

SELECTIONS FROM
THE FIRST BOOK OF KURAL

TRANSLATION AND NOTES BY
C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

ROCHOUSE & SONS, LTD.
MADRAS

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North
58

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FIRST BOOK OF KURAL

DHARMA

Chapter 4

There is no greater wealth one can acquire than *Dharma* and no misfortune greater than the forgetting of it.

அறத்தினா஁ங்கு ஆக்கமும் இல்லை அதனை
மறத்தலின் ஁ங்கு இல்லை கேடு.

‘Forgetting’ *Dharma* is failing to perform one’s duties according to *Dharma*.

Go as far as your strength and resources permit without swerving from the path of *Dharma* :

ஓல்லும் வகையான் அறவினை ஓவாதே
செல்லும்வாய் எல்லாம் செயல்.

This is Tiruvalluvar’s characteristic way of bringing everything down to the level of practicality without losing hold of the ideal.

Keep the mind free from evil thoughts. This is the whole of *Dharma*. The rest is only of the nature of sound and show :

மனத்துக்கண் மாசிலன் ஆதல் அனைத்து அறன்
ஆகுல நீர பிற.

The key to purity of action is purity of thought. The attainment of a mind free from evil thoughts is the aim of a

religious life, and this is a silent process. External observances are sound and show. ஆகுலம் is sound and show.

அறம் is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit word *dharmā*, for which there is, I believe, no single-word equivalent in English. Duty, virtue, and other such words, do not really cover the full import of either அறம் or *dharmā*.

*

True religious life consists in the avoidance of four things: envy, the craving for pleasure, anger and harsh speech:

அழுக்காறு அவா வெகுளி இன்னாச்சொல் நான்கும்
இழுக்கா இயன்றது அறம்.

*

Do not say to yourself, let me see about it later when I shall be better fitted. Live the true religious life now. It will be the one unfailing support while all else will perish and disappear:

அன்று அறிவாம் என்னாது அறம்செய்க மற்று அது
பொன்றுங்கால் பொன்றாது துணை.

*

Only the joy that comes from right conduct is true happiness. Other pleasures are really sources of pain and causes for shame:

அறத்தான் வருவதே இன்பம்மற்ற எல்லாம்
புறத்த புகழும் இல.

Pleasures will soon become pain, if the act that procures it is unrighteous. Right conduct is therefore not only right but wise.

THE GOOD HOUSEHOLDER

Chapter 5

The so-called householder really helps the other orders in the proper fulfilment of their duties :

இல் வாழ்வான் என்பான் இயல்பு உடைய மூவர்க்கும்
நல்லாற்றின் நின்ற துணை.

i.e., the unmarried student, he who gives up active life and goes to the jungle and the *sanyasin* can carry on as such only because most others live as good householders. The householders therefore should not be looked upon as selfishly living for pleasures while the others are leading lives of abstinence. The householder works for the others who have for reasons to renounce work.

*

Love and right conduct give to the householder's life its true character and purposefulness :

அன்பும் அறனும் உடைத்தாயின் இல்வாழ்க்கை
பண்பும் பயனும் அது.

Family life is beautiful and purposeful only if it is marked by love and *Dharma*. Love makes it beautiful and *Dharma* is fulfilment of its purpose.

*

If a man goes through the householder's life along the way of *Dharma*, nothing is left for him to attain, becoming a recluse or going to the forest :

அறத்துஆற்றின் இல்வாழ்க்கை ஆற்றின்
புறத்துஆற்றில்
போ ஒய்ப் பெறுவது எவன்.

+

Of all classes of aspirants to *Dharma*, the householder who lives up to the standard is the most esteemable

இயல்பினான் இல்வாழ்க்கை வாழ்பவன் என்பான்
முயல்வாருள் எல்லாம் தலை.

+

There is more penance in the life of a householder who does what should be done and avoids any lapse from *Dharma*, than in the privations of hermits :

ஆற்றின் ஒழுக்கி அறன்இழக்கா இல்வாழ்க்கை
நோற்பாரின் நோன்மை உடைத்து.

He who leads his life in this world as he should, ranks with the gods in heaven :

வையத்துள் வாழ்வாங்கு வாழ்பவன் வான் உறையும்
தெய்வத்துள் வைக்கப்படும்.

THE LIFE-PARTNER

Chapter 6

She is a true life-companion who is equal to the duties of a householder's life, and who adjusts herself to the bread-winner's resources :

மனைத்தக்க மாண்பு உடையள் ஆகித்தன் கொண்டான்
வளத்தக்காள் வாழ்க்கைத் துணை.

It is essential for happiness in family-life that culturally and economically the wife should fall into line with the family of her adoption.

There is no true family-life where the wife has not the qualities required for fulfilling the duties of a good householder. If the mistress of the house has not these qualities, neither wealth nor other circumstance can be of any avail :

மனைமாட்சி இல்லாள் கண் இல்லாயின் வாழ்க்கை
எனை மாட்சித்தாயினும் இல்,

The husband's virtues cannot make up for it.

..

If the mistress of the house be noble, nothing will be wanting. If the mistress of the house be not noble, naught will avail :

இல்லதுஎன் இல்லவள் மாண்பு ஆனால் உள்ளது என்
இல்லவள் மாணாக் கடை.

What is there on earth greater than woman, if she be firm in her loyalty to her partner in life ?

பெண்ணின் பெருந்தக்க யாஉள கற்பு என்னும்
திண்மை உண்டாகப் பெறின்.

கற்பு is not mere physical chastity. It is unqualified loyalty to husband.

☆

The true wife thinks not of God when she rises in the morning, but offers her worship to the husband. Even the clouds will obey and pour the rain at her command :

தெய்வம் தொழாஅள் கொழுநன் தொழுது எழுவாள்
பெய்எனப் பெய்யும் மழை.

The Vedanta as well as Hindu practice have forms of worship which enable the devotee to see the supreme deity in every object of love or adoration. Husband-worship is not a neglect of God.

÷

Of what use is the purity of women sought to be brought about by physical restrictions? Their own conscience is the best watch :

சிறைகாக்கும் காப்பு எவன் செய்யும் மகளிர்
நிறைகாக்கும் காப்பே தலை.

CHILDREN

Chapter 7

Of all things that one may be blessed with, we know of nothing equal to the joy of having children who grow up to true enlightenment :

பெறும்அவற்றுள் யாம்அறிவது இல்லை அறிவுஅறிந்த
மக்கள்பேறு அல்ல பிற.

÷

Sweeter far than heavenly ambrosia is the dish in which one's child has dabbled with its little hands :

அபிழ்தினும் ஆற்ற இனிதே தம் மக்கள்
சிறு கை அளவிய கூழ்.

✱

They speak of the sweet tones of the flute and of the harp who have not heard their own children lisp :

குழல் இனிது யாழ் இனிது என்பதம் மக்கள்
மழலைச்சொல் கேளா தவர்.

*

The best inheritance that a father can provide for his son is an education that will fit him to take front rank among cultured men :

தந்தை மகற்கு ஆற்றும் நன்றி அவையத்து
முந்தி இருப்பச் செயல்.

i.e., In bringing up sons, fathers should remember that not wealth but education conduces most to their happiness.

✱

Hearing words of appreciation uttered by people about her son, the mother feels greater joy than what she felt on the day she gave birth to him :

சுன்ற பொழுதின் பெரிது உவக்கும் தன்மகனை
சான்றோன் எனக்கேட்ட தாய்.

The son's greatest filial service is so to conduct himself as to make men say in wonderment, "Great must have been the father's inherited merit to be blessed with such a noble son" :

மகன் தந்தைக்கு ஆற்றும் உதவி இவன் தந்தை
என்றோற்றான் கொல் எனும் சொல்.

AFFECTION

Chapter 8

Those who have not a loving disposition, belong only to themselves. The tender-hearted belong to others even in their bones :

அன்பிலார் எல்லாம் தமக்கு உரியர் அன்புடையார்
என்பும் உரியர் பிறர்க்கு.

