

UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA



SIR PONNAMPALAM RAMANATHAN  
MEMORIAL LECTURE

VALUES IN POLITICS  
(Thirukkural : a case study)

BY

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*Sir. Ponnampalam Ramanathan*



Dr. Ponnambalam Ramanathan

## INTRODUCTION

The University of Jaffna, in collaboration with the Parameshwara Trust, conducts the Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan Memorial Lecture. The theme usually centres round subjects related to tradition, religion, technology, society and human values.

This year the lecture is being delivered by Dr. S. K. Shanmukha Nathan, Head, Department of Economics, University of Jaffna. His area of specialisation includes Economics, Political Science and International Politics.

His lecture is on *Values in Politics* and takes *Thirukkural* as its central point of reference. It is a fitting tribute to the Memory of the great statesman, administrator, philanthropist and philosopher.

University of Jaffna,  
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1992-09-08.

Professor A. Thurairajah,  
Vice-Chancellor



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Professor A. Thiruvirajulu  
Vice-Chancellor

University of Jaffna,  
Thiruvirajulu, Jaffna.  
1997-09-02

Dear President Hon. Vice - Chancellor,  
The Dean, Faculty of Arts,  
Members of the Ramanathan Memorial Trust,  
Members of the academic community, University of Jaffna,  
Students, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a supreme honour to have been invited to deliver

## SIR PONNAMPALAM RAMANATHAN MEMORIAL LECTURE 1992.

Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan was pre - eminently an idealist but he never lost sight of practicality and realism. The cast of his mind and outlook was that of a man of action.

For half a century and more, Ramanathan was the Principal actor and motive force on the national scene. Whether as statesman or administrator, whether as a philanthropist or as a philosopher he was the focus of attention and affection.

The present lecture is designed to commemorate that great man, the illustrious figure of Tamil Eelam who second to none in proclaiming the lofty ideals in Tamil Culture. As a political leader and statesman Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan represented the Ceylon Tamils, at various national and international forums.

Introducing Ramanathan to the American audience Myron Phelps, a New York lawyer and an eminent Indologist said, "he is by far the most spiritually illuminating teacher I have ever known". Everywhere in America he was addressed as "Brahma jnani" or the knower of God.<sup>1</sup>

This evening I propose to discuss a topic which was very near to his heart; he reflected these ideas in the course of his learned speeches in the Ceylon Legislative Assembly as well as in many platforms he had addressed in Sri Lanka and abroad. "Ramanathan's fame and name travelled far beyond the confines of this little Island. England placed him in the front rank of imperial statesman of the day. India acclaimed him the most authoritative exponent of the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy".<sup>2</sup>

The theme of the lecture today is:- "VALUES IN POLITICS"  
- Thirukkural a case study -

“வள்ளுவர் வகுத்த அரசியல் விழுமியங்கள்”

Sir Ramanathan was specially invited by the Tamil Scholars in Madras, which included such illustrious names like Dr. U. V. Suwaminatha Aiyer, Marai Malai Adigal and V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar to inaugurate the Thiruvalluvar Maha Sabai. He accepted the invitation and travelled to Madras and delivered the Presidential Address. He told his audience that he had the chance of reciting the Kural verses from his childhood. He loved the beauty of the diction of these two - line verses which contained inestimable ideas. Ramanathan declared that the “Thirukural holds within its pages the panacea for the multitude of ills that have afflicted humanity and that it is man's best recipe for the making of a new world”. Ramanathan also published a commentary on the first four chapters of Kural and called it “Payiram” (பாயிரம்)

ஆயிர முகத்தால் அகன்றதர்யினும்  
பாயிர மில்லது பனுவ லன்றே (நன்னூல்)

### What are Values?

Value is a term commonly used in economics, religion and social relationships. In economics, value and price go together. Value refers to exchange ratios among economic goods and services. There was a classical school which proposed the labour theory of value which remained in vogue until Karl Marx modified it to suit his ideology.

In social relationships values refer to the ends of life, the purpose of life etc. Philosophical theory of value is closely related to ethics and to a great extent both ethics and values co-exist. So also moral values which are based on the mores or accepted practices of communities.

In his monumental work “General theory of value” Ralph B. Perry defines value in the generic sense “any object of any interest”. Objects become valuable only when somebody takes interest in them. But Perry concludes that objective value study



does not involve a "vicious relativism". Valuations do not depend on feeling and opinion; they are of permanent interest.<sup>3</sup> Values are Universal in application.

