

Instilling Civic Discipline through the wisdom of the Tirukkural

The *Tirukkural*, usually attributed to the Tamil sage *Thiruvalluvar* who lived in India in the 6th century, is probably one of the most concise and universal secular treatises on ethics. It contains 1,330 verses, the '*kurals*' which encompass almost every facet of human life. Its 133 sections of 10 verses each are divided into three books: *aram* (virtue), *porul* (government and society) and *kamam* (love).

Although the *Tirukkural* is often read as a work of personal ethics, its moral vision extends far beyond the private individual. *Thiruvalluvar* is concerned with the conditions under which human beings can live together in an orderly, prosperous and just society. In modern vocabulary, a substantial part of this teaching may be described as a philosophy of civil or civic discipline.

While the text speaks in the language of its time often addressing an audience of kings, ministers, and householders, its valuable insights into right-eousness and personal conduct; and the reciprocal duties of rulers and subjects offer a powerful framework for cultivating civic discipline in contemporary citizens. Thus, *Tirukkural* envisages civic order as a chain: self-control → right conduct → responsible speech → social obligation → respect for others → impartial justice → responsible government → social harmony.

The most significant feature of *Tirukkural* is that the text is non-sectarian. It avoids endorsing any particular religion and instead focuses on universal moral principles such as truth, compassion, and justice. For a diverse, multi-religious democracy like India, this secular and inclusive ethic is crucial because it allows citizens to find shared values that cut across caste, religion, and region. In its own unique way, this text propounds a political philosophy that is democratic at its core where citizens see civic duties as expressions of widely shared virtues for self-governance. This could be juxtaposed with another monumental work on socio-political philosophy, *The Arthashastra* by *Kautilya*.

Three concepts of social ethics form the basis of *aram*. Moral order and right behaviour or "*ozhukkam*, duty to society or, "*oppuravarithal*" and possession of self-restraint or "*adakkamudaimai*".

Kural 121: Self-control places a person among the gods; lack of it leads into deepest darkness.

Kural 122: Guard self-control as a precious treasure; there is no greater wealth in life.

The first and perhaps the most crucial step in becoming a dutiful citizen is mastering one's own impulses. This quality is of paramount importance, especially regarding traffic discipline.



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Queue-jumping, road rage, or failure to drive in one's designated lane happens when one lacks self-control. In crowded cities, treating restraint as valuable wealth would help people observe traffic rules, silence in public libraries, and orderly behaviour. The discipline of speech and control of anger is another important component of the *Tirukkural*. It warns that wounds inflicted by harsh words never fully heal and that uncontrolled anger destroys both the individual and the community.

Kural 127: Whatever else you leave unguarded, guard your tongue; otherwise errors of speech will bring bitter suffering.

Kural 129: The wound inflicted by fire may heal, the scar inflicted by the tongue does not.

Kural 301: He truly restrains anger who restrains it when he has the power to harm; when he has no power, restraint is of little account.

These *kurals* are directly relevant especially in the context of social media and public discourse. In an age of instant messaging, information deluge and online anonymity, these couplets speak with particular force. The decision not to share an inflammatory rumour, to withhold reply in anger to a communal slur, and avoiding to indulge in trolling become civics acts. Calm, measured speech protects social harmony and strengthens the unity-in-diversity that the Constitution seeks to safeguard. Thus, the verses instruct the citizens to speak with utmost responsibility.

The *Tirukkural* goes on to expand the concept of "*oppuravarithal*".

Kural 211: Duty asks for no repayment, what repayment can the world offer to the rain?

Kural 212: All the wealth acquired through one's labour, is ultimately meant to be used in service of those who deserve assistance.

Kural 215: The wealth of a wise person who understands the world's needs, is like a village reservoir filled with water.

Kural 216: When wealth belongs to one who cares

for others, it resembles a fruit-bearing tree standing in the centre of the village.

Kural 217: The wealth of a truly generous person, is like a medicinal tree whose every part can heal.

Modern social reformers from Gandhi to Ambedkar and Periyar have cited the *Tirukkural*'s emphasis on human dignity, non-violence, and social justice. The text criticises pride based on birth and wealth valuing virtue over status, thereby undermining the ideological basis of rigid hierarchies. The text has been cited by national leaders, included in parliamentary speeches and public addresses, as a symbol of India's civilisational wisdom that transcends narrow politics. Its universal ethical language makes it possible to speak of duty, sacrifice, and service without privileging any single community, which supports unity in diversity.