*

The enlightened hold that the saving joy of the soul when burdened with the body is the experience of human affection :

அன்போடு இயைந்த வழக்கு என்ப ஆர்உயிர்க்கு
என்போடு இயைந்த தொடர்பு.

i.e., Human affection is possible only if the soul is clothed in flesh and blood, and it is worth while for the sake of the experience of such affection to suffer the miseries of life on earth.

*

Affection is a training for *bhakti*, and out of *bhakti* will come unsought true enlightenment, the goal of all endeavour.

* அன்புநனும் ஆர்வம் உடைமை அதுநனும்
நன்புஎன்னும் நாடாச் சிறப்பு.

* I have amended the text as a result of comparing this Kural with Bhutattalwar's *Andadi*, 1st stanza. நன்பு therein is used to denote Jnana. The interpretation given by Kural commentators retaining the old text நன்பு is far too flat to be correct.

Strewn with pleasure is the way to Heaven for it can be attained by well-ordered family life :

அன்புஉற்று அமர்ந்த வழக்குஎன்ப வையகத்து
இன்புற்றார் எய்தும் சிறப்பு.

This is contrasted by implication to the toilsome path of celibacy and penance.

*

A tender heart helps one in the path of religion. But this is not all. Love inspires the brave soldier too. It is well known that the bravest warrior is often the most tender-hearted.

அறத்திற் கே அன்புசார்பு என்ப அறியார்
மறத்திற்கும் அஃதே துணை.

Parimelazhagar's interpretation of this Kural is different. மறம் in his commentary is the contrary of அறம் and he explains the verse to mean that love overcomes wrath and enmity, and helps one not only to do the right himself, but also to overcome the wrong done by others. மறம் has in Tamil literature also another meaning besides the one Parimelazhagar has taken up. மறம் stands for the virtues of the soldier, and I think that is the sense in which the word is used in this verse, and it makes the use of the word துணை appropriate.

*

Inflexible Law withers up the soul of him that has no love in his heart even as the sun shrivels up the bodies of boneless worms :

என்பு இலதனை வெயில் போலக் காயுமே
அன்பு இலதனை அறம்.

i.e., As the spine supports the bodies of vertebrates, love supports the soul. Without it, life shrinks and stops the spirit's evolution.

+

Where there is no tenderness of heart, life is barren of purpose. Can a tree that is dried up in the desert-sun hope to put forth leaves ?

அன்பு அகத்து இல்லா உயிர் வாழ்க்கை வன்பால் கண்
வற்றல் மரம் தளிர்ந்த தற்று.

Without a tender heart, of what avail are the externals of family life ? Just as the outer ear or eye may be there, but it is of no avail to the deaf and the blind, so is the soulless routine of a house-holder's life purposeless without tenderness of heart :

புறத்து உறுப்பு எல்லாம் எவன்செய்யும் யாக்கை
அகத்து உறுப்பு அன்பில வர்க்கு.

+

Without tenderness of heart, the body is but bones covered up with leather. In love alone is the secret of life :

அன்பின் வழியது உயிர்நிலை அஃது இலார்க்கு
என்பு தோல் போர்த்த உடம்பு.

—

AN OPEN HOUSE

Chapter 9

The only justification for remaining in family life and for acquiring and keeping property is that one may command the means by which help may be given to those who seek help :

இருந்துஓம்பி இல்வாழ்வது எல்லாம் விருந்து ஓம்பி
வேளாண்மை செய்தல் பொருட்டு.

To sit for a meal by oneself keeping out those who come expecting hospitality is a thing to be abhorred even if the food were the elixir of immortality.

விருந்து புறத்தாத் தான்உண்டல் சாவா
மிருந்துஎனினும் வேண்டற் பாற்று அன்று.

The goddess of prosperity will be gladdened in heart and linger in the house of the man whose smiling face welcomes those who seek hospitality :

அகன்அமர்ந்து செய்யாள் உறையும் முகம் அமர்ந்து
நல்விருந்து ஓம்புவான் இல்.

Must he indeed sow seed in his field, who eats what remains after feeding the guests ? The gods will look after the man who feeds his guest before sitting down himself to eat. Hospitality is itself seed enough for his fields and the crops will rise.

வித்தும் இடல்வேண்டும் கொல்லோ விருந்து ஒம்பி
மிச்சில் மிசைவான் புலம்.

*

“What have we gained spending all our lives in toil and care? Nothing avails now.” Thus on their last day will lament those who have failed to look after those who come for help and earn the fruits of such sacrifice :

பரிந்துஒம்பிப் பற்றுஅற்றேம் என்பர் விருந்துஒம்பி
வேள்வி தலைப்படா தார்.

*

How stupid those misers are who fail to practise the law of hospitality and succeed in being poor in the midst of plenty !

உடைமையுள் இன்மை விருந்துஒம்பல் ஒம்பா
மடமை மடவார் கண் உண்டு.

The delicate flower withers away if you take it to the nose to inhale its fragrance. But the guest who comes for a meal will shrink even at a distant look that indicates unwillingness to receive :

மோப்பக் குழையும் அனிச்சம் முகம் திரிந்து
நோக்கக் குழையும் விருந்து.

We should treat guests more delicately than the most delicate flower.

THE SOFT WORD

Chapter 10

Observe the speech of enlightened men. In their words you will find truth soaked in affection :

இன்சொலால் ஈரம் அனை இப் படிநு இலவாம்
செம்பொருள் கண்டார்வாய்ச் சொல்.

Gentleness of speech is not pleasant falsehood, but the truth that is spoken by men who know the whole of the law and are not misled by dry dogmas, who are full of affection for the person to whom the truth is addressed and therefore find the words that make truth acceptable.

*

The kindly word and the glad and loving look accompanying a gift are appreciated even more than the gift itself :

அகன் அமர்ந்து ஈதலின் நன்றே முகம் அமர்ந்து
இன்சொல னாகப் பெறின்.

To give is good. But the sweet manner accompanying the gift touches the heart of the receiver, even more than the gift.

*

The relief of distress consists in the glad face, the welcome look and speech that is marked by genuine consideration for the feelings of the man that is in distress :

முகத்தான் அமர்ந்து இனிது நோக்கி அகத்தான் ஆம்
இன் சொலினதே அறம்.

The gift that is thrown at the distressed without these accompaniments does not really relieve suffering but hurts.

✱

Adversity has no fears for the man who has gladdened the hearts of men by kind words :

துன்புஉறாஉம் துவ்வாமை இல்லாகும் யார் மாட்டு
இன்புஉறாஉம் இன்சொ லவர்க்கு.

The world will not leave such a man to suffer by reason of poverty.

✱

Not jewels but courteous deportment and gentleness of speech are things that beautify :

பணிவு உடையன் இன்சொலனாதல் ஒருவற்கு
அணி அல்ல மற்றும் பிற.

✱

Truly it is strange that people speak harsh words, when they have themselves felt and experienced the joy that kindly speech begets :

இன்சொல் இனிதுசுன்றல் காண்பான் எவன் கொலோ
வன் சொல் வழங்கு வது.

Every moment we have direct personal experience of the marvellous effect of kind words from others and yet, when we speak, we forget it and indulge in harsh speech.

When gentle words are available, why do men choose the word that hurts ? Is it not foolish to pick unripe berries when ripe ones can be had for the plucking ?

இனிய உள வாக இன்றாத கூறல்
கனி இருப்பக் காய்கவர்ந் தற்று.

GRATITUDE

Chapter 11

The good deed that is done not in return but in the first instance is more precious than anything in this world or beyond. Nothing can repay that act:

செய்யாமல் செய்த உதவிக்கு வையகமும்
வானகமும் ஆற்றல் அரிது.

What is done in return for something previously done can never be as great as the deed born out of sheer generosity, be it ever so small by itself. There is therefore nothing that can be considered an adequate repayment.

By itself the help rendered may be trifle, but the hour of need when it was given makes it bigger than the whole world:

காலத்தினால் செய்த நன்றி சிறிது எனினும்
ஞாலத்தின் மாணப் பெரிது.

