when she gave birth to him. (69)

The best way a son can repay the kindness of his father is to make men say:—

> By what great penance
> did his father beget him?

After indicating the warmth of the inter-personal relationship that must exist among father, mother and son, Valluvar wants that the love that sustains the members of the family should not get atrophied in selfish pursuits but should become universal by transcending the limits of the individual, the family, the community and the country. In Kural No. 72, the differences between genuine love, which redeems itself by the highest and noblest acts of sacrifice, and the utter lack of love, which marks the stony-hearted are exemplified. Says the Kural:—

The loveless men belong all to themselves;
but men of love
belong to others-their bones and all. (72)

Having emphasised the importance of love, Valluvar calls upon the house-holder to show hospitality to guests. 2000 years ago, there were not many inns or hotels in Tamil Nadu. It was full of villages of varying sizes. Pilgrims, men of business and scholars in pursuit of Truth and poets would be performing their long journeys by foot, breaking their journey, at dusk and resuming it by dawn the next day. The climate of Tamil Nadu is such that except for two or three months in the year, anybody could lie down under the open sky on the pials of houses without having to pay any rent for such user. It is against this background we have to understand the great emphasis that Tiruvalluvar has placed upon hospitality to guests. The guests might be known or unknown persons and if they come within the house, they should be warmly and respectfully taken in and looked after. They were not all mendicants who lived by taking alms. Ordinarily, they would be hyper-sensitive persons like poets, artists, philosophers. So says Kural No. 90:—

If we smell the Anicha flower,
it will wither and wilt away;
like wise,
if you look at the guest with an unwelcoming face,
he will with erand wilt away.

Sweet speech lubricates the wheels of life and keeps the atmosphere positively creative. In fact a hearty gift with an unsmiling face is much less productive of good than sweet speech with a beaming face. (92)

Valluvar is surprised that people, who reap rich dividends by indulging in sweet speech, should be so unbusinesslike as to use harsh words and incur certain loss.

Another virtue, which Valluvar wants the householder to cultivate, is the virtue of gratitude. He knew the liberating influence of gratitude upon the human, mind. He says:—

It is not good
to forget the good done to us,
but it is good forthwith
to forget the evil done to us. (108)

To remember an act of kindness done to us by another will give us mental joy and physical pleasure. It is neither good for the body nor for the mind to remember mental or physical pain caused to us. That is why the Sage says, 'It is better forgotten forthwith'.

Valluvar advises us as to how we should react to evil. Even if a man has inflicted upon us a murderous injury, the effect of it will be wiped out by thinking of some good he might have done us before. (109)

Another quality which Tiruvalluvar calls upon the householder to pursue is impartiality. It is the ornament of the wise to remain impartial without inclining to either side like the level rod of the balance loaded with equal weight on both of its pans. (118)

Next in order comes the possession of humility. Tiruvalluvar says:—

Humility will place you among the gods
but the lack of it will engulf you in the deepest darkness.
(121)

This idea goes counter to Hazlitt's statement 'Humility is the worst of virtues'. Evidently, Hazlitt must have confused timidity with humility. Humility is the mark of the man of learning, who has realised how ignorant he is. As Valluvar says:—

Humility is good for all,
but when it is shown by the rich
it shines like a special wealth.

The man, who has no humility, may get angry, easily wag his tongue needlessly and thereby come to grief. That is why Valluvar says:—

A wound caused by a burning fire
may heal internally,
but not a wound caused by a blistering tongue.

Valluvar next asks the householder to cultivate character. He does not say that character will give him postmortem paradise. All that he says is "Character gives a man an honourable place in Society and, therefore, it would be valued more than life itself". (131)

In Kural No. 137, he says:—

A man of character achieves greatness;
but a man who has no character achieves
infinite disgrace.

Valluvar persuades us to cultivate good character by saying: "Character alone produces happiness". Kural No. 138 says:—

Good character sows the seed,
out of which happiness sprouts forth,
but bad character will give eternal sorrow.