When we come to politics, we learn that values are authoritatively enforced. Of course this is a negation of freedom and therefore, inconsistent with the lofty ideals of freedom we preach. According to Professor David Easton, "Politics is the study of authoritative allocation of values for the society."<sup>4</sup> In Hegel's theoretical construct the state was glorified. Nothing short of the state is the actualization of freedom. From Hegelian dialectics came Marxian interpretation of history. So the value system also undergoes fundamental changes from Individualism to Socialism,

### Values of Thirukkural

Politics as you know is an ancient discipline, as old as the city - states of ancient Greece. And politics is also a natural activity; as natural as the family. Family is inescapable for a normal man. So also political activity is quite natural and compulsory; man is born as a member of a state and continues to live in it performing the roles of a citizen. As a citizen he has rights as well as obligations. So the state as a natural institution existed not only in ancient Greece but also in all parts of the world.<sup>5</sup> A well developed state system governments and laws, political philosophy, and ideas of power existed in Greece, Rome, India, China and in many parts of the world. We find Plato speaking about Justice, Aristotle about forms of government Cicero and Polybius on international law and empire systems. Kautilya discussing political domination and Thiruvalluvar emphasising virtue and character in both the ruler and the ruled. He declares in many places virtue and truth as highest values in domestic and social life.

Thiruvalluvar was concerned with the building of a model, a model of social living. In this structural model, virtue or அறம் is the foundation.

"அறத்தான் வருவதே இன்பம்" என்றும்

"அறனீனும் இன்பமும் ஈனும் திறனறிந்து தீதின்றி வந்தபொருள்"

(754)

Valluvar fixed "fair means" for acquiring wealth as well as pleasure.

Politics is a natural phenomenon, but at the same time it involves power. Harold Lasswell, a modern thinker defined thus:

"Political Science is an empirical discipline; the study of the shaping and sharing of power". He further said that a political act is performed in power perspectives"<sup>6</sup>

So power had been a permanent issue in politics. Plato understood its importance but tried to devalue it in his scheme of his ideal politics. Whereas Kautilya and Machiavelli enthroned power in their scheme of pragmatic politics, thus values suffered a set-back in them. In the dealings with the king, power and power alone mattered. The title "Arthasastra" yields a meaning therefore, aggrandisement of the state power, through economic and political means, he was called Chanakya; Thiruvalluvar seems to have propagated a secular approach to problems of man and society.

Thirukkural keeps the moral order and love as the basic values. Kural is a 3 dimensional treatise on Dharma, Artha and Karma meaning அறம் பொருள் இன்பம். It is therefore, known as "Muppai" (முப்பால்) Here Aram is a body of moral principles which is also a central thread which permeates all the three aspects of life. These moral principles are based on the traditional qualities of Tamil social life; Therefore Valluvar speaks of morals as if common to the ordinary citizen as well as to the king. Hence status may vary; social position may change — yet the values remain same throughout. Can we say, therefore, that Kural is democratic in form, content and appeal? Dr. M. Varadarajan expresses this view in his famous book, "திருவள்ளுவர் அல்லது வாழ்க்கை விளக்கம்". Kural's concepts are applicable both to Kingship (முடி ஆட்சி) as well as Democracy (குடியாட்சி)

Thirukkural Didaetic Poetry திருக்குறள் நீதிக் கவிதை

The Thirukkural has been acclaimed as a world classic and its author, Thiruvalluvar, as a bard of Universal Man.



The Thirukkural has a three fold treatment of life as Virtue Wealth and enjoyment. Dr. Varatharajan calls it a Three — dimensional models of living. Valluvar declares that those who live up to these models will be counted among the Gods:

வையத்துள் வாழ்வாங்கு வாழ்பவன் வானுறையும்  
தெய்வத்துள் வைக்கப் படும் (50)

As for the Tamil literary tradition, the treatment of life in terms of its inner and outer phases அகம், புறம் is well known. Aham deals with love and family life, Puram with the external life, that is life outside the home orbit. Puram could refer to the environment which includes the economic activity, social and political. Politics of course include the war and peace efforts of the community.

Both the inner and outer aspects of life may be taken to deal with two stages of spiritual evolution. In the first stage the inner and the outer aspects of life stands for human love and external warfare. In the second stage they stand for consummation of human love in divine love as a result of the conquest of the self. The early discovery of this ethics of life and social living is very impressive in the Tamil Culture.

