

VALLUVAR AND PERIYAR, THE TWO RATIONALISTS OF TAMIL NADU



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Abstract:

There have been many sages, saints, and philosophers in various parts of the world in the past. Most of them had their own superstitious ideas. They were more concerned about life after death rather than life on earth. They did not believe in the equality of people. About two thousand years ago, there was a philosopher by the name of Thiruvalluvar in Tamil Nadu who wrote the book called Thirukkural. About a thousand years before him, Aryans have migrated to Tamil Nadu, and during his days, their influence was slowly on the rise. Thiruvalluvar wrote his book to condemn the Aryan view of life and their superstitious beliefs. About 1,910 years after Thiruvalluvar, Periyar was born. During Periyar's days, the Aryan influence over the Tamil people had become more intense. The Tamil society was divided into hundreds of castes. Some sections of the Tamil people were even considered untouchables. Women were treated as domestic servants and childbearing machines.

There was a total lack of social justice in Just like Thiruvalluvar, who condemned the Aryans' beliefs and practices, Periyar wanted to reform the Tamil society. He studied Thirukkural and found that the ideas in Thirukkural are compatible with

his own ideas. He encouraged the Tamil people to read Thirukkural.

This paper compares the Aryan view of life and their values against those of the Tamil society during the days of Thiruvalluvar. The conditions in the Tamil Society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how Periyar wanted to reform the Tamil society are also discussed in this paper. The similarities between Thiruvalluvar's and Periyar's ideas are explained. Periyar's appreciation of Thirukkural and his efforts to promote Thirukkural are also described in this paper. Finally, Periyar's attempts to establish social justice and instill a sense of pride and self-respect in the minds of Tamil people are discussed in detail.

Keywords:

Aryan, Thiruvalluvar, Thirukkural, Periyar, Sangam, social justice, equality, self-respect, rationalism.

Introduction:

In the course of human history, there have been many philosophers, prophets, sages, and saints who have contributed to the development of philosophical ideas. Most of these great scholars had a religious bias and

were inconsiderate in matters related to social justice, social equality, and rationalism. For example, despite his extraordinary ability for dialectical reasoning, Socrates (469 BC – 399 BC) believed in the infallibility of the Oracle of Delphi, and he never rejected the Athenian view of religion. Socrates's ardent disciple Plato (428 BC – 348 BC) was proud of the fact that he was an Athenian and not a barbarian, and he was happy that he was born as a man instead of being born as a woman. In ancient Greece, which is considered the cradle of democracy, slavery was an accepted practice. Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) says, "Some should rule, and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary but expedient. From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule." So, it is apparent that social equality was not considered the foundation of democracy by the ancient Greek philosophers. The Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 BC – 479 BC) believed that heaven is the author of all virtue, and he considered heaven itself as a kind of God, and God created the virtue in us. The religious leaders Mahavira (540 BC – 468 BC) and the Buddha (563 BC – 483 BC) were concerned more about life after death rather than life on earth.

There have been only very few philosophers who were truly rational and secular in their thinking. Almost five hundred years after Socrates, Confucius, and the Buddha, in the state of Tamil Nadu, India there was an extraordinary man, who was an outstanding philosopher who analyzed almost all aspects of human life from a rational and secular standpoint and offered practical guidelines for a purposeful life on earth. Scholars consider his ideas to be eternally valid and universally acceptable. His name is Thiruvalluvar . His legacy is his magnum opus called Thirukkural, and it is considered a veritable guide for the "Art of Living."

Thiruvalluvar and the Thirukkural:

Thiruvalluvar is very well known in the state of Tamil Nadu, where people of all ages study his book. Many scholars from various countries have praised Valluvar's ideas. For example, Professor Moriz Winternitz (1863-1937), an eminent Austrian orientalist, says, "Valluvar's Thirukkural is one of the gems of the world literature. He (Valluvar) stands above all races, castes, and sects, and what he teaches is a general human morality and wisdom. No wonder that the Kural has been read, studied and highly praised in the land of its origin for centuries, but also found many admirers in the west, ever since it has become known." Dr. Albert Schweitzer (1875 – 1965), the German philosopher, physician, and Nobel laureate admired Valluvar's positive view of the world and life as opposed to the "world and life negation" preached by the religions of India. Leo Tolstoy (1828 – 1910), the famous Russian novelist, was very impressed by Valluvar's ideas about non-violence. Also, Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948) was so fascinated by the Kural that he wanted to learn the Tamil language so that he could study the original version of the Kural. Many other scholars and philosophers from various parts of the world have recognized and admired Valluvar's profound yet pragmatic view of human life and the practical guidelines he has offered for a purposeful life. The Russians are said to have preserved important books of lasting value in the Kremlin in an indestructible tungsten chamber so that they may outlast even a nuclear attack and be useful to the posterity. The Kural is one of the books in that chamber. The Kural has been translated into more than forty languages of the world. The Kural is the most translated non-religious book in the world. Several authors have written many commentaries in Tamil, English, and other major languages of the world. There are more than 50 translations of the Kural in the English language alone.