Valluvar is particular that a man, who lives the life of a householder, shall not covet another man's wife. He says:—

Of all the fools that stand
on the out-skirts of virtue,
there is no fool greater
than the one who stands
on the outskirts of another man's home. (142)

Valluvar knows what a tremendous amount of courage is required not to covet another mans wife. He also knows that when once that courage is achieved, great dignity will go with it. In Kural No. 148, he says:—

That supreme courage of manliness,
which looks not at the wife of another,
is not merely a virtue for the great;
is lends them a great dignity. (148)

Turning to the quality of forbearance, Valluvar tells the householder:—

Just as the Earth bears
even those who cut into it,
it is important to bear
even those who revile us, (151)

In Kural No. 153, he gives us an interesting and thought-provoking epigram:—

Poverty in poverty
is
to turn a guest away without feeding him;
Might of might
is
to suffer fools.

Hospitality and forbearance go hand in hand in this Kural, In Kural No. 160, he says:—

Those, who endure fasting as a penance,
are great,
but they are next only to those,
who endure the evil words of others.

Valluvar next asks the house-holder to be free from jealousy, which Shakespeare points to as that "green-eyed toad". In Kural No. 165, Valluvar says:—

To those who have envy
it is punishment enough;
even without enemies it can bring them destruction.

The next advice that Tiruvalluvar gives the householder is not to covet another man's property. We know how Prime Minister Gladstone's kleptomania brought disgrace to an otherwise magnificent personality. Next to non-coveting, Valluvar places the virtue of abstinence from back-biting. Back-biting is the very reverse of the way of love and is disruptive of friendship and unity. Kural No. 187, says:—

Those, who know not
to cultivate friendship with laughter,
will, by back-biting,
estrange the closest of relatives.

Valluvar pours contempt upon the back-biters by wondering:—

Is it out of charity
that the Earth bears the burden
of the one who slanders people behind their backs. (189)

In Kural No. 190, the poet asks:—

If people should detect their own faults,
even as they detect the faults of others,
would any evil happen to mankind? (190)

Next, Valluvar proceeds to instruct the house-holder, not to indulge, in profitless words, and to learn to dread even the performance of evil deeds. In Kural No. 205, he says:—

Don't commit evil, saying, "I am poor";
if you do, you will become poorer still.

In Kural No. 204, he observes:—

Think not even forgetfully,
of ruining others;
Virtue will engulf in evil
the man, who thinks of doing evil to others.

In a separate chapter, Valluvar commands benevolence to all:—

Benevolence seeks not
any return;
how can the Earth repay the clouds
for their benevolence! (211)

It is the confirmed judgement of Valluvar that neither in the world of the gods nor here upon the Earth, can we come across a virtue which is greater than benevolence.

The wealth of those, who distribute it to others,
is like
the lake, supplied by springs,
being filled to the brim with drinking water. (215)

Wealth, when it is in the hands of a benevolent man,
is like
the ripening of a fruit tree right in the midst of a town.
(216)

If it were said that evil will emerge out of benevolence, it is worth procuring such benevolence even by selling oneself. (Kural No. 220).

Valluvar has a thousand ways of persuading the Haves to help the Have-nots. Kural No. 225 says:—

The power of enduring hunger is a mighty power
but it is next only to the power of those,
who can remove that hunger by giving.

Valluvar pities those hard-hearted misers, who hoard their riches all life long and then die leaving all their hard-earned riches behind. He asks with smiling sensitivity:—

Don't they know the joy of giving—

these hard-hearted men who hoard
just to lose their hoarding? (228)

Valluvar climaxes his chapter on 'Giving' with the following Kural:—

There is nothing more evil
than dying;
even dying will be sweet
if you have lost the capacity to give. (230)

Having catalogued all the virtues above discussed and commended them to the house-holder, Valluvar tells him that the outcome of practising all these virtues is renown, (Puhazh). He makes this ideal attractive by saying:—

There is nothing immortal in this world
except fame, which exalts you in the eyes of the world.
(233)

Valluvar underlines the need for achieving fame by saying:—

If you are born into this world,
be born with qualities,
which make for fame;

those, who have not those qualities,
had better remain unborn. (236)

We can hear Valluvar gnashing his teeth as he adds:—

The soil, which bears the burden of an infamous man,
will become barren and infertile.