*

If it is a good deed, never forget it. But if some one does a wrong, it is good that very day to forget it:

நன்றி மறப்பது நன்று அன்று நன்றல்லது
அன்றே மறப்பது நன்று.

Painful like death itself may be the evil that you suffer at a man's hand. But remind yourself of some good thing that he once did for you. It may help you to forget the present pain :

கொன்று அன்ன இன்னா செயினும் அவர் செய்த
ஒன்று நன்று உள்ளக் கெடும்.

This is an instance of Tiruvalluvar's characteristic way of giving helpful practical hints to achieve what may seem to be a mere counsel of perfection.

RECTITUDE

Chapter 12

The acquisitions of a man of rectitude go down to his children without diminution and will protect them against adversity :

செப்பம் உடையவன் ஆக்கம் சிதைவு இன்றி
எச்சத்திற்கு ஏமாப்பு உடைத்து.

Rectitude of means employed gives stability to what is acquired, whereas what is got by swerving from the straight path stands ever in danger of being lost again or to serve as a snare. The most powerful motive for the householder is the desire to see that his children are assured of happiness after him. Upright conduct, says Tiruvalluvar, ensures this. It is not a mere superstition invoked for supporting the moral rule. There is practical wisdom in the statement as to the stability of well-earned wealth and the instability of acquisitions got by methods that society condemns.

-k

It may seem that no evil attaches to the acquisition that comes by swerving from the path of rectitude. But do not be tempted. Give up the thought at once :

நன்றே தரினும் நடுவு இகந்து ஆம் ஆக்கத்தை
அன்றே ஒழிய விடல்.

Who lived a life of rectitude and who did not can be seen from how their children fare :

தக்கார் தகவிலர் என்பது அவரவர்
எச்சத்தால் காணப் படும்.

Parimelazhagar construes the verse to mean that good men will be blessed with progeny and that bad men will be denied that joy. அவரவர் எச்சத்தால் can more easily mean what has been said above and that interpretation is more in consonance with Tiruvalluvar's rational ethics.

Your life will impress itself on your child's character, and if you wish well for your child beware and walk in the path of rectitude, says the poet.

*

If your thoughts show signs of turning from the path of rectitude, know that misfortune awaits you :

கெடுவல்யான் என்பது அறிகதன் நெஞ்சம்
நடுவுஓர் இ அல்ல செயின்.

The swerving of your mind can be noticed by you before anyone else sees it. Look upon it as an evil portent and beware.

If the man who has walked firmly in the path of rectitude loses his worldly possessions, his poverty does not lower him in the estimation of the world. He retains his status in society as if nothing had happened to him :

கெடுவாக வையாது உலகம் நடுவாக
நன்றிக்கண் தங்கியான் காழ்வு.

Let businessmen know that it is good business to protect the interests of others exactly as they do their own :

வாணிகம் செய்வார்க்கு வாணிகம் பேணி
பிறவுந் தம்போல் செயின்.

This is the Kural version of the formula that honesty is the best policy. Rectitude is not only *dharma* but worldly wisdom also.

SELF-CONTROL

Chapter 13

Self-control is as necessary a virtue for the householder as for the recluse. The duty of guarding against cupidity, pride or anger is what is dealt with in this chapter.

Self-control takes one to the gods. Want of it will push one into utter darkness :

அடக்கம் அமரருள் உய்க்கும் அடங்காமை
ஆர் இருள் உய்த்து விடும்.

✽

There is no possession more precious than self-control. Watch therefore as you would watch treasure :

காக்க பொருளா அடக்கத்தை ஆக்கம்
அதனின் ஊங்கு இல்லை உயிர்க்கு.

✽

It is well for every one to be meek, but for those who have wealth meekness is added possession :

எல்லார்க்கும் நன்றும் பணிதல் அவருள்ளும்
செல்வர்க்கே செல்வந் தகைத்து.

Learning, good birth, and wealth are not reduced but enhanced by a becoming humility of deportment.

If in a single birth a man lives a life of self-control and withdraws the five senses, as a tortoise when it senses danger draw itself into its shell, he shall have insured himself against evil in seven births thereafter :

ஒருமையுள் ஆமைபோல் ஐந்து அடக்கல் ஆற்றின்
எழுமையும் ஏமாப்பு உடைத்து.

*

You may neglect everything else but be vigilant in restraining your tongue. Those who fail in this meet with great trouble :

யா காவராயினும் நா காக்க கவாக்கால்
சோகாப்பர் சொல் இழுக்குப்பட்டு.

Not that in other things one may relax control ; but the danger of careless or angry speech is constantly present, and requires special attention.

*

The injury caused by a burn heals, but the pain caused by the thoughtless word is never forgotten. It remains forever in the mind like an ugly scar :

தீயினால் சுட்ட புண் உள் ஆறும் ஆறாதே
நாவினால் சுட்ட வடு.

Men forget many injustices but they rarely forget or forgive an insult.

—

If a man knows how to control the rising anger in his mind and guards himself against losing his temper, all other virtues will seek him out and wait on his pleasure :

கதம்காத்துக் கற்று அடங்கல் ஆற்றுவான் செவ்வி
அறம்பார்க்கும் ஆற்றின் நுழைந்து.

Let a householder guard against careless speech and
loss of temper. The rest will be easy.

THE WELL-REGULATED LIFE

Chapter 14

Discipline of life is more precious than life itself, for it is out of that discipline that life derives value :

ஒழுக்கம் விழுப்பம் தரலான் ஒழுக்கம்
உயிரினும் ஒம்பப் படும்.

;

One may study many philosophies and clear doubts but it is the well-regulated life that ultimately avails and nothing else. Therefore guard it whatever may be the difficulty involved :

பரிந்து ஒம்பிக் காக்க ஒழுக்கம் தெரிந்து ஒம்பி
தேரினும் அஃதே துணை.

This is also the warning of the Upanishads. [Khato-panishad, ii, 24.]

*

The well-regulated life ennobles every rank of life. Where this fails, good or noble parentage will not save the man :

ஒழுக்க முடைமை குடிமை இழுக்கம்
இழிந்த பிறப்பாய் விடும்.

*

The brahmin can read again what he has forgotten of the scriptures and make up for lost memory. But if he neglects regulation of life he forfeits for ever the advantage of his birth :

மறப்பினும் ஒத்துக் கொளவாகும் பார்ப்பான்
பிறப்பு ஒழுக்கம் குன்றக் கெடும்.

What is lost in learning may be made up for, but what is once lost in the way of life is lost for ever. The caste system regulated society in the days of our poet. The brahmin had the duty of study and teaching. If the scripture was forgotten by the brahmin, he lost the purpose of his elevated rank. But this, says the poet, could be made up for by fresh study. Not so, however, could the brahmin regain his position once he fell into the error of neglecting the regulation of life prescribed for him. Ignorance or the neglecting of prescribed studies was a great offence in the brahmin. But a greater offence was the neglect of the discipline of life prescribed for him.

*

A well-regulated life brings honour. Neglect of it will lead to utter disgrace :

ஒழுக்கத்தின் எய்துவர் மேன்மை இழுக்கத்தின்
எய்துவர் எய்தாப் பழி.

The learned really betray ignorance when in spite of their learning they fail to regulate their lives in accordance with the principle of social co-operation :

உலகத்தோடு ஒட்ட ஒழுக்கல் பல கற்றும்
கல்லார் அறிவிலாதவர்.

Much learning is worthless if one cannot exercise self-control in conduct and behaviour. Regulation of life and social co-operation are more important than scriptural or philosophical knowledge.

AGAINST UNLAWFUL LOVE

Chapter 15

It is stupidity to entertain amorous thoughts about one who belongs to another. Any one that knows either the way of dharma or that of worldly wisdom will avoid this folly :

பிறன் பொருளாள் பெட்டு ஒழுகும் பேதைமை ஞாலத்து
அறம்பொருள் கண்டார்கண் இல்.