Despite these adulations by eminent philosophers and the availability of numerous translations of the Kural, we know very little factual information about its author, Valluvar. Most of the biographical information available about Valluvar is anecdotal. The only thing that we know for certain is that he was born in the state of Tamil Nadu, which lies in the southeastern part of India. There is a controversy about his exact place of birth. Some people believe that he was born in Mylapore, a suburb of Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu. Others claim that he was born in the district of Kanyakumari, which lies in the southern tip of India.

Just like the mystery surrounding his place of birth, the year of Valluvar's birth is also an unresolved issue. A group of renowned Tamil scholars met in 1921 and decided that Valluvar should have been born in 31 BC. The government of the state of Tamil Nadu has officially recognized that Valluvar was born in 31 BC. Due to the uncertainty surrounding his exact year of birth, it is generally believed that Valluvar was born about 2000 years ago. From the various stories about his personal life, we infer that Valluvar was married, and his wife's name was Vasuki.

Assuming that Valluvar was born about 2000 years ago, the primary religions in Tamil Nadu and India during that time were the Vedic religion (the forerunner of modern-day Hinduism), Jainism, and Buddhism. Although we find some similarities between the Kural and the three religions, Valluvar differs significantly from them. In fact, his book is strictly secular. While the focus of the religions is life after death, Valluvar's focus is life on earth. His philosophy is based on life and world affirmation. His message is one of virtue, truth, non-violence, love, and compassion towards all living beings of the world. His book contains solutions for the problems we face today and humanity's problems in the future. Valluvar's Kural stands tall as a beacon light forever guiding humanity.

Aryans and Their Philosophy:

According to historians, Aryan migration into Tamil Nadu began approximately about 1,000 BC. During that time, the Aryans' religion was the Vedic religion which was based on the Vedas and Upanishads. The essential features of the Vedic religion are as follows:

- The goals of human life are dharma (righteousness, moral values), artha (prosperity, economic values), kama (pleasure, love, psychological values), and moksha (liberation, spiritual values).
- The Lord created four classes (Varnas) of people: the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra, from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet, respectively.
- These classes are distinct. The class to which a person belongs is determined by his birth. Those born to Brahmins are Brahmins; those born to Kshatriyas are Kshatriyas, and so on. A person has no way of changing the class to which he belongs. Of these four classes, the Brahmins were considered the most superior class. The next three classes are Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. Each class of people had pre-determined duties. The Brahmins are the priests. The Kshatriyas are the warriors. The Vaisyas are businessmen and agriculturists. The only duty assigned to the Sudras was to serve the other three higher classes of people. In addition to the four classes, there were people belonging to the fifth class called Panchamas, and they were considered the lowest class of people, and they were the untouchables.
- The Vedic religion advocates the social doctrine of four stages of life. It maintains that one should first become a celibate student, then become a married householder discharging his duties to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by sacrificing; then retire with or without his wife to the forest to devote himself to spiritual contemplation; and finally, become

a homeless wandering ascetic and devote himself to the pursuit of liberation (salvation). These four stages apply only to the top three classes and not to the Sudras.

- The Aryans prayed to the gods Indra, Agni, Vayu, and Varuna. During the prayers, it was customary to make animal sacrifices and eat the sacrificed animal's meat and consume a liquor known as soma.

- Women were considered fickle, unreliable, corrupt, and licentious, and therefore it was thought that they should not have any independence, and they should be protected all the time .