Perhaps the most compact statement of *Thiruvalluvar*'s social philosophy occurs in *Kural* 983, which establishes that a perfected character is supported by the five pillars of love, moral shame, social responsibility, consideration for others, and truthfulness. A disciplined citizen possesses love, because society cannot be sustained by hostility; moral restraint, because conscience must operate even when enforcement is absent; social responsibility, because human beings have obligations beyond themselves; consideration, because others possess dignity; and truthfulness, because trust is essential to collective life.

Using *Tirukkural* to frame civic education (whether in schools, public campaigns, or government messaging) can therefore strengthen a nationally constructive discourse that respects regional cultures (such as Tamil heritage) while tying them to a shared Indian ethos of dharma and responsible citizenship.

From the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean, our nation possesses a profound wealth of scriptures, philosophical concepts, and ideas. This heritage is vital in today's world, where we urgently need a guiding light. Across time and space, the teachings of our sacred texts reiterate that strong ethics are essential for leading a happy, purposeful life and becoming responsible citizens. In our journey toward a Viksit Bharat, we must bring these teachings to the centre stage, ensuring the latent wisdom of our glorious country is accessible to all. A true milestone will be achieved when all of us are well versed with the scriptures of the north, south, east and west. We must unearth and disseminate this ocean of wisdom residing in texts, poetry, and proverbs to every corner of our nation.

Fable with Moral

The Silent Sacrifice for Duty

(Urmila Nidra- Ramayana)



When Lord Rama was sent to the forest for 14 years, Sita chose to go with him. Lakshmana decided to leave his royal life behind to serve his elder brother. He asked his wife, Urmila, to stay back in Ayodhya. He explained that his time would be fully dedicated to guarding Rama and Sita, leaving no room for family life. Urmila agreed with a heavy heart. She chose to support his duty instead of becoming a distraction.

On the very first night in the forest, Rama and Sita fell asleep. Lakshmana stood outside the hut with his bow, keeping a watch. Nidra Devi, the Goddess of sleep, appeared before him. She noted that it was time for Lakshmana to rest. Lakshmana folded his hands and begged the Goddess to spare him for 14 years. He needed to stay awake day and night to ensure his brother's safety.

Deeply moved by his devotion, the Goddess agreed to his request. However, the balance of nature required someone to bear Lakshmana's share of sleep. Lakshmana asked the Goddess to approach his wife back in Ayodhya. Nidra Devi went to Urmila and explained the situation. Without hesitation, Urmila accepted the burden.

For the next 14 years, Urmila slept continuously in the palace of Ayodhya. This divine pact allowed Lakshmana to remain completely sleepless and alert during the entire exile. His unbroken wakefulness eventually enabled him to defeat Indrajit (Meghnada), who could only be killed by a warrior who had conquered sleep. When the exile finally ended, Lakshmana returned and finally fell into a deep sleep so Urmila could wake up. This quiet act became known as *Urmila Nidra*, an unmatched tale of silent sacrifice and devotion.

MORAL OF THE FABLE: True duty requires shared sacrifice

Wisdom Word Search

W P A S A N A V B J N
A O W N M K L H U O A Q I
D K A D H I K A R A N A S
H U P E S P O E B I N L S
I J P A R I S A L K K A A Y
P O I J Y O F W V A O C Y
A I A Y U T T A K A T F A
T W M H I T I S V A T Z K
E A A L R A T T H A H D H
Y X C Q R O G A R A V A Y
Y H C D Q W M U E A K E N
A R A K X H G T N I T I A

WORDS TO FIND

Adhikarana, Adhipateyya, Amacca, Ana, Ayuttaka, Garava, Nissaya, Parisa, Pasasana, Rattha

ADHIKARANA (A-DHI-KA-RA-NA)

- A legal matter, official case, or public dispute requiring administrative resolution.

ADHIPATEYYA (A-DHI-PA-TAY-YA)

- Sovereignty, supreme authority, or the rightful exercise of governing power.

AMACCA (A-MATCH-CHA)

- A high-ranking minister or trusted adviser who assists the ruler in governing the state.

ANA (AA-NAA)

- An official order or administrative decree issued by the governing authority.

AYUTTAKA (AA-YUT-TA-KA)

- A government-appointed superintendent responsible for supervising public works and state affairs.

GARAVA (GA-RA-YA)

- Respect and reverence shown toward authority, responsibility, and public duty.