*

Among those who stray from the path of right conduct, there is none so stupid as the man who trespasses into another man's home :

அறன்கடை நின்றருள் எல்லாம் பிறன்கடை
நின்றூரின் பேதையார் இல்.

This is so because he will find no pleasure such as he foolishly hopes for in the contemplated offence but, instead, as a result must live in constant fear of disgrace and punishment.

*

It is better for one to be dead than to be tempted by thoughts of sin where one has been received with trust :

விளிந்தாரின் வேறு அல்லர் மன்ற தெளிந்தார் இல்
திமை புரிந்து ஒழுகுவார்.

Of no avail will be a man's importance, however great it may be, if he lacks in the simple wisdom of not violating another's home :

எனைத்துணையர் ஆயினும் என்னும் தினைத்துணையும்
தேரான் பிறன் இல் புகல்

Disgrace will be his lot notwithstanding all his importance.

It may seem all too easy to err with another's wife, but the disgrace will be unredeemable for all time :

எளிது என இல் இறப்பான் எய்தும் எஞ்ஞான்றும்
வினியாது நிற்கும் பழி.

The infatuated fool may think it is all so easy and imagine that it will end with it. But the disgrace will be as permanent as the pleasure was momentary, and escape from consequences will be as impossible as the error was easy.

Enmity, Sin, Fear, and Disgrace will ever dog the path of the man who violates the sacredness of another's home :

பகை பாவம் அச்சம் பழி என நான்கும்
இகவாவாம் இல் இறப்பான்கண்.

Those who have personal experience of the crime deprecated in this chapter can appreciate all that is stated herein and the insight of the poet.

He is not a true householder who lets his amorous thoughts dwell on those who belong to others. He may in conduct be a good husband and a good father and everything else, but the impure thought is enough to make it all a sham.

அறன் இயலான் இல்வாழ்வான் என்பான் பிறன் இயலாள்
பெண்மை நயவாதவன்.

*

Manhood consists in being able to control one's mind and being proof against amorous thoughts towards one that belongs to another. It is good religion as well as social order :

பிறன்மனை நோக்காத பேராண்மை சான் றீருர்க்கு
அறன் ஒன்றோ ஆன்ற ஒழுக்கு.

Virility does not consist in feebleness of self-control and indulgence in illegitimate desire.

FORBEARANCE

Chapter 16

Does not the earth support the man that is engaged in digging it? It is proper that we too bear with those who wrong us :

அகழ்வாரைத் தாங்கும் நிலம்போலத் தம்மை
இகழ்வாரைப் பொறுத்தல் தலை.

If one wrongs you, put up with it. But it is better still to forget it if you can .

பொறுத்தல் இறப்பினை என்றும் அதனை
மறத்தல் அதனினும் நன்று.

*

It is not a very great achievement if one revenges a wrong done. It is a golden achievement and will remain in the world's memory as such if a strong man shows forbearance in the face of wrong :

ஒறுத்தாரை ஒன்றாக வையாரே வைப்பர்
பொறுத்தாரைப் பொன்போல் பொதிந்து.

+

Retaliation gives but a day's joy. Forbearance brings glory for all time :

ஒறுத்தார்க்கு ஒருநாளை இன்பம் பொறுத்தார்க்குப்
பொன்றும் துணையும் புகழ்.

Momentary is the gratification felt in returning pain for pain. But the reward for forbearance is the esteem of good men for all time. We may not therefore sacrifice the larger for the smaller pleasure.

*

Pride leads a man to do wrong to you. But your greater pride should be to defeat him by your forbearance :

மிகுதியான் மிக்கவை செய்தாரை தாம் தம்
தகுதியான் வென்று விடல்.

Your forbearance will prove your greater worth and disillusion his pride. This is the defeat referred to, which is not a platitude. The incisive rationalist approach is a common characteristic of Tiruvalluvar and Marcus Aurelius. Forbearance is not a negative thing. It is an effective blow delivered to the wrong-doer's pride.

*

The man that shows forbearance in the face of insult has truly practised the discipline of the *sanyasin* though he is a householder :

துறந்தாரின் தூய்மை உடையர் இறந்தார் வாய்
இன்னாச்சொல் நோற்கிற் பவர்.

*

Great ascetics practice fasting, but forbearance in the face of the foolish attacks of ignorant men is a greater penance than such fasting :

உண்ணாது நோற்பார் பெரியர் பிறர்சொல்லும்
இன்னாச்சொல் நோற்பாரிற் பின்.

DO NOT ENVY

Chapter 17

There is no greater wealth or possession than the possession of a mind that is free from envy :

விழுப்பேற்றின் அஃது ஒப்பது இல்லை யார்மாட்டும்
அழுக்காற்றின் அன்மை பெறின்.

The envying of others' possessions is equivalent to poverty. It makes one, though in possession of wealth, go through as much misery as poverty causes. The misery cannot be remedied by any acquisition of wealth or other sources of joy, as the cause of pain arises from outside oneself, viz., in another's wealth. Hence to be endowed with a temperament free from envy is the greatest blessing on earth.

*

It is he that cares not for his own spiritual or mental well-being that allows his mind to entertain envious thoughts instead of feeling happy when he sees the well-being of others.

அறன்ஆக்கம் வேண்டாதான் என்பான் பிறன்ஆக்கம்
பேணாது அழுக்கறுப் பான்

*

A man may lose his happiness without having a single enemy in the outer world to cause it. His own envy is enough.

அழுக்காறு உடையார்க்கு அது சாலும் ஒன்றர்
வழுக்கியும் கேடு ஈன்பது.

i. e., your own mind can be your worst enemy. Envy makes poverty amidst wealth and misery amidst causes for joy. No thief is required to rob you of your wealth. Envy does the work by making your wealth of no avail to you for joy.

*

The goddess of good-luck is impatient with men that cannot bear the sight of other people's good fortune. She immediately entrusts such men to the charge of her elder sister :

அவ்வித்து அழுக்காறு உடையாணைச் செய்யவள்
தவ்வையைக் காட்டி விடும்.

In the folk-mythology of India which curiously embodies Vedanta, the elder sister of the goddess of Fortune is Misfortune. Misfortune is the responsibility of the senior goddess, while the younger is in charge of good luck and well-being. The two are sisters, and therein is the philosophy of Vedanta which looks on pain and pleasure with indifference.

*

You may be blessed with every good trait and all good fortune. But the one blemish of envy is enough to cast you into hell-fire.

அழுக்காறு எனஒரு பாவி திருச்செற்றுத்
தியுழி உய்த்து விடும்.

Envy makes hell for the man now as well as hereafter.

*

None has grown richer by envying. No one has lost anything by not envying. Simple truth, but we forget it when we see another's good fortune !

அழுக்கற்று அகன்றாரும் இல்லை அஃது இல்லார்
பெருக்கத்தின் தீர்ந்தாரும் இல்.

Alas that so many men purposelessly entertain envious thoughts which only cause pain to themselves without achieving anything !

— — —

DO NOT COVET

Chapter 18

அழக்காறு is envy, an inability to be happy at the sight of another's well-being. வெஃகல், greed, is covetousness, the desire to obtain by illegitimate means what is another's.

*

If a man's mind turns to thoughts of abandoning rectitude and to take by illegitimate means what belongs to others, it will automatically lead him to many an error and bring disgrace to him and his family :

நடுவுஇன்றி நன்பொருள் வெஃகின் குடிபொன்றிக்
குற்றமும் ஆங்கே தரும்.

*

If you desire to be happy in the real sense, do not turn to what is not legitimate, which at the most can give but transient pleasure :

சிற்றன்பம் வெஃகி அறனல்ல செய்யாரே
மற்றுஇன்பம் வேண்டு பவர்.

*

What then is a man to do ? Control your mind, says Tiruvalluvar, whenever the wandering senses seek to drag it downwards.

Those who have the wisdom to keep their senses under restraint will never think of other's possessions to make up for their want :

இலம்என்று வெஃகுதல் செய்யார் புலம்வென்ற
புன்மையில் காட்சி யவர்.