The Tamil Society During the Days of Valluvar:

The Sangam period is the period of the history of ancient Tamil Nadu spanning from 500 BC to 200 AD. This period got its name from the famous Sangam academy of poets and scholars who gathered in the city of Madurai during that period. The classical literary masterpieces called Ettuthokai and Pattupattu, which contain Tamil poems written by many scholars, belong to this period, and they are referred to as Sangam literature. Sangam literature and the Kural contain valuable information about the Tamil society and the life of Tamils during the Sangam period. Some of the significant facts about the Tamil society during the days of Valluvar can be summarized as follows:

- According to the Tamil people of the Sangam period, the goals of human life are Virtue, Wealth, and Love. Salvation was not considered a goal to be sought after.

- After the Aryan migration, their influence in Tamil Nadu was slowly growing. The Aryans successfully influenced some of the Tamil kings. For example, the Pandia king Muthukudumi Peruvazhuthi and the Chola King Rajasuyam Vaetta Perunarkilli of the Chola kingdom performed elaborate Vedic religious rituals with the help of the Brahmin priests. Out of the many kings in the Sangam period, only very few seem to have been positively influenced by the Brahmins.

- Although the Tamil scholars of the Sangam period were aware of the belief systems and Aryan values, the general public was not aware of them. But the Tamil society tolerated the Brahmins and even respected them for their knowledge.

- The concept of class structure by birth (Varna) was popular only among the Aryans and not with others in Tamil society. The Tamil society did not have a class structure as described in Manusmriti.

- In general, the Tamil people neither adopted the Aryan values nor opposed them. They were apathetic towards them. But the influence of the Aryans was gradually growing in the Tamil society from 1,000 BC onwards.

- The Aryans prayed to Indra, Agni, and other gods of that ilk. They believed in an omnipotent God who created the universe. The Tamil people did not have the concept of an all-powerful God who created the universe. Mostly they worshipped nature. They believed that there is no God other than their heroic ancestorws . The tombstones of warriors were worshipped with reverence. On special occasions, they prayed to Tamil God Murugan.

- Women enjoyed a respectable position in society. Sangam literature is a collection of 2436 poems written by 473 poets, and out of them were 30 were women. This shows that women had access to education during the Sangam period and were considered respectable members of the household and society.

Valluvar's Repudiation of the Aryan values:

A close examination of the Kural reveals the fact that Valluvar did not approve of the Aryan values. The following are some examples where Valluvar disagrees with the Aryan values and philosophy.

- According to Sangam literature and Tholkappiyam, the goals of human life are virtue, wealth, and love. Salvation was not considered a goal. Consistent with Sangam literature and

Tholkappiyam and in contradiction to the Aryan values, Valluvar also considers virtue, wealth, and love the three goals of human life.

- The Vedic religion has a mixed message about killing animals. While it emphasizes that non-violence is the duty of all classes of people, it allows killing animals for sacrificial purposes and eating the meat of the sacrificed animals. Manusmiriti says that the meat of an animal can be eaten after it has been killed for sacrificial purposes. Also, according to Manusmiriti, meat can be eaten when someone is in dire need of food. Valluvar is critical of this stance of the Vedic religion regarding meat-eating. He condemns animal sacrifice and meat-eating.

Not killing and eating the meat of an animal is better than a thousand sacrificial offerings.

(kural – 259)

- In opposition to the Vedic religion's class structure (Varna), Valluvar declares that all are equal by birth (kural – 972). In kural 973, Valluvar mentions that greatness is not necessarily associated with birth, and in kural 133, he says that one's greatness really depends on one's character.

All human beings are equal by birth, but distinctions arise only because of the different qualities of their actions.

(kural – 972)

Even if considered high by accident of birth, persons without good character are not necessarily noble; so also, people considered low by accident of birth are not necessarily low.

(kural – 973)

Good character is a sign of greatness, and lack of good character is a sign of meanness.

(kural – 133)

- The concept of the four stages of human life never gained ground in Tamil society. In Sangam literature, there is no reference to

vanaprastha when according to the Aryans, a married man goes to a forest with or without his wife and contemplates spiritual matters. Tamil literature only mentions the life of a householder and an ascetic. Valluvar considers one who lives as a householder with his family is superior to the one who becomes an ascetic in search of his own salvation. He questions the value of Vanaprastha and ascetic ways of life.

If one leads a virtuous family life, what else can one gain by following other ways of life.

(kural – 46)

He who leads his family life the right way is superior to the ascetics who aspire for a better life in the next world.