Kural No. 240 embodies the ultimate verdict of Tiruvalluvar:—

They alone live,
who live without infamy;
and they alone live not,
who live without fame.

It is true that love of fame is not entirely an unselfish virtue. But then Valluvar knows that it is a sufficiently sound psychological incentive for the ordinary man to practise such graceful and unselfish virtues as hospitality, gratitude, impartiality, humility, character, patience, etc.

After tempting the house-holder to cultivate these virtues and to secure fame in the eyes of society, Valluvar places before him the loftier ideal of living in the world with eternal and incessant joy. In order to achieve this ideal, the house-holder must renounce, not the world, but certain egoistic habits and tendencies. He appeals to the house-holder to become a *Thuravi* or a renunciant by cultivating certain special and difficult virtues. First he must acquire spiritual grace:—

Acquire grace by pursuing the path of goodness;
whatever system you may explore,
you will find that grace alone is your companion. (242)

They will never enter the evil world of darkness whose hearts ooze with grace (Kural No. 243). Rightly does Valluvar declare:—

Those who help others by exercising grace,
will never fear for their lives. (244)

This Kural appears to be both a commentary upon and an illustration of the life and conduct of martyrs like Mahatma Gandhi.

The other world is not for those who have no grace, even as this world is not for those who have no wealth. (Kural No. 247).

Those, who lose their wealth,
may, at some future time, blossom again;
but those, who have lost grace,
have lost it for ever and for ever and can
never recover it. (248)

The man, who performs a virtuous act without grace,
is like a muddle-headed man
securing a glimpse of Reality. (249)

Cultivation of grace necessarily leads, in the view of Valluvar, to compassion for all lives. That is why he calls upon the householder to renounce the eating of meat, in order that he may become a man of grace. Kural No. 251 says:—

How can he be possessed of grace,
who, to swell his own flesh,
eats the flesh of others!

The wily argument "I only eat the flesh of animals killed by others; I don't kill animals myself", is met by Valluvar in the following Kural (No. 256).

If the world were to refuse
to kill for the purpose of eating,
there would be none to sell flesh
for the purpose of gaining money.

Here in this context, Valluvar takes the opportunity to denounce the enormous number of sacrifices of animals, which were made in the name of religion during his time. Kural:—

Not to kill an animal and eat its flesh
is better far
than pouring ghee into a thousand sacrificial fires. (259)

All lives will,
with folded hands, worship him,
who would neither kill an animal nor eat its flesh. (260)

The next thing that Valluvar commends is the practice of *Thavam* or meditation. Performance of austerity and non-infliction of injury to other lives are said to be part of *Thavam.* A man who has increased his spiritual power by *Thavam,* gets enormous powers of changing his very environment:—

Destruction of the enemies
and elevation of friends
can be wrought by the mere thoughts of the man
who performs penance. (264)

As whatever one wishes
can be attained
in the manner one wishes,
Thavam must be practised here and now. (265)

Those who performs *Thavam*
are really those who perform their proper duties;
the others get entangled in desire
and toil in vain. (266)

Those who perform austerities by going through
the crucible of agony
will shine all the brighter like gold heated in
the crucible of fire. (267)

All souls will worship him,
who, losing his Ego,
gets control of his own soul. (268)

Those who have attained in full
the power derived from penance
can successfully pummel even the Lord of death. (269)

The have-nots have increased and multiplied,
because
those, who practise penance are a few,
and those, who practice it not, are many. (270)

While commending the practice of penance, Valluvar takes care to denounce those wicked men who pretend and pass off for men of penance.

Looking at the secret sin of the wicked-hearted
the elements five (of which the body is composed)
will laugh inwardly. (271)

It is here that Valluvar warns us against being misled by the outer shape of things:—

Though the lute (yazh) is crooked,
it produces wholesome music,
unlike the arrow, which, though straight,
is cruel in the effect it produces.

So, says Valluvar:—

We must judge men, not by their appearance,
but by the actual deeds that they perform. (279)

Valluvar has a dig at the external paraphernalia of men who are not really spiritual in conduct.

