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**UNIVERSAL HUMANISM IN
*TIRUKKURAL***

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by

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Introduction

1. Like *Bible* in every Christian home, like *Bhagwat Gita* in every devout Hindu's home, like the *Holy Quran* in every devout Muslim's home, the book of *Tirukkural* forms an inseparable part of every Tamilian's home all over the world. This Paper analyzes the intrinsic merit of the religion of Universal Humanism that is embedded within each of the 1330 'Kurals' written by Saint Tiruvalluvar nearly three thousand years ago, which has survived the test of time, despite many odds.

2. What characterizes these 1330 couplets is the basic structure of three major sections namely "*Araththuppaal*", "*PoruTpaal*" and "*Kamaththuppaal*". For a better appreciation of the contents of each of these three major sections one may as well classify them in to the following broad thematic classification:
 - 2.1 "Ethics of Good Living"
 - 2.2 "Ethics of Good Governance"
 - 2.3 "Intricacies of Sensual Pleasures between lovers".

Within these three broad spectra of human experience, Tiruvalluvar deals extensively between choices available for every man/woman in choosing personal codes of conduct, the judicious cannons of righteous governance to be adopted by Kings and Leaders in charge of a country or a society at large and thirdly the right kind of sensual pleasures that a Man and Woman can extend to each other in their carnal behaviour, which naturally leads on to the right kind of progenies of value to the Society. In brief, there is a "Holistic appraisal" of human behavior in all the three levels of an individual's family life within the four walls of a home, social obligations in life within the broader society at large and finally physical intimacy wrapping up sensuality in life. Thus, the wholeness of life is covered in all respects from beginning to end.

3. Valluvar was not a religious or social preacher and hence he does not lay down prescriptive rules and regulations to follow. Instead his approach is one of plain description of basic rationale approximating to scientific, pragmatic “Humanism” of universal significance. One of the main reasons why his 1330 Kural verses has survived these several centuries of waves of many changes in human civilization is because of that universal attitude of perfect humanism. He resembles Shakespeare in English literature or Omar Khayyam in Persian sufism or Confucius among the Chinese Philosophers. He transcends time and space, belonging to the era of past, present and future because his theme is eternally valid for all peoples of the world at large: the eternally vital culture of *Universal Humanism*.

4. We may consider *Tirukkural* as an epic artifact of grand concepts dealing with moral and social/ political treatise of all times. Within it we may discover the personal, the social and the intimately dual / carnal (sensual) feelings of mutual enjoyment. To put it in other words, there is a cud for every reader of *Tirukkural*, to nip it, to bite it to chew it and enjoy the cud of it whenever time permits to mentally get back to chew the contents at one’s own leisure. In that respect it is also modern in structure and style: to visit, and revisit at one’s own space, time and convenience. This aspect of its brevity, chapter - wise arrangement of structured contents, classification and sub-titles indication system add to the beauty of its everlasting universal literary merits. Hence it is a classic par excellence of the class of Homer’s “*Iliad*” and Virgil’s “*Aeneid*”. It is quite enormous and stands equal to “Paradise Lost” but without the injunction of a clash between National Armies, individual valour and heroics or with an intended objective of “justifying the actions of GOD to Man.” Come to think of it, it justifies the actions of men and women to Mankind. That sums up the greatness of the *Universal Humanism* carefully pre-selected by Saint Valluvar.

5. At a very different level of “Perception” and appreciation it may also lend itself to most modern concepts of righteous and effective principles of Management and Corporate profitability in social transactions between various social groups and levels among “stakeholders”. In a nutshell, *Tirukkural* fits in admirably in meeting all the Canons of “Classical”, “Modern” and “Post – Modern” values of human nature.

6. The presenter of this Paper takes legitimate but humble privilege in delving deep in to the *Universal Values* embedded in this great work of Art, Polity and Sensuality, through several examples presented in their original and through translations in a major language of global importance, namely English. It is very comforting to know that Tirukkural has been already translated in to many major languages of the world. Yet there is a desideratum to have it translated in to *all* spoken and written languages of mankind. Such translations that are mostly available in the Web Space as well as print medium provide all the necessary support to implement our appeal to the larger World Body namely the United Nations through its wonderful cultural arm of UNESCO to recognize it as a fitting piece of **GLOBAL LITERATURE of Universal Humanism** so as to enable immediate and automatic TRANSLATIONS of Tirukkural in all the major Languages of the World at large, especially so at the present age of instantaneous computer translation processes. Finally let us sum up putting forth a strong case through the unanimous recommendation for recognition of “ *Tirukkural* ” as a sound and dexterously woven ethically founded “Valuable Document of the United Nations” in the larger interest of creating a perfect understanding between all the member Nations of the U N, appreciating and following sound principles of *Universal Humanism*.
7. The very first English translation of TIRUKKURAL was by an eminent British Civil Servant, Francis Whyte Ellis, who was one of those who took his duties quite seriously. He had single handedly undertaken a veritably authentic translation of nearly one third of the 1330 couplets, some of which are quoted often for its sheer inspiration. As for instance the three couplets that are quoted below by the eminent historian, Charles Allen (2017: p.77.) in his well - researched book “ Coromandel : A personal history of South India.”