*

Of no avail is keenness of intellect, of no avail is wide knowledge if greed siezes one to folly.

அஃகி அகன்ற அறிவுஎன்னும் யார்மாட்டும்
வெஃகி வெறிய செயின்.

Greed is a malady which affects even men of keen intellect and wide learning. Hence this warning.

*

Even men whose plan is ultimately to renounce the world are often guilty of covetousness. If indeed you live a householder's life in order ultimately to learn to look upon all beings with the eye of universal love and charity, how ruinous to that plan it is to let greedy thoughts enter your mind !

அருள்வெஃகி ஆற்றின்கண் நின்றான் பொருள் வெஃகிப்
பொல்லாத சூழக் கெடும்.

*

Do not covet other's possessions. When you come to possess the things which you laboured illegitimately to obtain, you will find no true enjoyment therein such as you had desired. True enjoyment is possible only if the acquisition is lawful :

வேண்டற்க வெஃகிஆம் ஆக்கம் வினைவயின்
மாண்டற்கு அரிதாம் பயன்.

*

Greed is folly. It results only in misery equivalent to death. On the other hand, it should be your pride not to be tempted to look with covetous eyes on other people's possessions. Cultivate this indifference. It will give you a sense of triumph.

இறல் ஈனும் எண்ணுது வெஃகின் விறல் ஈனும்
வேண்டாமை என்னும் செருக்கு.

Greed defeats its own purpose. Contentment leads to victory of the spirit.

SPEAK NOT ILL OF OTHERS

Chapter 19

You may sometimes speak the harshest things to a man's face, but do not indulge in the thoughtless vice of calumniating any one behind his back :

கண்ணின்று கண்அறச் சொல்லினும் சொல்லற்க
முன்னின்று பின்னோக்காச் சொல்.

*

If men will see their own faults as they see other's, evil must come to an end :

ஏதிலார் குற்றம்போல் தம் குற்றம் காண்கிற்பின்
திது உண்டோ மன்னும் உயிர்க்கு

Tiruvalluvar felt just like Burns !

AVOID WORTHLESS TALK

Chapter 20

This chapter is intended to instil decorum of speech in company and points out the serious consequences of a seemingly venial fault.

He who indulges in purposeless talk causes disgust to his company and finally earns universal contempt :

பல்லார் முனியப் பயன் இல சொல்லுவான்
எல்லாரும் எள்ளப்படும்.

*

Indulging in worthless talk in mixed company does greater mischief than even wrongs done to friends.

பயன் இல பல்லார் முன் சொல்லல் நயன் இல
நட்டார் கண் செய்தலின் தீது.

You may hope for charity from friends whom you wrong, but you will earn the contempt of society by lack of restraint in general conversation.

CONSCIENCE

Chapter 21

திவினையச்சம் is trepidation at the thought of wrong-doing.

The folly that brings about wrong-doing frightens good men, although bad men see nothing terrible in it.

திவினையார் அஞ்சார் விழுமியார் அஞ்சுவர்
திவினை என்னும் செருக்கு.

Bad men have got over natural hesitation by use and wont. The fear of evil as first experienced is what should be kept undiminished.

*

From evil springs fresh evil, like fire which regenerates itself. Men should shrink from sin as from a terror even worse than fire:

தியவை தீய பயத்தலால் தியவை
தியினும் அஞ்சப் படும்.

The peculiarity of fire is that, of what it consumes, it makes for itself regenerative continuity. That which is set fire to itself causes fresh material to burn. Sin has this quality of fire and in a more terrible form. Therefore shrink from it at the very start, for later you will be unable to cope with it.

*

The highest and most precious of all arts consists in not returning evil for evil :

அறிவினுள் எல்லாம் தலைஎன்ப தீய
செறுவார்க்கும் செய்யா விடல்.

Forbearance is recommended as the highest form of all higher knowledge. It stops the chain of evil where you can control it. You cannot prevent another but you can prevent yourself from contributing to the progressive sequence of evil.

*

Even by inadvertance do not think of any act that will hurt another. If you do, the law of Nature decrees your own ruin :

மறந்தும் பிறன்கேடு குழற்க குழின்
அறம்குழும் குழந்தவன் கேடு.

*

It is possible to escape other enemies, but you cannot fly from the relentless pursuit of your own evil deed :

எனைப்பகை உற்றாரும் உய்வர் வினைப்பகை
வீயாது பின்சென்று அடும்.

*

The evil pursues the evil-doer as the shadow pursues a man wherever his feet may take him. Those who commit evil cannot escape nemesis :

தீயவை செய்தார் கெடுதல் நிழல்தன்னை
வீயாது அடிஉறைந் தற்று.

*

Do you love yourself? Then do not do to any one what falls in the class of evil, however small it may be :

தன்னைத்தான் காதலன் ஆயின் எனைத்துஒன்றும்
துன்னற்க தீவினைப் பால்.

SOCIAL CO-OPERATION

Chapter 22

ஒப்புரவு is active social co-operation with the spirit of helpfulness behind it.

What good did the creatures of the earth do to the clouds that pour the rain? So indeed should you serve society seeking no return :

கைம்மாறு வேண்டா கடப்பாடு மாரி மாட்டு
என்ஆற்றும் கொல்லோ உலகு.

*

Good men put forth industry and produce wealth not for themselves but for the use of society :

தாளாற்றித் தந்த பொருள்எல்லாம் தக்கார்க்கு
வேளாண்மை செய்தல் பொருட்டு.

Wealth is not to be earned for the purpose of self-indulgence or for satisfaction of greed. Wealth should be treated as the citizen's instrument for helpfulness. The word வேளாண்மை is not just helpfulness, but helpfulness combined with a sense of duty.

*

There is no pleasure in this or in the other world equal to the joy of being helpful to those around you. Do not lose the opportunity for this rare pleasure :

புத்தேள் உலகத்தும் ஈண்டும் பெறல்அறிதே
ஒப்புரவின் நல்ல பிற.

*

Man is born as a social being. He alone lives who functions as a social co-operator. He who does not recognise this duty is to be counted as one dead :

ஒத்தது அறிவான உயிர் வாழ்வான் மற்றையான்
செத்தாருள் வைக்கப்படும்.

*

When prosperity comes to a man who has understanding and knows his duty to his fellow-men, it is like the village tank being filled by the rain :

ஊருணி நீர்நிறைந் தற்றே உலகுஅவாம்
பேர்அறி வாளன் திரு.

i. e., it is an occasion for joy for the whole community. The tank keeps the water from running to waste or being dried up, and serves to quench the people's thirst throughout the year.

*

When wealth comes to a large-hearted man, it is like the village tree coming to be in fruit :

பயன்மரம் உள்ளூர்ப் பழுத்தற்று செல்வம்
நயனுடை யான்கண் படிந்.

The joy of finding ripe fruit in their own village tree is an apt figure for the prosperity that comes to the large-hearted citizen to whom it is joy to spread joy around him and for which prosperity brings the opportunity.

*

The village tank, the village fruit tree, and now the drug plant whose every part serves as unfailing remedy for ailments :

SOCIAL CO-OPERATION

மருந்துஆகித் தப்பா மரத்தற்றுஆல் செல்வம்
பெருந்தகை யான்கண் படிந்.

i.e., If wealth comes to one who is blessed with a large heart, it becomes the unfailing drug-plant for society's troubles.

The village tank stores the water from running to waste : so the wise citizen acquires and looks after his acquisitions in order to serve all. The village tree bears ripe fruit ; so the liberal-minded citizen freely gives of his wealth to help all around. The medicinal tree is the precious alchemist of nature. Its leaves, bark, fruit and root take out of the earth those essences which relieve ailments of all kinds. So does the wealth of the great citizen serve to relieve suffering of all kinds. His knowledge and experience make up the alchemy that is needed to put the wealth to effective use for the benefit of the community.