There is no need to shave the head
nor elongate the face with a beard,
if you have liquidated acts which the world condemns.
(280)

Valluvar next pleads for non-covetousness:—

Stealth stands steadfast in the heart of the covetous,
even as Virtue stands steadfast
in the heart of those who have a sense of measure. (288)

The renunciant is next required to practise truthful speech (Vaimai).

If you ask what truth-speaking means
it is speaking words,
which are untainted
by the least trace of evil. (291)

It may be remarked that Valluvar tests even truth on the touch-stone of goodness. Supposing the uttering of truth is likely to produce evil, what shall we do? Valluvar anticipates this question and answers it in the following Kural:—

Even falsehood belongs to the realm of truth,
if it can produce faultless good. (292)

Valluvar says that the man of truth will be universally acclaimed. He declares in Kural No. 294:—

He who lives by renouncing falsehood from his heart,
will live enshrined
in the hearts of all mankind. (294)

Valluvar thinks that truth—speaking is even superior to the making of gifts and the performing of penance. Valluvar is so convinced of the spiritual quality of truth-speaking that he goes to the extent of asserting:—

If one can be free from falsehood,
it is needless for him to practise any other virtue.
(297)

External cleanliness can be procured
by a wash with water;
but internal cleanliness can be secured
only by truth—speaking. (298)

To the wise,
all the lights of the world are not lights,
the light of truth
is the only guiding light.

In the concluding Kural on Veracity, Tiruvalluvar gives a magisterial summation of his entire life's experience in the following words:—

Of all the verities
we have scrutinized,
there is nothing more productive of good
than truth-speaking. (300)

The sage next asks us to refrain from anger. A man may not be angry with his master, because he dare not, but he may lose his temper very often, while dealing with his servant. So Valluvar tells us which kind of restraint is proper:—

He is the real restrainer of anger
who restrains it where it can hurt;
where your anger cannot hurt,
what does it matter if you restrain it or
give it free rein. (301)

In Kural No. 304, it is said:—

Can there be a greater foe than anger
which would kill laughter as well as joy?

Valluvar next refers to the destructive effect of anger upon the human body:—

If you want to guard yourself,
guard against anger;
if you guard not,
anger will kill yourself. (305)

In the next chapter on 'Non-doing of evil', Valluvar calls upon the Man of penance:—

Not to do evil,
in any manner,
at any time, to any one—
even mentally. (317)

A man knows what pain evil inflicts upon him. Why, then, should he think of inflicting evil upon others? (Kural No. 318)

If you do evil to others in the forenoon,
evil will come of its own accord
and inflict itself upon you
in the afternoon. (319)

The next Chapter on non-killing embodies the central concept of Tiruvalluvar. He thinks that man should have reverence for all lives and that if he shows irreverence to life in any form, he will be sowing the seeds of vice. In Kural No. 323, it is said:—

"The greatest good is, without doubt, 'Non-killing',
next to it in rank comes freedom from falsehood".

Valluvar's luminous insight in this behalf is expressed by him in a myriad ways. In Kural No. 324, Valluvar says:—

If you ask what is the perfect way,
it is the way by which
the kiIling of any life is avoided.

In the estimation of those, who know the nature of vileness, men, who destroy life, are the vilest. (Kural No. 329).

After calling upon the house-holder to practise these virtues, he reminds him of the evanescence of things so that he may not procrastinate and postpone the practice of the recommended virtues. In Kural No. 331, he says:—

To mistake the evanescent for the Eternal
is the quality of the meanest intellect and
has to be disdained.

Referring to the transience of wealth, he says:—

Accumulation of great wealth
is like
the accumulation of a vast crowd
in a dramatic theatre;
wealth disappears as quickly as the crowd
that melts away
after the theatrical play ends. (332)

Though wealth itself is impermanent, Valluvar tells us that works of permanent value can be rendered with the aid of wealth.

Perishable is the nature of wealth;
if you obtain it,
forthwith do something imperishable. (333)

As regards the evanescence of human life, Valluvar says:—

The one, who existed yesterday,
is no more today;
that is the glory of earthly life. (336)

And what about the passage of time? Every day that passes brings death closer by a day:—

To the wise,
that which appears to be a day

is but a saw
which cuts down the term of human life. (334)

Hence the need to do the right thing and that, too, quickly:—

Do virtuous deeds quickly,
before the tongue becomes powerless,
and the fateful hiccup supervenes. (335)

Those who know not
to live richly even for a moment
occupy their minds with a million-million fancies,
nay, even more. (337)

Here is a cameo by Tiruvalluvar on the relationship between the body and the soul.