அன்பகத் தில்லா உயிர்வாழ்க்கை வன்பாற்கண்
வற்றல் மரந்தளிர்த் தற்று.

(குறள் எண் : 78)

78. *As in a barren soil a sapless tree,
So flourish those in wedded bliss, whose souls
Know not the sweets of love.*

புறத்துறுப் பெல்லாம் எவன்செய்யும் யாக்கை
அகத்துறுப்பு அன்பி லவர்க்கு.

(குறள் எண் : 79)

79. *What though the body each perfection own,
If in the breast, the beauty of the mind,
Exist not.*

அன்பின் வழியது உயிர்நிலை அ.திலார்க்கு
என்புதோல் போர்த்த உடம்பு.

(குறள் எண் : 80)

80. *That breast alone contains a living soul,
Which love inspires; void of this genial warmth,
'Tis bone o'erlaid with skin.*

The significance of this translation, points out Charles Allen, “was enough to inspire the French Scholar Edouard – Simon Ariel to work on his own French translation, declaring in a letter to his eminent colleague Eugene Burnouf that what was so wonderful about these verses was 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; the fact that he proclaims in this very essence, in their eternal abstractness, virtue and truth... the tenderest emotions of the heart.” (Allen: 2017: p.77)

8. Hence in historical and contemporary social perspective, “*Tirukkural symbolizes their Ulagap podhumarai* or ‘ common creed’ to most of the ancient South Indians, as well as offering a guide to the good life lived in harmony with humanity and nature. At the very least, the Tirukkural’s 1330 melodious couplets, ten to each chapter, are easy to remember and full of good sense.” (Allen: 2017p.78)

There are many myths and legends about the origin, the parentage and the social background of this common bard of Thamizhagam. While they are interestingly presented by many historians who are least interested in polemics of the most common Aryans versus Dravidians debate, it is worth noting that the same Historian mentioned above found that,

“... However, in 2005 this widely accepted version was challenged by the Kanyakumari Historical and Cultural Research Centre, which announced that it had established Tiruvalluvar’s true origins. A name inscribed on a tenth- century copper plate had led them to the most southerly section of the Western Ghats, known in British days as the Tinnevely Range but carrying a variety of far older names, including Pothigai Malai, Pothiyam Malai, Agasthya Malai and Mahendra Giri. According to the oldest member among the Kanikkars these mountains are known as Thiruvana Malai because they had been named after one of their own, the poet Saint Tiruvalluvar. Allen says, “According to the old man – 105 years old -Tiruvalluvar had been born there and had ruled the area as its King, frequently roaming through the hills with his wife in search of honey. After his death the Kanikkar people had added Tiruvalluvar to their gods and continued to worship him to the present day. But then other South Indian communities also claim Tiruvalluvar one of theirs, including Jains, Budhdhists and Shaivas. These claims make the point that Tiruvalluvar stands for Tamil and Dravidian identity. He is the South’s champion in the face of advancing Sanskritization from the North.” (Allen: 2017. P.80.)

It is but natural that loud votaries of imagined superiority and ancestry of Aryan clans begin to feel uncomfortable at the sagacity and ancestry of Tiruvalluvar and his immortal work dealing elaborately about the intricacies of good and morally righteous living (*Araththuppaal*), ethics of public and private life of individual in a normal society (*PoruTpaal*) and finally the gently expressed nuances of passionate love lives between a man and woman in all its dexterity as described in detail (*Kaamaththuppal*). Here is a balanced view of life neither negative – positive in dichotomy of values, neither moralizing and pontifying in tone and unwarranted advice and finally integrating the natural craving for normal desires of man and woman in coming together to procreate a future generation. This homogeneity of integrated values of life make the one thousand three hundred and thirty *Kural* Couplets a veritable tome of human collective wisdom.