*

Poverty does not stop the social co-operation of those who have a clear understanding of the duties of life. They continue their social service undeterred by adversity :

இடன்இல் பருவத்தும் ஒப்புரவிற்கு ஒல்கார்
கடன் அறிகாட்சி யவர்.

It is not necessary to be rich to be helpful. There are ways in which in any position one can help. The essence of social service is in the mind. Under each changed circumstance, a new duty arises and the due fulfilment of it is what should be attended to. When, therefore, a man loses his material resources, he does not need to think his capacity for social co-operation has ceased.

*

The worst misery that poverty brings to the large-hearted man is the pain of not having resources enough to serve others in the manner he had been accustomed :

நயன் உடையான் நல்குந் தான் ஆதல் செய்யும்நீர்
செய்யாது அமைகலா ஆறு.

✱

If social co-operation appears to ruin you, it is indeed worth while to be ruined. There is no price too high to pay for service to society. You may sell yourself out into slavery if that would enable you to serve the people around you :

ஒப்புரவினால்வரும் கேடுஎனின் அஃதுஒருவன்
விற்புக்கோள் தக்கது உடைத்து.

HELPING THE POOR

Chapter 23

That alone is a gift which is given to the needy. Gifts to others are in the nature of a business transaction wherein what is given is expected to be duly returned :

வறியார்க்கு ஒன்று ஈவதே ஈகைமற்று எல்லாம்
குறியெதிர்ப்பை நீரது உடைத்து.

குறியெதிர்ப்பை denotes the record of presents received from relations on certain occasions in accordance with customary social duty. Such presents are recorded to be compensated for by equivalent gifts on a similar future occasion when the donor receives gifts.

*

Receiving charity, even when poverty permits it, invariably hurts. On the other hand, to give to the poor is good, even if there were no future world wherein merit is duly rewarded :

நல்லாறு எனினும் கொளல் தீது மேல் உலகம்
இல் எனினும் ஈதலே நன்று.

The very act of giving gives joy to the giver and receiving a favour causes pain to the receiver. This is inherent in human nature, apart from any consequences dependent on the promises of scripture. This is a characteristic instance of the Tiruvalluvar approach.

He looks at things with a scientific eye and does not tie himself in credal knots.

*

You may find it unpleasant to be approached for charity. But that is only until you see the radiant face of the man whose distress you have relieved :

இன்னாது இரக்கப் படுதல் இரந்தவர்
இன்முகம் காணும் அளவு.

When you see that face, you will feel that it was indeed a good fortune that you had the chance and the power to create so much joy, miserable human being as you were with so many limitations.

*

The ascetic's strength of mind enables him to bear hunger and out of it arises his power also. But the act of relieving another's hunger is greater than suffering hunger oneself :

ஆற்றுவார் ஆற்றல் பசி ஆற்றல் அப்பசியை
மாற்றுவார் ஆற்றலின் பின்.

The suffering of privations is brave but it is braver to feel for others and stint yourself to help them.

*

Fortunate is he who saves men from the devastating curse of hunger, for he has thereby deposited his possessions in a well-guarded vault :

அற்றார் அழிபசிதீர்த்தல் அஃது ஒருவன்
பெற்றான். பொருள்வைப் புழி.

*

Have not these men ever experienced the delight of giving? Else, why are they so hard-hearted and refuse to give and at the end of it all disappear from earth leaving behind what they withheld from the needy?

ஈத்துஉவக்கும் இன்பம் அறியார்கொல் தாம்
வைத்துஇழக்கும் வன்க ணவர். [உடைமை

They would not be so foolish and miserly if they had the imagination to realise what great joy they had in their power to make for themselves which they vainly try to find otherwise. If they tried it once, they would see it.

*

Wretched is he whose poverty forces him to beg for alms. But more wretched indeed is he whose narrow heart makes him close the door against the hungry so that he may eat by himself:

இரத்தலின் இன்னாது மன்ற நிரப்பிய
தாமே தமிழர் உணல்.

*

Death is most painful. But even that becomes pleasant to the good man when he finds himself unable to help the wretched:

சாதலின் இன்னாது இல்லை இனிதுஅதூஉம்
ஈதல் இழையாக் கடை.

The extolling of alms-giving and the unmeasured condemnation of the miser might appear foolish in the age of industrial revolution and may not be appreciated when reconstruction of the economic structure of society on an entirely new basis is actively canvassed. We should try to understand it on the back-ground of social organisation which was not even remotely conceived in those days as possible of alteration by law. All that was said in those days about charity should be recast and applied to social service in the new order. The substance remains though the form may change.

PUBLIC ESTEEM

Chapter 24

Poverty is wealth if it is brought about for causes that raise a man in the esteem of the world, and even death under certain circumstances is life ever-lasting. Such poverty which is not poverty and such death which is not death but life come only to those who understand true values :

நத்தம்போல் கேடும் உளது ஆகும் சாக்காடும்
வித்தகர்க்கு அல்லால் அரிது.

*

When men have not lived so as to earn the esteem of good men, why do they not see and grieve over their own fault but blame the world that refuse to esteem them ?

புகழ்பட வாழாதார் தம்நோவார் தம்மை
இகழ்வாரை நோவது எவன்.

According to commentators, chapters 25 to 38 deal with matters of special significance to the order of ascetics and monastic life. When Kural was written, the monastic life was common enough in South India and large numbers of people of the Jain and Buddhist denominations were solemnly pledged to it. Some believe that Tiruvalluvar was a Jain. But even if he was not a Jain, he wrote for all, including Jains. There was therefore a place for special chapters dealing with the monastic life in the comprehensive book that the Kural was planned to be. But one cannot be certain that all these chapters had this specific purpose. Much of what is said in these chapters are applicable even to men leading family lives. Tiruvalluvar definitely takes the view that detachment in conduct is the essence of the principle of renunciation and that monastic life is not necessary for a man's salvation if he knows how to do his duties in ordinary life with detachment and equanimity.

COMPASSION

Chapter 25

Various are the teachings of the religions of the world, but in all you find that compassion is that which gives men spiritual deliverance. Hold on to it :

நல்லாற்றான் நாடி அருள் ஆள்க பல்லாற்றல்
தேரினும் அஃதே துணை.

அருள் is looking on all creatures with the love that is associated with blood relationship.

*

Soul endangering sin flees from him who looks upon all beings with affection :

மண்உயிர் ஒம்பி அருள் ஆள்வாற்கு இல்என்ப
தன்உயிர் அஞ்சும் வினை.

*

Even as the happiness of this world depends wholly on material possessions, compassion is that on which your happiness in the world beyond wholly depends :

அருள் இல்லார்க்கு அவ்வுலகம் இல்லை பொருள் இல்
இவ்வுலகம் இல்லாகி யாங்கு. [லார்க்கு]

*

Those who have lost their possessions may flourish once again. But there is no hope for those who have failed in the duty of compassion :

பொருள் அற்றார் பூப்பர் ஒருகால் அருள் அற்றார்
அற்றார் மற்றுஆதல் அரிது.

Wealth can be lost and got again, but goodness lost is an irrecoverable loss.

*

Can one who has no compassion in his heart be true to Dharma by force of other virtues ? This is no more possible than that one who has no understanding can reach the true meaning of things :

தெருளாதான் மெய்ப்பொருள் கண்டற்று ஆல்லைதரின்
அருளாதான் செய்யும் அறம்.

Men can see easily that understanding is essential for knowledge, but they do not see what is equally true, viz., that compassion is essential for goodness.

*

When a man is inclined to be cruel to those over whom he has power, let him think of himself trembling before the cruelty of stronger men :

வலியார்முன் தன்னை நினைக்கதான் தன்னின்
மெலியார்மேல் செல்லும் இடத்து.

EAT NO MEAT

Chapter 26

How can a man adopt the way of compassion, eating the bodies of other beings in order to nourish his own body ?

தன் ஊன் பெருக்கத்திற்குத் தான் பிறிது ஊன்
எங்ஙனம் ஆளும் அருள். [உண்பான்

Meat eating is inconsistent with tenderness to life or compassion. Nature cannot work a contrary whatever be the casuistry about it. If we must eat meat, let us not talk of compassion or charity.