The hunter puts a basket over a bird
and thinks he has imprisoned it;
but the wily bird burrows into the ground
and out of the basket and flies away.

That is the kind of friendship, which exists between the
body and the soul. (338)

Death is like unto sleep
and birth is like a waking up from slumber. (339)

Looking at the phantasmagoria of souls tenanting one body after another in the succession of births, Valluvar pitifully says:—

Is there no permanent refuge for the soul,
which takes a temporary shelter in the body! (340)

It is thus found that by pointing to the transience of wealth and mortality of man, Valluvar appeals to the renunciant to make spiritual hay while the bodily sun shines by practising all the virtues which he has prescribed for him.

In the chapter on renunciation, Valluvar says:—

> Whatever it is that you have renounced
> you are sure to be liberated from the pain that
> it can cause (341)

This is a profound thought which has been most pithily expressed. A man, who renounces his motor car, becomes free from the trouble and expenditure of maintaining it. The man who renounces his cook is no longer subjected to the suffering that the cook can inflict upon him. It is thus manifest that renunciation of anything whatsoever brings about liberation from the pain and mischief that that thing can cause. This Kural reminds us of the simplicity of Socrates, who was content with one simple, shabby robe throughout the year and liked bare feet better than sandals or shoes. He had freed himself from the fever of possessiveness which agitates mankind. Looking at the multitude of articles displayed for sale in the market place, he remarked, "How many things there are in this world that I do not want?" In fact, he felt himself immensely rich in his self-imposed poverty.

In Kural No. 342, Valluvar says that this renunciation gives man the capacity to rejoice in this very world and to celebrate life with eclat:—

> A man, who destroys the arrogance of 'I' and 'mine',
> will enter a world
> superior even to that of the denizens of Heaven. (346)

> Sorrows will not lose hold,
> of those who do not lose hold of attachment. (347)

In Kural No. 350, the Saint says:—

> Attach yourself to the One,
> who has no attachments;
> cling fast to that paramount attachment,
> in order to get free from all attachments.

The renunciant is next called upon to become aware of the Ultimate Reality:—

Darkness disappears from,
and bliss descends upon,
those who rid themselves of delusion
and develop an unclouded vision. (352)

For those that have dispelled doubts and achieved clarity
Heaven is nearer than Earth. (353)

According to Valluvar, even the knowledge obtained through the five senses is useless except for those who have acquired knowledge of Ultimate Reality.

The moment that a man's mind becomes aware of the Real,
it can be said with certainty
that there is no birth again for him. (357)

Let the very names of lust, anger and delusion perish;
at once all pain shall perish. (360)

In the next chapter, the sage calls upon the renunciant to root out desire:—

If desire, that woe among woes, is destroyed,
joy will become eternal even in this world. (369)

Most men think that they are free merely because they are politically, economically or socially free. The truth is that inspite of all these freedoms, they continue to be victims of their own impulses, and have no greater freedom than sleep-walkers. Says Valluvar:—

They alone are free,
who are free from desire;
the others are not really free. (365)

It is only after the individual has achieved real, spiritual, freedom and awareness of the Real and has become an ideal renunciant that Valluvar expects him to play the more important role of the member of the community and the citizen of the State.

In the concluding portion of the *Porutpal* or Canto on Wealth, which comes after the Canto on Virtue, Valluvar delineates the features of the sage or the superman and holds him up as the ideal for the renunciant. In other words, renunciation of desire, self-sacrifice, performance of penance, perception of reality, etc. are all qualities, which, according to Valluvar, are not ends in themselves, but qualities which make the individual fit to become a *Sanror* (Sage) and serve Society the better. Let it be clearly understood that the sage is not a person who runs away from life or renounces worldly duties, but a person who has eradicated his ego, discovered his own soul, achieved inner harmony and is, therefore, spiritually, temperamentally and instinctively fit to help people in distress and to spread peace and joy among men, and on the basis of the Reality of the world and life affirmation, to celebrate the whole of life. From the house-holder to the renunciant, from the renunciant to the sage or superman—that is the direction in which, according to Valluvar, Man is bound or destined to evolve. With the realization that he is one with all life, the duties and responsibilities of the sage or the superman increase enormously. In the last chapter in the Canto on Wealth, Tiruvalluvar deals with *Sanranmai* or the character of the sage; says he:—