(kural – 47)

The effort of he who guides others to lead a virtuous life and leading a life that does not deviate from virtue is more of a penance than the penance of the ascetics. (kural – 48)

- In contradiction to what Manusmiriti says, Valluvar holds women in high regard and according to him the greatness of family life is determined by a good wife. Valluvar insists that chastity is a great virtue to be practiced by all women, and they do that through their own will and determination.

The Tamil Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries:

Since the beginning of Aryan infiltration into Tamil Nadu, the Tamil society has radically changed in many respects. The Vedic religion has turned into Hinduism. Thousands of temples have been built in Tamil Nadu for various gods. Brahmins have successfully brainwashed the Tamil people into believing the Hindu religion and the multitude of religious rituals. The Tamil people who during the Sangam period worshipped nature and few deities of their own started praying to a whole host of new pantheon of Hindu gods and they have become infatuated with the Hindu religious festivals. Around the nineteenth century,

religion and the religious rituals have become almost an obsession with most Tamil people. There were religious rituals to be performed on several occasions. For example, marriages, certain months during pregnancy, birth of a child, death, death anniversaries, groundbreaking for a building, and housewarming were some of the occasions when the religious ceremonies were performed. Brahmins were the ones who officiated as priests in the temples and during the religious ceremonies. Brahmins were rewarded well for their services. Because of their close connection with the religion, the Brahmins enjoyed a special status in society, and they were considered a superior class of people.

Due to the influence of Jainism from 500 BC to 600 AD, Brahmins became strict vegetarians. Imitating the Brahmins, some members of the Tamil community also became vegetarians. The vegetarians were considered to belong to higher castes. The people who did manual work were looked down upon and were considered lower castes. The people engaged in certain occupations like washermen, scavengers, barbers, cobblers, and a few others were regarded as the lowest class and untouchables. These people were not allowed to walk in the streets surrounding the temples, and they were definitely prohibited from entering the Hindu temples. The casteless Tamil society of the Sangam period had become one in which several castes have sprung up, and there was a graded inequality in the society.

Because the Brahmins were considered superior, they became entitled to several privileges. They had access to education while others were denied educational opportunities. As a result, around the 19th century, the Brahmins, who consisted of less than 3% of the population of Tamil Nadu, had more than 70% of all lucrative jobs such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other government jobs.

During the Sangam period, the Tamils were well versed in music and used many indigenous

musical instruments. They also had a variety of dances. Around the 19th century, native Tamil music was modified as Carnatic music, which the Brahmins promoted. Most of the songs were in the Telugu language instead of Tamil. The Brahmins also modified the native dances of Tamil people and called it Bharatanatyam and concocted a story that it was the dance form codified by the mythical rishi (sage) Bharatha. During the 19th century, the classical language Tamil which has a rich and robust collection of literature, was losing its purity because of the influence of Sanskrit. Many Sanskrit words replaced the Tamil words. Many writers and speakers routinely substituted Sanskrit words for Tamil words. Even some of the names of the cities and towns were replaced by their Sanskrit equivalents.

Thanthai Periyar:

During the 19th century, when the Tamil society was undergoing significant detrimental changes to its pride and prestige, the social reformer and activist Thanthai Periyar was born to Vankatappa and Chinna Thayammal on 17 September 1879. Thanthai Periyar's given name was Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy. He was conferred the title of Periyar in 1938 at the Conference of the Progressive Women's Association. The term "Periyar" means "Respected One" or "Elder". After 1938, he was always referred to as Periyar. He was also affectionately called Thanthai Periyar by his followers. The Tamil word "Thanthai" means a "respected father-like person." Periyar attended elementary school for five years. At the age of twelve, he joined his father in their family business. During his teenage years, he used to attend religious discourses at his house. Those discourses were organized by his parents and conducted by the Brahmin pundits. Periyar found several contradictions and superstitious ideas in the religious stories narrated by the Brahmin pundits.