Albert Schweitzer said:

"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 such lofty wisdom".<sup>9</sup>

A survey of the didactic poetry in ancient world literature bears testimony to this statement.<sup>10</sup> Following Homer's Iliad and Odyssey we come across Hesiod who wrote "Works and Days" (வேலையும் நாள்களும்)<sup>11</sup> and Ariotophanes "The Frogs" (தவளைகள்) both were considered famous didactic poetry. These were songs in praise of agriculturists and farmers. Hesiod speaks of a God who protects law and justice. The famous law giver of ancient Greece Solon also gives his instructions for good life

in verse. Then we come across the Latin classics written by Virgil.<sup>12</sup> It was also a book on Agriculture, known as "Georgics". Virgil declared that farming is the back bone of the national economy in Rome. It was wrong to have neglected it in the imperialistic Rome. We find a similar attitude in Thiruvalluvar:

சுழன்றும் ஏர்ப்பின்னது உலகம் அதனால்  
உழந்தும் உழவே தலை (குறள் 1031)

Virgil, this great poet said that death is nothing but deep sleep. Don't you find an echo in Valluvar in the Kural.

உறங்குவது போலும் சாக்காடு

After Virgil a book on astronomy வானவியல் - Astronomica by Menillus became popular among the Romans: This was also a didactic poetry. Menillus pointed out of an unknown godly power which establishes and operates the Universe.

Thus didactic poetry as well as didactic literature in ancient Greece and Rome performed the task of enforcing good behaviour among the people. In this long line of great authors must also be mentioned the Chinese thinker Confucius: In direct transliteration - K'ung Fu Tze. We understand him as the great thinker and philosopher, whose works are classified in the following headings.<sup>13</sup>

Aphorisms	—	முது மொழிகள்
The Great Learning	—	சிறப்பு மிக்க கல்வி
The Golden Mean	—	நடுவழிக் கோட்பாடு

Confucius once said, "Our elders were reluctant to tell all what to they felt, because others may ask 'could you live it?' We have a similar opinion expressed in Kural:

சொல்லுதல் எவர்க்கும் எளிய ; அரியவாம்  
சொல்லிய வண்ணம் செயல் (குறள் 664)

Confucius was known for his 'middle of the road' policy, that is "the doctrine of the golden mean".



## THIRUVALLUVAR AND KAUTILYA

Under the synthetic approach to the study of ancient political thought and institutions in India, Kautilya dominates the scene. A long line of philosophic theorists beginning with Manu/Usanas, Brihaspathi, Kautilya Vyasa are analysed by Indian and Western writers. But very few like Meckance Brown (in his book *Indian Political Thought*) have recognized the contribution made by South Indian thinkers. One such belief was voiced by Vaiyapuripillai by saying that Kautilya belonged to the South and from South he went to the North, studied the Dharmasastras and Arthasastras then prevalent in North India. Kautilya himself mentions in his book 'that this is a compendium of all the Arthasastras which in view of acquisition and maintenance of the earth, have been composed by ancient teachers'. (B. A. Salutare)

However, there are fundamental differences between Thiruvalluvar and Kautilya in the approach to polity and political views. Kautilya based his "Arthasastra" on the original "Dharmamithi" or Dandaniti which were parts of Dharmasastras. Professor P. V. Kane's view is representative of the many thinkers on this subject. Dr. Kane said, "Rajadharma is a very important subject of the Dharmasastras, and that the Arthasastra which is principally connected with rights, privileges and responsibilities of the ruler, is therefore, a part of Dharmasastra"<sup>14</sup> But there are others like Dr. Narenthranath Law and Professor Rungaswami Ayangar who maintained that Dandaniti was not born out of Dharmasastra, but was evolved on independent lines.<sup>15</sup>

Thiruvalluvar, on the other hand belonged to a different tradition and cultural background. First he had the Sangam epoch which produced the immortal literature called அகநானூறு and புறநானூறு. Tholkappiam should have been very close to him. Thiruvalluvar must have been exposed to Buddhist and Jaina ideologies. It would not be inappropriate if I say that he could have been acquainted with the Greek Political thought, as he lived at a time when flourishing trade was on between Thamilagam and Yavanam (Greece).