> It is the duty of all Sages
> to perform all that is good;
> And it is the duty of all men to realize
> they should become Sages. (981)

After reaching the level of consciousness of the super-man, doing good in return for evil may become to him as natural as breathing. That is why Tiruvalluvar asks:—

> Of what avail is the character of the sage
> if he cannot confer benevolence
> even upon persons who have done him evil. (987)

Thus Tiruvalluvar conceives his *Sanror* to be a sage, who has liquidated his ego, who has an unclouded vision of Ultimate Reality, who is in a perpetual state of bliss, who is full of compassion for his fellow men, who has a profound concern for all lives that are in distress on the earth, and who, without any limitations of caste, creed, community or nation, rushes to help anyone in distress and thus practises universal love. This concept developed by Tiruvalluvar 2000 years ago is singularly refreshing and surprisingly modern.

A bird's eye view of the Tirukkural shows that Valluvar had the wisdom to see the part, not in isolation, but in the light of the whole and to suggest methods by which the tempo of the individual's evolution could be accelerated. The blue print he has handed down to posterity is both bold and detailed in conception.

12

THE BARD OF UNIVERSAL MAN

The weaver of Mylapore had a wholesome world-view; the pattern in his carpet becomes visible as we look at his multiple-tinted Kurals in the light of the whole.

He was essentially an optimist. At a time when the religions around him had developed profound misgivings about the reality of the world and started concerning themselves with man's redemption from the world, Valluvar concerned himself with the improvement of the human predicament through love and compassion. While the Protagonists of Maya taught others to say 'No' to life, Valluvar with all his might said 'Yes'. He opposed inactivity and indifference to the world and declared, "Evil *Karma* (action) is better than no *Karma"*. He said so because a man, who did evil deeds, was atleast in touch with reality, and there was, therefore, the possibility of his correcting himself; but there was no such possibility for the man who believed in non-activity.

He demanded of man not only an inner perfection but also an outer activity in the shape of selfless service to others.

The people, who believe in world and life affirmation, are usually preoccupied with worldly activity and are indifferent to their spiritual welfare. On the contrary, those who believe in world and life negation, put their spiritual welfare in the forefront and neglect the activities of the world. In fact, while the Bhagavad-Gita said, "Be unconcerned *in* action", those accustomed to life negation became unconcerned *with* action.

The Kural, on the other hand, struck the golden mean between the two schools of thought and called for external activity as much as for internal freedom.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer in his 'Indian Thought and its Development' at page 16 says: "World and Life Negation are found in the thought of Jesus in so far as he did not assume that the Kingdom of God would be realized in this natural world. He expected that this natural world would very speedily come to an end and be superseded by a super-natural world in which all that is imperfect and evil would be overcome by the power of God". On the contrary, Valluvar believed that in this very natural world, the liberated man can find his heaven and said that perfect bliss could be attained by an individual in this natural world itself and it is unnecessary to wait indefinitely for the transformation of the world in order to transform oneself. Thus he took life and world affirmation to a loftier plane than Christ.

In Jain and Buddhistic thought, non-violence was originally advocated out of an eagerness to keep oneself uncontaminated by the world; in fact, the principle of non-violence originated in those religions from the principle of non-activity. But in Valluvar, positive love and compassion are the basis, upon which non-violence is justified.

Another contribution Tiruvalluvar made to the world of thought is equally original. He said: "Whatever is good conduces to happiness and whatever is productive of good is the truth". This theory of truth is an important event in the history of philosophy.