9. That ripeness is all that Humanity needs and nothing more and nothing less than that to lead a peaceful, harmonious and beneficial existence on earth.

Let us now examine closely some of the most popular of these special couplets called ***Kural***.

- 9.1 Placing one's faith in the Creator, our GOD:
 9.2 What is the use of bookish learning, if it does not lead to following the Great God
 9.3 Who are those who manage to live long and healthy?
 9.4 How to avoid desires and prejudices in one's existence?
 9.5 How can you practice equanimity between success and failure?
 9.6 Who are those that lead a long life of perpetual happiness?
 9.7 How can one avoid mental worries that comes aplenty?
 9.8 What steps are most useful in achieving the goal of one's life?
 9.9 What are the eight-fold approaches to be practiced for a fullness in life?
 9.10 How can a person successfully cross the endless sea of repetition in births?

Commentaries written by eminent editors have underscored the basic approach of these cryptic couplets, full of apparent brevity and economy of diction, stress upon the fundamentals of human behavior through devotion to good values in life. Tiruvalluvar was not a preacher and hence avoids scrupulously a tone of pontifical prescription. He adopts to use his in – depth knowledge of human actions in various contexts and its residual results. It is therefore a Cause – Effect dialogue *a la* PLATO'S *Dialogues* with his disciples. His chosen style is deceptively simple but runs quite deep in thoughts similar to a flooded stream whose waters gushing in its muddy depth are pure and serene. In one of his couplets, Tiruvalluvar sagaciously suggests the nature of human mind when its thoughts are pure and serene. In the chapter on “ *uukkamudaimai* = Industriousness ; “Energy”(G U Pope), Valluvar observes that,

வெள்ளத் தனைய மலர்நீட்டம் மாந்தர்தம்
 உள்ளத் தனைய துயர்வு.

(குறள் எண் : 595)

VeLLaththanaiya mlar niiTTam maanthartham
ULLaththu anaiyathu uyarvu

Kural (595).

Pope's rendering is as follows:

**With rising flood the rising lotus flower its stem unwinds;
The dignity of men is measured by their minds**
= “**The stalks of water-flowers are proportionate to the depth of water; so is men's
greatness proportionate to their minds.**”

How profoundly alike and naturally genuine? Indicates depth of observation both among flora and human nature.

The very next Kural sounds more optimistic about the rewards of industrious and energetic temperament:

**உள்ளுவ தெல்லாம் உயர்வுள்ளல் மற்றது
தள்ளினுந் தள்ளாமை நீர்த்து.**

(குறள் எண் : 596)

**uLLuvathu ellaam yurvuLLal maRRathu
thaLLinum thaLLaamai niirththu**

Kural (596)

Pope's translation is as follows:

**Whatever you ponder, let your aim be lofty still,
Fate cannot hinder always, thwart you as it will**
= “**In all that a king thinks of, let him think of his greatness; and if it should be thrust
from him (by fate), it will have the nature of not being thrust from him.**”

On the power of the soul within a human being he said,

**உள்ளம் இலாதவர் எய்தார் உலகத்து
வள்ளியம் என்னுஞ் செருக்கு.**

(குறள் எண் : 598)

**uLLam ilathavar eithaar ulakaththu
vaLLiyam ennum cerukku**

(*Kural 598.*)

G U Pope's rendition is as follows:

**The soulless man can never gain
The ennobling sense of power with men.**

= Those who have no (greatness of) mind, will not acquire the joy of saying in the world, “ we have exercised liberality”

Once again the conclusion of Chapter 60. clinches the value of mental energy thus:

**உரமொருவற் குள்ள வெறுக்கையஃ தில்லார்
மரமக்க ளாதலே வேறு.**

(குறள் எண் : 600)

**uram oruvaRku uLLaveRUkkai akkthillaar
maram makkaL aathaley veeRu.**

(Kural 600.)

G.U.Pope's explication runs thus:

**Firmness of soul in man is real excellence;
Others are trees, their human form a mere pretence.**

=Energy is mental wealth; those men who are destitute of it are only trees in the form of men.