*

The butcher with the knife in his hand cannot turn his heart to compassion. It is the same with one who has eaten the body of another creature made tasty with condiments :

படைகொண்டார் நெஞ்சம்போல் நன்றுஊக்காது
உடல்சுவை உண்டார் மனம். [ஒன்றன்

He who likes the taste of meat is a butcher. It is no use distinguishing between meat-eating and the slaughtering of animals oneself.

*

Eating the meat that is obtained by killing is gross stupidity. It cannot be compassion but it is the opposite to encourage killing and thereby killing the doctrine of non-killing :

அருள் அல்லது யாதெனில் கொல்லாமை கோறல்
பொருள் அல்லது அவ்வூன் தினல்.

To make other people break the law against killing life cannot be consistent with compassion. There is no sense therefore in those who would not kill eating the meat that is necessarily obtained by killing. This is obviously a protest against the eating of meat practised by persons professing to be adherents of the law of non-killing, and an answer to those who argue that dietary rules should not be mixed up with compassion or virtues of the mind.

*

If men will decide not to kill for the sake of eating, no one will make a trade or profession of slaughtering living creatures :

தினற்பொருட்டால் கொல்லாது உலகுஎனின் யாரும்
விலைப்பொருட்டால் ஊன் தருவார் இல்.

This is an answer to the argument that people live by selling meat and that if we buy meat already slaughtered, there can be no sin in it or want of compassion.

*

What is meat but a cruel and ugly ulcer wound in the body of another creature? How can one who realises this make it an article of food?

உண்ணாமை வேண்டும் புலாஅல் பிறிதொன்றன்
புண்அது உணர்வார்ப் பெறின்.

i.e., It is strange that something so disgusting and so cruel can be considered food.

*

More meritorious than a thousand burnt offerings is it to give up the practice of killing a living creature and eating its carcase :

அவிசொரிந்து ஆயிரம் வேட்டலின் ஒன்றன்
உயிர்செகுத்து உண்ணாமை நன்று.

*

All the living creatures of the world offer worship with folded hands to the man who refrains from killing and abstains from meat :

கொல்லான் புலாலை மறுத்தானை கைகூப்பி
எல்லா உயிரும் தொழும்.

i.e., the creatures of the world would look upon him as a God descended on earth to save them from their relentless enemies.

NON-KILLING

Chapter 33

Share your food with the hungry. Refrain from causing death to any form of life. All the codes enjoin this:

பகுத்துஉண்டு பல்லுயிர் ஒம்புதல் நூலோர்
தொகுத்தவற்றுள் எல்லாம் தலை.

*

Life is dear, but even to save your life, do not do that which will deprive another creature of its own dear life :

தன்னுயிர் ரீப்பினும் செய்யற்க தான்பிறிது
இன்னுயிர் நீக்கும் வினை.

— —

PENANCE

Chapter 27

To a world deeply attached to orthodox practices of self-inflicted pain, Tiruvalluvar says :

Penance consists in the fortitude with which the pain that falls to one's lot is borne and in the avoidance of causing pain to sentient beings. This is the substance of penance and nothing else :

உற்றநோய் நோன்றல் உயிர்க்கு உறுகண் செய்யாமை
அற்றே தவத்திற்கு உரு.

All false notions of supernatural benefits arising out of self-inflicted pain are discounted and a rational and catholic doctrine of patient suffering is indicated.

*

Blessed is he who is qualified for penance. To those who undertake it without being truly qualified, penance is mere profitless travail :

தவமும் தவமுடையார்க்கு ஆகும் அவம் அதனை
அஃது இலார் மேற்கொள் வது.

*

Those who have not renounced the worldly life must have perhaps kept out of the order of ascetics only to be able to look after those who undergo privations for penance's sake :

துறந்தார்க்குத் துப்புரவு வேண்டி மறந்தார்கொல்
மற்றையவர்கள் தவம்.

i.e., So obviously good and attractive is renunciation that this perhaps must be the reason for so many refraining from adopting that life. There is a delicately expressed warning here that the house-holder's life is not to be deemed inferior.

*

The gold in the furnace shines the more it is in the fire. So do they who suffer in order to chasten their spirit shine the more resplendently for the pain that they willingly bear :

சுடச்சுடரும் பொன்போல் ஒளிவிடும் துன்பம்
சுடச்சுட நோக்கிற் பவர்க்கு.

*

He who has acquired mastery over his self is the object of universal worship :

தன் உயிர் தான் அறப் பெற்றானை ஏனைய
மன்னுயிர் எல்லாம் தொழும்.

தன் உயிர் தான் அறப் பெற்றானை : He holds his life in fee-simple who does not let himself be held by his senses. Otherwise, instead of the soul being master and the body its slave, the soul is held as slave by the body.

IMPURE LIFE

Chapter 28

If one has falsehood in his heart and secretly breaks the law of celibacy the five elements that watch from inside his body laugh at the futile fraud :

வஞ்ச மனத்தான் படிற்றொழுக்கம் பூதங்கள்
ஐந்தும் அகத்தே நகும்.

Remember that you have within you five witnesses watching your secret and shameful crime. Not God the All-immanent, but even the physical elements laugh in scorn, says Tiruvalluvar.

*

Of what avail are the trappings of purity or sainthood when within him his conscience is conscious of having fallen into guilt :

வானுயர் தோற்றம் எவன்செய்யும் தன்நெஞ்சம்
தான் அறி குற்றப் படின.

*

The feeble-minded wearing the brave trappings of strength is like a miserable cow putting on the skin of a tiger to save itself from being impounded while feeding stealthily on the corn in a stranger's field :

வலிஇல் நிலைமையான் வல்லுருவம் பெற்றம்
புலியின்தோலை போர்த்துமேய்ந் தற்று.

Men think this saint has conquered the flesh and will not stoop to offences of the flesh and thereby he gets the opportunity for secret crime.

*

If a man clothes himself in the externals of a saint and under that cover commits sin he descends to the life of the mean bird-catcher who hides in the bush to trap innocent birds :

தவம்மறைந்து அல்லவை செய்தல் புதல்மறைந்து
வேட்டுவன் புள்சிமிழ்த் தற்று.

*

Making public pretensions to purity of life, if you secretly act contrary to the law, soon will you be landed in numberless troubles and you will lament in exceeding measure :

பற்றுஅற்றேறம் என்பார் படிற்றொழுக்கம் எற்று
ஏதம் பலவும் தரும். [எற்றுஎன்று

Consider well, Is it worth while? asks Tiruvalluvar in his characteristic way.

*

There are some in this world who like the *Kunri* seed are beautifully red all over, but have in their hearts a black spot like that seed.

புறம்குன்றி கண்டுஅனைய ரேனும் அகம் குன்றி
மூக்கின் கரியார் உடைத்து.

குன்றி is a very hard and light and beautifully red seed used as the smallest unit in weighing gold. It has a black spot on its "nose".

*

There are many that pass for holy men who keep foulness in their hearts and go through the external ablutions of saints in order to deceive others and hide their sins :

மனத்தது மாசஆக மாண்டார்நீர் ஆடி
மறைந்துஓழுகும் மாந்தர் பலர்.

*

Is not the arrow smooth and straight but cruel, and the harp curved but makes sweet music? So must our judgment depend not on appearance but on conduct :

கணைகொடிது யாழ்கோடு செவ்விதுஆங்கு அன்ன
வினைபடு பாலால் கொளல்.

*

Avoid what the world condemns. If you succeed in this, there is no need for the shaven head or the growing of long hair :

மழித்தலும் நீட்டலும் வேண்டா உலகம்
பழித்தது ஒழித்து விடின்.

Some hermits shave their heads clean and others allow their hair to grow wild according to the order to which they belong. Purity makes the saint, not the external.