Yet another contribution made by Tiruvalluvar was to free the concept of God from the trammels put upon it by denominational religions. Diderot, the 18th Century French Philosopher, rejected with scorn the God revealed in the Bible and pleaded with his countrymen to rise to a conception of God worthy of the Universe that science had revealed: "Enlarge and Liberate God", he demanded. Nearly two millenia before Diderot, Tiruvalluvar had enlarged and liberated God by equating Him with pure and absolute love. In fact, Tirumoolar, one of the spiritual descendants of Tiruvalluvar

expounded this theory of love in Tirumandiram, a collection of 3000 immortal songs in Tamil. In one of his songs, be says:—

They are fools, who say
that Love and God are two;
they know not that Love and God are one;
after knowing that Love and God are one,
they remain rooted in Love-as-God.

While Western thought was in the main concerned with Man and Society and tended to ignore his relationship to his Maker, oriental thought reversed the process and was concerned more with man's relation to his Maker than with man's relation to man. Valluvar absorbed the best from both these schools. His chief glory is that he effected a synthesis of the two for the first time in the history of thought. This is obviously why Dr. Albert Schweitzer, one of the greatest philosophers and humanitarians of the 20th Century, says in his "Indian Thought and its Development" as follows:—

"That the idea of active love did arise in the popular ethics of India in fairly ancient times we know from many stories we meet in her literature and especially through the ethical maxims found in the Kural, a work which probably belongs to the 2nd Century A.D."

***

"What a difference between the Kural and the Laws of Manu which originated some four centuries before it! In the latter, under the dominance of the Brahmanic spirit, world and life affirmation is still just tolerated alongside world and life negation. In the Kural, world and life negation is only like a distant cloud in the sky."

***

"In the ethics of the Kural, as in those of the Laws of Manu, the idea of reward has a place. The way of virtue is recommended because it leads to a better reincarnation or to liberation from rebirth. Alongside of this is found also the naive view, which is so conspicuous in Chinese ethics, that moral behaviour results in

earthly welfare and immoral in misfortune. Nevertheless, ethics in the Kural are not so entirely dominated by the idea of reward as in Brahmanism, Buddhism, and the Bhagavad-Gita. We already find here the knowledge that good must be done for its own sake. It shines out from various maxims".

***

"Even though one should say there is no higher world, it is still good to give" (222)—"True liberality asks nothing in return. What does the world give in return to the cloud that gives it rain?" (211)

***

"Whilst the Bhagavad Gita in a forced and chilly manner gives as a motive for remaining in active life that it is in accordance with the order of the Universe, the Kural justifies it—what an advance!—by the idea of ethical activity. Work and profit place a man in a position to do good."

***

"According to the Kural, duty is not confined, as in the Bhagavad-Gita to what the caste ailing involves, but consists is in general in "all that is good".

***

"Maxims about joy in activity, such as one would not expect from Indian lips, bear witness to the strength of the world and life affirmation present in the Kural".

***

"Like the Buddha and the Bhagavad-Gita, the Kural desires inner freedom from the world and a mind free from hatred. Like them it stands for the commandment not to kill and not to damage. It has appropriated all the valuable ethical results of the thought of world and life negation. But in addition to this ethic of inwardness there appears in the Kural the living ethic of love."

***

"With sure strokes the Kural draws the ideal of simple ethical humanity. On the most varied questions concerning the conduct of man to himself and to the world its utterances are characterised by nobility and good sense. *There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom.*"

***

"So a natural and ethical world and life affirmation of this kind was present among the people of India at the beginning of our era, although nothing of it can be found in Brahmanism, Buddhism and Bhagavad-Gita Hinduism. It gradually penetrates into Hindu thought through the great religious teachers who had sprung from the lower castes and lived among and felt with the people."

Thus Dr. Albert Schweitzer puts Tiruvalluvar on the highest peak of Indian thought. Shri Aurobindo in his book, "The Foundations of Indian Culture" —(Page 358) refers to the Tirukkural as "the Gnomic Poetry, the greatest in plan, conception and force of execution, ever written in this kind, of the Tamil Saint, Tiruvalluvar."

The man, who has earned such compliments, must have spent the greater part of his life thinking about Man, about human conditions and about the best way of leading life while on this planet. He worked out his concepts in a pragmatic manner so that they could be applied to the details of daily living.