In the very next chapter on “ *Madi inmai* “ (Ch. 61) Valluvar advised:

**நெடுநீர் மறவி மடிதுயில் நான்கும்
கெடுநீரார் காமக் கலன்.**

(குறள் எண் : 605)

**NeTuniir maRvi maTithuyil naankum
KeTu niiraar kaamak kalan**

(Kural 605)

G.U. Pope's translation runs thus:

**Delay, oblivion, sloth, and sleep: these four
Are pleasure – boat to bear the doomed to ruins shore
= Procrastination, forgetfulness, idleness and sleep – these four things form the vessel
which is desired by those destined to destruction.**

On the theme of “*aaLvinai uTaimai* ” “Manly Effort” Tiruvalluvar remarks:

மடியுளாள் மாமுகடி என்ப மடியிலான்
தாளுளாள் தாமரையி னாள்.

(குறள் எண் : 617)

*muyaRci tiruvinai aakkum muyaRRinmai
inmai pukuththi vidum*

(*Kural 616*)

G. U. Pope’s translation runs as follows:

*Effort brings fortune’s sure increase,
Its absence brings to nothingness
= “Labour will produce wealth; idleness will bring poverty.”*

On administrative excellence, he has the following advice to share with Managers:

கருவியும் காலமும் செய்கையும் செய்யும்
அருவினையும் மாண்ட தமைச்சு.

(குறள் எண் : 631)

*karuviyum kaalamum ceykaiyum ceyyum
Aruvinaiyum maandatu amaichu*

(*Kural 631*)

T. R. Kallapiran, a long-time proven superb Banking Manager translates it thus:

**The good minister conceives grand projects for execution
And works out the means, proper timing and plan of action**

The modern Management Science follows the same advice through: S W O T Analysis. This is a singular but an exceptionally sound argument to place the creations of Tiruvalluvar on a universal springboard for acceptance as a fit Universal Document acceptable to all men at all times.

10. CONCLUSION

Let us conclude this brief account of the *UNIVERSAL HUMANISM*, which is the hallmark of the brilliance and eternal appeal of Tiruvalluvar's one thousand and three hundred and thirty Kural couplets, with his thoughts on "Courtesy" so succinctly presented in his one hundredth chapter called, "*PaNbudaimai*". In Kural 996 he points out,

பண்புடையார்ப் பட்டுண்டு உலகம் அதுஇன்றேல்
மண்புக்கு மாய்வது மன்.

(குறள் எண் : 996)

paNpudaiyaarp paTTunTu ulagam ahthu inRel
maNpukku maayvathu maN .”

G U Pope translates it as:

The world abides; for 'worthy' men its weight sustain,

Were it not so, 't would fall to dust again.

[= The (way of the) world subsists by contact with the good; if not, it would bury itself in
the earth and perish.]

**Let us not allow such a monumental edifice of *Tirukkural* perish from doing its duty to
preserve Universal Humanism to Mankind in this century and hereafter.**

Finally, let us recall with immense gratitude the golden thought of Dr. Abdul Kalam,

**“ DREAMS are not those that disturb our sleep, but those which do not allow us to
sleep !”**

Ladies and Gentlemen ! let us not allow ourselves get lost in sleep.

End Notes

1. “ *Tirukkural: English Translation and Commentary*” by G.U. Pope, Rev. W.H. Drew., Rev. John Lazarus and Mr. F.W. Ellis. (First published by W.H. Allen & Co., 1886. Reprinted by The South India Saiva Sidhdhantha Works Publishing Society, Tinnevely, Madras, India, 1962, 1982. A.pdf version is available at the Project Madurai Website prepared by Dr. K. Kalyanasundaram under Project Madurai 2002 and can be visited by opening: [Http://www.projectmadurai.org](http://www.projectmadurai.org)).
2. “ Tirukkural “ Words of Eternal Wisdom, Translated by Manager T. R. Kallapiran, from the perspective of Management Principles and published by TriShakthi Publications, Chennai, 2011. For Copyright queries please address e-mail: trisakthipublications@trisakthi.com or the author : kallapiran2003@yahoo.com.
3. “*Tirukkural Aram:(Meaning and Explanation), Chennai : Notionpress.com by Professor H. V. Visweswaran, 2016.* Wherein the author corrects what he considers misconceptions by the popular editor Parimelazhagar. Debatable no doubt.
Further details from: vichaan@gmail.com
4. Allen, Charles “*Coromandel: A Personal History of South India*”, Little, Brown Book Group, London, 2017. (Easily one of the most objective analysis of Tirukkural.)
5. G.U.Pope’s Collection of “ *Ellis papers on Tirukkural*” , Bodleian Library, Weston Rare Manuscripts Collection, Level 5, Oxford University, Oxford. (Indebted to prompt assistance from Mr. Alan Brown and his team of assistants at Bodleian Library).