Later in 1904, Periyar had a disagreement with his father, and he left his home and traveled to North India. During his travel, he

reached Kaasi, the city of the holy temple of Lord Shiva. He found the so-called holy river the Ganges was filthy and dead bodies were floating on it. One day, he had nothing to eat, and he was famished. He found a place where free food was given to Brahmins. He wore a thread across his chest like the Brahmins and entered the place where food was served. Although he had the thread across his chest like the Brahmins, he also had a mustache which was against the Brahmins' customs. The people serving food immediately found out he was not a Brahmin, and they refused to serve him food and kicked him out. Because of his excruciating hunger, he ended up eating the leftover food thrown in the street. The place that was serving the food was a charity organized by a non-Brahmin. But at that place, Periyar, a non-Brahmin, was not served food, whereas the Brahmins enjoyed the non-Brahmin's hospitality! The discrimination and insult that he experienced dealt a blow to Periyar's regard for Hinduism. That incident created a deep hatred in the mind of Periyar against the Brahminical practices and a disbelief in the innumerable gods revered by the Brahmins. Periyar decided to fight against the dominance of the Brahmins over the non-Brahmins in every walk of life.

The incident at Kaasi convinced Periyar that the Indian society, particularly the Tamil society, was utterly lacking in social justice. He realized that the Brahmins had undue influence and power, and they were dominating all facets of Tamil society. He knew that the power of the Brahmins came from the Hindu religion. He wanted to abolish the caste system and the practice of untouchability and transform the society in which there was no caste-based discrimination, and all were treated equally.

In the town of Vaikom in the neighboring state of Kerala, the people belonging to certain lower castes were not allowed to walk on the streets surrounding the temple. Periyar was invited to take up the leadership in the protest against such prohibition. He led an agitation defying

such a ban and was sentenced to undergo imprisonment. Periyar's courageous efforts put an end to the discrimination at Vaikom, and he was conferred the title of 'Hero of Vaikom'. During this time, Periyar was the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. He has been trying to get the Congress Party to approve the Communal Reservation in Government jobs and education for the non-Brahmins to eliminate discrimination against them. But his efforts for establishing Communal Representation were defeated by the Brahmin-dominated Congress Party. After that, he quit the Congress Party and founded the Self-Respect Movement. With Periyar's help and support, the Communal Reservation scheme was implemented by the Justice Party. Subsequently, in 1944 the Justice Party was changed to Dravidar Kazhagam, and Periyar presided over Dravidar Kazhagam for the rest of his life.

In addition to fighting for social justice, Periyar was also concerned about how women were treated in Tamil Nadu. Till the first half of the 20th century, child marriages were common in India. In fact, the Brahmins claimed that according to their religious books, it was a sin to conduct the marriage of a daughter after she attained puberty. According to the Brahmins, child marriage was the right thing to do. Periyar strongly condemned the practice of child marriages. Also, widow remarriages were completely unheard of in Tamil society. Periyar conducted the marriage of his niece, who had become a widow at the young age of nine. Till 1956, women did not have the right to inherit properties from their parents or their deceased husbands. Young girls were not educated once they reached puberty. Periyar argued in favor of education for women. He claimed that Tamil society treated women as sex slaves, domestic servants, and childbearing machines. He strongly advocated husbands and wives to adopt birth control. Periyar wanted girls and women to get educated and be treated as equals to their male counterparts. He insisted

that women should have equal opportunities for education and employment. He criticized the hypocrisy of chastity for women and argued that it should either also apply to men or not at all for both genders. He was in favor of women taking jobs in the police departments and the army.

Throughout his life, Periyar was a warrior fighting for social justice. Periyar insisted that the non-Brahmins should have self-respect and should not consider themselves inferior to anyone else. Periyar also told his followers to analyze everything using a rational approach. Self-respect and rationalism were Periyar's weapons in the fight for women's rights and social justice. He traveled countless miles and delivered thousands of lectures in every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu, promoting rationalism and self-respect among the Tamils.

Periyar was critical of the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and other religious texts. He was fond of Thirukkural, and he considered that as the only book worth reading. He found that Thirukkural echoes his own views on many issues.

Periyar and Thirukkural:

Thirukkural was written approximately about 2000 years ago. It has been quoted extensively in literary works like Silappadhikaram and Manimekalai, which came about two centuries later. Around the sixth century, when the devotional literature came into the Tamil literary scene, Thirukkural took a backstage. Around the eleventh century, Thiruvalluvamaalai was written in praise of Thirukkural. Thiruvalluvamaalai consists of fifty-five short poems. The poets whose names appear in Thiruvalluvamaalai did not live during the eleventh century. Actually, those poets belonged to the Sangam period (500 BC – 200 AD). Because those poets were well known, somebody might have used their names and wrote those poems to praise Thirukkural. After Thiruvalluvamaalai, ten famous scholars wrote their commentaries

on Thirukkural. The most famous of those commentators was Parimelazhagar, who wrote his commentary on Thirukkural during the fourteenth century. Thirukkural was printed for the first time in 1812. Rev. G. U. Pope published his English translation of Thirukkural in 1886. Subsequently, many commentaries in Tamil, English, and other languages appeared.