In the great systole and diastole of history, an age of licentiousness is succeeded by an age of severe discipline. From the way Valluvar condemns the vices of man, it may not be far wrong to presume that the society in which he lived was profligate, given to tall talk, violence and triviality. At the same time, it may be noticed that Valluvar presents a many-toned picture of a society, which had a high culture which was sophisticated and well-ordered and which had an opulent religious, aesthetic, economic and political activity and had an abundant life-movement.

While dealing with such a society and commenting upon it, he reveals his clairvoyant intelligence as well as the fact that he was a masterly mixture of wisdom and learning, idealism and pragmatism, gravity and humour, austerity and romance. He salted his profound observations with kindly humour, and occasionally, with biting sarcasm.

Tiruvalluvar left little to be said on any major problems of life. The accumulated impression that one receives from what he has said is that the sage rather than the warrior was the ideal of Valluvar, and his ideal man (Sanror) not only talked philosophy but also lived it. His writings leave us the impression that he had a strong conviction that compassion is the power that holds the different parts of the Universe together and the greatest happiness can only come from, and the perfect morality would consist in, a sensitive loyalty to this whole.

The witchery of Valluvar enables him to give himself wisely both to the pursuit of Truth and to the creation of Beauty. He not only founded a new philosophy but also gave expression to it in poems of such sculptured power that no man has equalled them. The Kurals, as a whole, have just enough lightness to float the burden of Valluvar's thought.

Tiruvalluvar coined phrases and invented expressions, which have put both language and philosophy heavily in his debt. The very composure and majesty with which he sums up immense things reflect the confidence, poise and grace with which he met the problems of life. No mistiness, vagueness, sophistry, prevarication or indecision clouds his writings.

There is a vital inwardness and ripeness about his couplets arising from his extraordinary maturity and mellowness. He, therefore, drops his fruits of wisdom like a ripe tree.

Above all, his colossal and loving inclusiveness gives him a vision that refuses to recognise the trivialities of caste, community or nation. His is a cosmopolitanism, which he shared with another

Tamil Poet, Poon Kundranar, who was probably coeval in time with Tiruvalluvar and who showed similar catholicity by proclaiming:—

> Every country is my native land
> and every man my kinsman.

In the great republic of letters, Valluvar had few equals. Rightly did G.U. Pope hail him as "The Bard of Universal Man".

•

APPENDIX

Transliteration of Tamil words used in this monograph, with diacritical marks:

1. Tiruvaḷḷuvar
2. Tirukkuraḷ
3. Kambar
4. Avvayār
5. Chēra
6. Chōla
7. Pāndyā
8. Tamiḷ
9. Karikāl Chōḷa
10. Gajabāhu
11. Silappatikāram
12. Manimēkalai
13. Sāttanār
14. Kapilar
15. Paraṇar
16. Kōtamanār
17. Māngudi Marudanār
18. Tēnīkkudi Marutanār

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The Cural of Tiruvalluvar—Translation by Rev. W.H. Drew … 1840
2. The Tamil Plutarch—By Simon Casey Chitty … 1859
3. The Sacred Kural or Tiruvalluva Nayanar By Rev. G. U. Pope—*Oxford University Press* … 1886
4. Le Livre D L' Amour De Tiruvallouva—French Translation by De Barrigue De Fontainieu … 1889
5. The Maxims of Tiruvalluvar—By V.V.S. Iyer … 1915
6. Valluvam—Dr. Va. Suba. Manickam … 1953
7. 'Valluvar Vakku'—Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Tiruvalluvar Kazhagam, Tenkasi … 1955
8. Tiruvalluvar Vazhkai Vilakkam—By M. Varadarajan … 1959
9. Tirukkural—English Translation & Notes and Comments—By K.M. Balasubramaniam … 1962
10. A History of Tamil Literature—By T.P. Meenakshisundaram … 1965
11. Tirukkural Needi Ilakkiam—By K.T. Tiruna-vukkarasu … 1971
12. "Tirukkural Couplets with Clear Prose Rendering" By Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati … 1971
13. Voice of Valluvar—By Rao Saheb S.R.V. Arasu … 1972
14. Tirukkural Puthaiporul—By K.A.P. Viswanathan … 1974