Thiruvalluvar was Preoccupied with a stable social order based on economic welfare and a good government. He once and for all rejected the laws inherent in Varnashrama Dharma and the principles of Dandaniti. We can safely conclude that Valluvar was the most secular and pragmatic. He also did not accept politics based on power and brute force. His was a polity based on human values. Whenever and wherever possible, whether in Porutpal Arathupal or Kamathupal, Valluvar's emphasis was on the righteous conduct and human values. The relevance of Thiruvalluvar for the modern age is that according to the Soviet researcher Pyatigorsky: "Valluvar neither prophesied nor spoke in hints and riddles but spoke with full conviction of the truth, both as an artist and thinker".<sup>16</sup>

### Polity of Thiruvalluvar

The uniqueness of Thiruvalluvar is that his polity is universal and does not refer to any particular state or kingdom. His ideas are based on a sense of values which are again universal and are not circumscribed by the conventions of a static society. Thiruvalluvar's concern is with an ideal state in the modern sense. In this respect his writings could be compared to the views of an ideal state of Plato. But Plato had been criticised as an utopian idealist as his views cannot be applied to living societies; where-as Thiruvalluvar has been acclaimed a Realist with a universal outlook, this was one of the fundamental traits of classical Tamil writing. He came in traditional background which proclaimed the ideal,

“யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்”

It is true that Thiruvalluvar had the traditional concept of a Ruler - Kingdom in his mind while writing on political principles. But he does not refer to any particular king or ruler of his time, as we find in Kautilya or Machiavelli. Kautilya had the Chandragupta Maurya as the ideal king, while Machiavelli wrote with the Ruler of Medici in mind. That was why Thiruvalluvar did not attempt to institutionalize any system of political authority. But he speaks about the power and respect of a king, places great importance on the role of ministers,



ambassadors and even on spies. It is very interesting to find such perennial truths expressed not by way of aphorisms but in a simple language.

Soviet Indologist and one who translated Thirukkural to Russian, Alexander Pyatigorsky said.

“It is an integral, homogenous work of art, the author of which addresses neither king nor subject but men. He does not address as a law-giver or prophet but as a well-wisher and teacher”.

“The Kural of Thiruvalluvar is rightly considered as Chef-d’oeuvre of both Indian and world literature. It is basically for the lofty humane ideas contained in it which are equally precious to the people all over the world, of all periods and countries”.

## CONSTITUENTS OF THE POLITY IN TIRUKKURAL

Thiruvalluvar's polity consists of The Ruler, The Ministers and Ambassadors, Fortress and Army, Wealth, Allies and Citizenry. His was not an exhaustive treatment of the elements of state like Kautilya. Because we must remember that he was not concerned with state craft nor with diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> Valluvar has not visualized states at war with one another; thus he was not dialated on armies and spies like Kautilya, nor was he interested in giving advices to any prince or ruler to become powerful.

Valluvar speaks about 3 basic freedoms:-

- (a) Freedom from Hunger.
- (b) Freedom from Disease
- (c) Freedom from Fear

Blessed is the land that knows no famine, disease and enmity: And blessed is the land which knows no poverty. Because poverty is the cause of all ills and evils.<sup>18</sup>

தங்குரவு என்னும் இடும்பையுள் பங்குரைத்  
துன்பங்கள் சென்று படும். (1045)

Alfred Marshall in his classic "Principles of Economics" says "The study of poverty is the study of the causes of degradation of a large part of mankind".

About the king Valluvar says,

முறைசெய்து காப்பாற்றும் மன்னவன் — மக்கட்  
கிறைஎன்று வைக்கப் படும் (குறள் 388)

The Prince who administers impartial justice and protects his subjects will be considered a God among men.

Here the word "முறை" refers to Justice in the traditional Tamil Culture which is referred to by another all comprehensive term "அறம்". Justice is, therefore, based on natural law and justice of the Tamil community, which had evolved over several centuries 19

Discussing the elements of the state Kautilya mentions seven saptanga:-

- (1) The King (2) The Ministry (3) The Country
- (4) The Fort (5) The Treasury (6) The Army and (7) The Allies

Whereas Thiruvalluvar said,

படைகுடி கூழமைச்சு நட்பரன் ஆறும்  
உடையான் அரசருள் ஏறு (381) Kural identifies 6 elements

"He is a lion among princes who possesses:

- (i) army (ii) citizenery (iis) resources (iv) ministry
- (v) allies and (vi) fortification "



The Kural identifies the King with the state, whereas Kautilya treats the King as only an element in the state.

Regarding the powers of the King, Kural declares:

இயற்றலும் ஈட்டலும் காத்தலும் காத்து  
வகுத்தலும் வல்ல தரசு (குறள் 385)

The ruler should know how to develop the resources of the country. He also should see that wealth is evenly distributed.