Despite the translations, commentaries, and printed editions, as late as the middle of the twentieth century, Thirukkural was still only in the parlor of the pundits. Tamil scholars considered Thirukkural as just a book in Tamil literature. Thirukkural is not just a book in Tamil literature. It deals with virtue, love, compassion, charity, friendship, politics, leadership, management, economics, and human psychology. In fact, it deals with all facets of human life and serves as a true guide for humanity. Periyar made a detailed study of Thirukkural. He found that Thirukkural contains ideas that are very similar to his own. He recognized the greatness of Thirukkural and its usefulness to the Tamil society, and he decided to bring it out from the pundits' parlor to the public square.

Periyar was always against class and caste systems which discriminated against the people by their birth. He was also highly critical of male dominance in Tamil society and how women were treated. According to him, all are equal by birth. He found a kindred spirit in Valluvar. Valluvar expresses the same idea in kural 972. In kural 973, Valluvar mentions that greatness is not necessarily associated with birth, and in kural 133, he says that one's greatness really depends on his character. From kurals 972, 973, and 133, we see that Valluvar and Periyar are in complete agreement.

According to Periyar, people should use rational thinking and avoid superstitions.

Periyar said, "No matter what anyone says, don't believe it. Use your intellect and rational thinking ability and analyze it and accept it if

it seems right to you; if not, do not accept it. Even if I say something, examine it, and accept it only if it seems right to you." In the following kural, we see that Valluvar and Periyar are again in complete agreement.

To discern the real truth in whatsoever is heard from whomsoever is real wisdom.

(Kural - 423)

Periyar did not believe in God or any such supernatural power. To him, one should work hard in order to be successful in life. We find similar ideas in the Kural regarding the importance of hard work for success in life.

Persistent hard work will bring about good fortune, and indolence will bring about poverty.

(kural – 616)

Even if gods cannot help you, your hard work will undoubtedly be appropriately rewarded.

(kural – 619)

One should not feel disheartened when a task seems impossible; persistent efforts will lead to greatness.

(kural – 611)

People who work hard relentlessly will overcome the so-called "fate". (kural – 620)

Periyar recognized that Valluvar's Kural contains ideas that are very close to his ideas. He also realized that although the Kural had valuable and essential ideas, it had not reached the public at large. He decided to promote the Kural. As a first step, in 1929, he printed the Kural and sold it for a small price of eight annas (eight annas would have been the equivalent of a few cents) so that most of the people could easily afford to buy the book. Later he sold the pocket edition of the Kural for six annas, and in 1949 he sold the same for five annas. In 1949 he organized and conducted a very successful two-day conference on Thirukkural. That was the first Thirukkural Conference that was ever held anywhere in the world. Several leading

Tamil scholars participated in the Conference, and the Conference was a great success. After that, Periyar routinely continued to mention the Kural in his speeches and writings. Some of Periyar's comments about the Kural are as follows:

- The art, culture, morals, ethics, etc., of the Aryans were totally different from the art, culture, morals, norms, etc. of the Tamils. Thirukkural was specially written to expose their differences.
- Thirukkural was written to repudiate Aryan principles and their way of life.
- The Buddha rejected and refuted the Aryan religion and its rituals. Thirukkural is doing precisely the same thing as what the Buddha did.
- Thirukkural can be of great use in our lives.
- There are no superstitious ideas in Thirukkural.
- Those who study Thirukkural will definitely gain self-respect.
- No one, including Muslims and Christians, will refute the ideas in Thirukkural.
- If someone asks you, "What is your religion?" you say that your religion is Thirukkural. If someone asks you, "What is your code of conduct?" you say that your code of conduct is Thirukkural.
- Thirukkural is the perfect medicine for Aryan hypocrisy. Thirukkural is a book that repudiates Manusmriti.
- You can take what you want from Thirukkural and ignore the ideas you don't want.
- Thiruvalluvar is an ideal socialist.
- Ideas needed for the welfare of the people are in abundance in Thirukkural.
- Thirukkural is a shield for us in the fight against Brahminism and the Brahmins' superstitious beliefs.