NISSAYA (NIS-SA-YA)

- Support, guidance, or dependence that enables the proper functioning of administration.

PARISA (PA-RI-SAA)

- An assembly, council, or gathering where important public matters are discussed and decided.

PASASANA (PA-SAA-SA-NA)

- The system of governance, administration, and orderly management of a kingdom or society.

RATTHA (RUT-THA)

- A sovereign kingdom, nation, or political territory governed under an established administration.

Note: These terms come from Pali, one of India's Ancient Languages.

Marvels of India

MAURYAN CIVIL SERVICE

Departmentalised Bureaucracy

Kautilya's Arthashastra describes an elaborate, extensive and efficient civil service organised around 27 adhyakshas (superintendents), each heading a specialised department such as agriculture, land, mines, customs and tolls, weights and measures, trade and commerce, shipping etc., assisted and supported by clerks and accountants. This functional division let a vast empire (c. 321-185 BCE), stretching from the northwestern frontier to the Deccan, be administered with the best governance model.

Built-in Accountability

Uniquely, the Arthashastra prescribes qualifications - honesty, loyalty, intelligence and administrative capability - for appointees, alongside an espionage network to detect corrupt officials and other suspicious activities, predating the present-day civil service ideals of merit and oversight.

Corroborated Evidence, Not Concocted

Megasthenes, the Greek envoy at Chandragupta's court, refers to six committees of five members each governing Pataliputra. At the same time, Ashoka's rock and pillar edicts allude to officials called mahamattas carrying out welfare functions. Hence, the textual, epigraphic and foreign travelogue testimony converge on one picture.

Centralised Governance

Ancient Indian historians note that this centralised structure gave Mauryan Bharat its first authentic administrative uniformity. However, they also observe that acute centralisation later made the system vulnerable once weaker successors held the throne: a caution embedded in its own success.



QUIZ

Agriculture & Food Security

Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
1. The image shown is a silver punch-marked coin/Karshapana from ancient India. Which dynasty could it belong to?	Nanda	Indo-Greek	Kushana	Satavahana
2. Which is currently the largest site from the Indus Valley Civilisation, showing an uninterrupted timeline of human settlement spanning the Early/Pre-Harappan, Mature and Late Harappan periods?	Chanhudaro	Dholavira	Ganweri-wala	Rakhigarhi
3. Which of them was not a royal emblem for dynasties during the Tamil Sangam Period?	Bow & Arrow	Twin Fish	Bull	Tiger
4. Who was the highest judicial officer in the Delhi Sultanate, second only to the Sultan in the administration of justice?	Kotwal	Qazi-ul-Quzat	Mufti	Amil

Answers: 1 - A, 2 - D, 3 - C, 4 - B

mahabharata

Abhyasavashagam manah

1. "A Mind Tamed by Practice"

Look, Ravi! This is a treasure of books!

Sangita! This is our school library.

2. Oh! Look! There is also a book carousel (Granthachakrika)!

Yes. Many Sanskrit books are kept in this book carousel.

3. Here are the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. How come there is no Gita?

Ah! The Gita is actually a part of the Mahabharata.

4. So, in the Mahabharata, there is a war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, right?

Yes! And during that war, Krishna advised the confused Arjuna — and that teaching is what we find in the Gita.

5. Alright, I remember now. But what exactly is the message of that teaching?

Let's read a part of it today. The chapter is called "A Mind Tamed by Practice."

What does that mean?

A restless mind can be brought under control by practice.

6. Selected Verses from the Gita

Arjuna said: Desire leads to anger, anger to delusion, delusion to loss of memory, loss of memory to destruction of intellect, and destruction of intellect to downfall. (2.62-63)

The Lord said: Desire, born of passion, is the great enemy — it is destructive and leads to sin. (3.37)

Contemplating sense-objects, attachment arises; from attachment comes desire; from desire comes anger; from anger, delusion; from delusion, loss of memory; from loss of memory, intellect is destroyed. (2.62-63)

Therefore, control the senses at the beginning. The mind is restless, strong and obstinate; but it can be controlled by practice and detachment, like the wind. (6.35)

7. The lesson...

With practice and detachment, the mind becomes steady and peaceful.

So, the Gita is not just a story of a war...

...it is a guide to inner strength and self-control.

8. Let's keep reading. A calm mind is the beginning of a better life.

MORAL OF THE STORY: The Gita teaches us that true strength lies in a disciplined mind.