Thiruvalluvar expects the ruler to know the truth; he may listen to every views and opinions but should be able to take final decision based on Truth.

எப்பொருள் யார்யார்வாய்க் கேட்பினும் அப்பொருள்  
மெய்ப்பொருள் காண்பது அறிவு. (குறள் 423)

Thiruvalluvar says that right man for the right job should be selected he should be left free to do the duty.

இதனை இதனான் இவன்முடிக்கும் என்றாய்ந்து  
அதனை அவன்கண் விடல். (குறள் 511)

These two kural Stanzas show that Valluvar was no dogmatist. The beauty is that whatever is told of the king is also applicable to the individual citizen. This is the uniqueness of Porutpal.

## JUST GOVERNMENT

A equivalent term used for just government in Thiruvalluvar is செங்கோன்மை.

வேலன்றி வென்றி தருவது; மன்னவன்  
கோல், அதுவும் கோடாதெனின் (குறள் 546)

It is not the weapon that gives victory to a ruler; it is sceptre (செங்கோல்) which should be straight. Valluvar, therefore, emphasises the Rule of the law in his polity.

## CONCLUSION

Thiruvalluvar's polity is one in which people live in harmony among themselves and the ruler upholding the highest ideals of righteousness and goodness and following correct economic policies. Thiruvalluvar had visualised the ideal of a welfare state which will be free from want and disease and wherein people can raise themselves to the stature of human excellence.

உறுபசியும் ஓவாப் பிணியும் செறுபகையும்

சேரா தியல்வது நாடு. (குறள் 734)

Thiruvalluvar devotes great attention to the virtues of good citizenry. He uses the term "சான்றாண்மை" for the attributes of good citizenry and the term செங்கோன்மை for a good government. Good citizens are those who possess the virtues of good conduct (ஒழுக்கம்) truth (வாய்மை) and dignity (தன் நிலையில் தாழாமை). He had not classified people into "rulers" and ruled, but as members of the orderly society. Thiruvalluvar's polity was not a "Police state" which depended on brute force. That was the reason why unlike Kautilya, he did not subscribe to the idea that dandaniti was the basis of state. Thiruvalluvar believed in the moral force which bind the society together and this was his approach to values. Thiruvalluvar propounded a theory of political values, the ends being good government and social happiness.<sup>20</sup>

Let me conclude with a passage from Baghwan Satya Sai-Baba's "EDUCATION IN HUMAN VALUES":

Politics without principles,  
Education without character,  
Science without humanity,  
Commerce without morality, are not only useless  
but positively dangerous.

இறுதியாக எமது யுழ் பல்கலைக்கழகத்தின் கோட்பாட்டினையும் நினைவுகூர்ந்து இவ்வுரையை நிறைவு செய்கின்றேன்.

"எப்பொருள் யார்யார்வாய்க் கேட்பினும் அப்பொருள் மெய்ப்பொருள் காண்ப தறிவு"

Thank you.

## APPENDIX:

திருக்குறள்

அறத்துப்பால் - VIRTUE

பொருட்பால் - WEALTH

காமத்துப்பால் - LOVE

அரசியல் - POLITY

இறைமாட்சி

கல்வி

அறிவுடைமை

வலியறிதல்

செங்கோன்மை

கொடுங்கோன்மை

கண்ணோட்டம்

ஒற்றாடல்

- The greatness of a King

- Education / Learning

- Possession of knowledge

- Estimating strength

- The Right Rule

- Unjust Government

- Graciousness

- Espionage

அமைச்சியல் - Ministry of State

அமைச்சு

சொல் வன்மை

வினைத் தூய்மை

வினைத் தீட்பம்

தூது

குறிப்பறிதல்

அவை அறிதல்

அவை அஞ்சாமை

- Ministers

- Eloquence

- Purity in action

- Power

- Envoys

- To know the king's mind

- Knowledge of the Assembly

- To avoid nervousness

அங்கவியல் - Elements of the State

நாடு

அரண்

பொருள் செயல் வகை

படை மாட்சி

படைச் செருக்கு

நட்பு

- The country

- Fortification

- Acquisition of wealth

- Excellence in army

- Army

- Friendship

# ஒழியியல் - Miscellaneous

குடிமை	- Nobility
மானம்	- Honour
பெருமை	- Greatness
சான்றாண்மை	- Perfect goodness
பண்புடைமை	- Courtesy
நல்குரவு	- Poverty
இரத்தல்	- Mondicanoy.



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