Thanks to Periyar's leadership after 1950, there was a remarkable resurgence in the interest in Thirukkural among the Tamil society. The credit also goes to Dravidar Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

Thiruvalluvar and Thanthai Periyar:

Thiruvalluvar wrote the Kural in order to condemn and refute the Brahminic beliefs, rituals, and superstitions. Recently, some people have started a campaign to belittle the greatness of Thirukkural by falsely claiming that the Kural is an abridgement of Sastras. The Sastras espouse the Vedic religious beliefs, and Valluvar's Kural directly opposes Vedic beliefs. Valluvar's concept of virtue is the same irrespective of their birth status whereas, the Aryan Sastras' concept of dharma depends on the class to which one belongs. They also state that Valluvar's kural in the section on Wealth are based on Athasastra. They fail to recognize that Arthasatra favors "the end justifying the means" whereas, the Kural is in favor of "means justifying the end." Another false and absurd claim by these Brahmin zealots is that the Section on Love in the Kural is based on Kamasutra. There could be nothing farther from the truth. Kamasutra is a guide to covet another man's wife and it contains explicit details of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman like a pornographic manual. Valluvar found that the Aryan values and beliefs were contrary to Tamil culture, and he wanted the Tamils to be aware of it, and that is why he wrote the Kural. The Kural is definitely not an abridgement of Sastras.

Like Valluvar, Periyar also could not accept Brahminism and its beliefs. Periyar found that the Vedic religion and its successor Hinduism were responsible for the Brahmin domination, caste system, and other social injustices. He also realized that Tamil people were docile and had no self-respect and accepted the Brahmins' claim for superiority. Periyar was indignant at the state of affairs in Tamil Nadu and started

his Self-Respect movement. He fought for communal representation, women's rights, abolition of the caste system, and other social justice issues.

Both Periyar and Valluvar fought against the Brahminic culture, religion, rituals, and superstitions. Valluvar did not have an organization behind him to support and propagate his messages. But Periyar had his party, Dravidar Kazhagam extending its wholehearted and unstinting support for his plans and programs. Periyar was able to bring about permanent and irrevocable changes in Tamil society. With his ideas of self-respect and rationalism, he has started a renaissance in Tamil society.

There is a kural that aptly describes Periyar's service to the Tamil Community. Valluvar says in kural 1028 that one who wants to serve the community cannot waste his energy on time and season considerations or dignity in the performance of that task. In the course of his service to Tamil society, Periyar has encountered imprisonment and insults. Those things never bothered him. He continued his relentless service till the ripe old age of ninety-four.

Conclusion:

Valluvar and Periyar are two remarkable rationalists the world has ever seen. Tamil people can legitimately be proud of both of them. We should study and follow the immortal words of wisdom of Valluvar. Periyar is often referred to as Thanthai Periyar, which means he is a father-like person. When Valluvar talks about what a father should do to his son, he says that he should prepare him for a prominent role in the assembly of the learned (kural - 67). Because of Periyar, most of the Tamils of the past two generations have had the opportunity for education and advancement in their lives. So, Periyar, the father-like person, has done his duty. In kural 70 , where Valluvar talks about how a son should reward his father, he says that it is the son's responsibility to conduct himself so that others would admire how hard

this man's father should have worked to groom him like this. So, the Tamil people owe a debt of gratitude to Periyar and they should live up to his expectations.

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Dr. Prabhakaran was born in Mannargudi, Tamil Nadu. He holds B.Sc. and M.Sc. degrees in Mathematics from the University of Madras, Chennai. After working as a lecturer in engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu for six years, he migrated to the USA and obtained his M.S. and Ph.D. in Computer Science and MBA in Information Management from U.S. universities. He has held senior positions in private companies, and he has also managed and directed Supercomputing facilities for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and U.S. Army.

Dr. Prabhakaran is passionate about the Tamil language, Tamil literature, Tamil culture, and the Tamils' welfare. He has served as President of the Washington Tamil Association, Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Foundation, and Vice President of the Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America.

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He has delivered several lectures on Thirukkural and Puranaanuru in various cities in the USA and India. His lectures are available on YouTube.

Dr. Prabhakaran considers promoting Thirukkural and Sangam Literature in western countries as his mission in life. He lives with his wife Geetha in Maryland, USA.

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