TRUTHFULNESS

Chapter 30

Truthfulness can wrong no being in the world :

வாய்மை எனப்படுவது யாது எனின் யாதொன்றும்
தீமை இலாத சொல்லு.

i.e., Truth is not truth if it is spoken to further some wrong. The standard test for right conduct including truthfulness is harmlessness. This does not mean that truth is underrated.

*

If one could speak an untruth which brings good without the least blemish of evil, it might be classed with truth :

பொய்ம்மையும் வாய்மை யிடத்த புரைதீர்ந்த
நன்மை பயக்கும் எனின்.

This is perhaps possible in cases like that of a doctor who says something hopeful for the patient which he knows is not accurate but which he believes may possibly do him good and which hurts no one. புரைதீர்ந்த நன்மை = Good without any concealed defect or blemish. Apart from this and similar cases of exception to the doctrine of verbal truth, the poet probably intends in these two verses to base the law of truth-speaking on the foundation of non-violence.

To some, the causing of pain to others is the great wrong and everything should be adjudged good or bad on this basic test; to others, truth is an absolute duty and a breach of that duty is by itself wrong and need not be related to the causing of pain to others. Those who explain the duty of truth on the basis of avoidance of pain to others are however not to be understood to allow laxity. It is perhaps easier to speak the truth than to avoid the causing of any pain to others. The latter is therefore a test which leads to a severer trial than literal accuracy.

*

Of all things confirmed in our experience, the rule of truthfulness stands out most firmly established. There is nothing more precious than truth :

யாம் மெய்யாக் கண்டவற்றுள் இல்லை எனத் தொன்
வாய்மையின் நல்ல பிற. [றும்

*

If you are truthful in thought and word you are superior to one who undergoes penances and gives gifts :

மனத்தொடு வாய்மை மொழியின் தவத்தொடு
தானம் செய்வாரின் தலை.

*

Truthfulness earns the esteem of the world besides bringing in its train the merit of every other virtue without the physical privations of penance :

பொய்யாமை அன்ன புகழ்இல்லை எய்யாமை
எல்லா அறமும் தரும்.

*

Water makes external cleanliness. Truthfulness is the detergent of the heart :

புறம் தூய்மை நீரான் அமையும் அகந் தூய்மை
வாய்மையால் காணப் படும்.

*

Lamps do not give the light that holy men desire. It is the light of truth that illuminates their path :

எல்லா விளக்கும் விளக்கல்ல சான்றோர்க்கு
பொய்யா விளக்கே விளக்கு.

AGAINST ANGER

Chapter 31

He truly is angerless who avoids anger when the wrong-doer is under his power. Where his anger cannot hurt, what matters it whether he guards against anger or not :

செல்இடத்துக் காப்பான் சினம்காப்பான் அல்
காக்கின்என் காவாக்கால் என். [இடத்து

*

Everyone knows that it is bad for oneself to lose temper in dealing with superiors. But where anger is directed against persons in one's power it is the worst of all offences :

செல்லா இடத்து சினம்தீது செல்இடத்து
இல்அதனின் தீய பிற.

Anger causes pain and a fresh lease of life is given to ill-will. Where it does not hurt the other party, it simply causes pain to oneself. The evil is obvious in this case ; but where it hurts another and therefore contributes to further ill-will, the evil is even greater.

*

Let us forget the cause for anger given by any one. From anger is born all evil :

மறத்தல் வெகுளியை யார்மாட்டும் தீய
பிறத்தல் அதனான் வரும்.

*

Can there be any greater enemy to mankind than anger which kills laughter and joy (which indeed are the greatest of blessings on earth) ?

நகையும் உவகையும் கொல்லும் சினத்தின்
பகையும் உளவோ பிற.

Tiruvalluvar appeals to our sense of values. Of what value is anything that destroys joy ?

*

Let him who would save himself guard against anger. The anger that is not held back is disastrous to oneself :

தன்னைத்தான் காக்கின் சினம்காக்க காவாக்கால்
தன்னையே கொல்லும் சினம்.

*

He who thinks anger is a profitable or worthy thing and yields to it is bound to suffer the evil thereof even like the fool that hits the ground with his hand :

சினத்தைப் பொருளென்று கொண்டவன் கேடு
நிலத்துஅறைந்தான் கைபிழையாது அற்று.

He who hits the ground hits himself by that act. Anger hurts the angry man, not the other. The certainty as well as the incidence of the pain are brought out by the analogy.

*

AGAINST ANGER

Greatm be the wrong; like many-tonuged fire it may burn, but it is worth while yet to struggle and rein back one's anger, if at all possible :

இணர்எரி தோய்வுஅன்ன இன்னு செயினும்
புணரின் வெகுளாமை நன்று.

The poet goes mentally through the difficulties that arise in the practice of what he preaches. This is Tiruvalluvar's special characteristic when dealing with any subject.

*

There is nothing lost by avoiding anger. On the contrary it will be seen that what is sought to be attained comes quicker if anger is avoided :

உள்ளியது எல்லாம் உடனெய்தும் உள்ளத்தால்
உள்ளான் வெகுளி எனின்.

This is the experience of the self-controlled and is held out to strengthen the aspirant.

DO NOT CAUSE HARM

Chapter 32

The best punishment for those who do evil to you, is to shame them by returning good for evil:

இன்னொசெய் தாரை ஒறுத்தல் அவர்நாண
நன்னயம் செய்து விடல்.

This may appear to be a platitude. Actual experiment will disclose how effective the advice is. The pain felt by the wrong-doer in his shame is greater than any that anger could inflict on him.

*

Is there anything in much learning if the learned man cannot feel the pain of others as keenly as the pain in his own body and avoid causing it:

அறிவினான் ஆகுவது உண்டோ பிறிதின்றோய்
தன்னோய்போல் போற்றுக் கடை.

*

When man has experienced pain caused to him by others and knows what it is, how can he wantonly cause it to others?

தன்உயிர்க்கு இன்னுமை தானறிவான் என்கொலோ
மன்னுயிர்க்கு இன்னு செயல்.

*

The pain that a man causes to another in the forenoon returns to him that very afternoon:

பிறர்க்குஇன்னு முற்பகல் செய்யின் தமக்குஇன்னு
பிற்பகல் தாமே வரும்.

THE FLEETING WORLD

Chapter 34

Like the crowd that gathers to see a play comes dazzling wealth. It disappears like the gathering which melts away when the play is over :

கூத்தாட்டு அவைக்குழாத்து அற்றே பெரும்செல்வம்
போக்கும் அதுவிளிந் தற்று.

The full force of the comparison can be realised by those who have seen the bare ground in the morning after the village play is over and all that dazzled overnight is gone, leaving nothing behind but dust.

*

We imagine the day is something by itself. But to those who can see the truth, the day is in reality nothing but the sharp saw that unremittingly saws through life :

நாள்ளன ஒன்றுபோல் காட்டி உயிர்சரும்
வாளது உணர்வார்ப் பெறின்.

*

Do that which is good without delay for you must do it before the tongue fails and the last hiccup seizes you :

நாச்செற்று விக்குள்மேல் வாராமுன் நல்வினை
மேற்சென்று செய்யப் படும்.

*

The most striking beauty about this world is that one who was in it yesterday is not to be found to-day :

நெருநல் உள்ளொருவன் இன்று இல்லை என்னும்
பெருமை உடைத்து இவ் வுலகு.

*

We cannot be certain of living the next minute. But we are not content with even a million plans :

ஒருபொழுதும் வாழ்வது அறியார் கருதுப
கோடியும் அல்ல பல.

*

The soul cares for the body only as the bird cares for its nest. The bird leaves it joyfully to fly in the air, so does the soul leave the body :

குடம்பை தனித்து ஒழியப் புள் பறந்தற்றே
உடம்பொடு உயிரிடை நட்பு.

+

The soul is indeed a homeless wanderer. It stays for a brief time in the body as the homeless wretch who takes shelter under some roof only to leave it at the earliest call :

புக்கில் அமைந்தின்று கொல்லோ உடம்பினுள்
துச்சில் இருந்த உயிர்க்கு.

RENUNCIATION

Chapter 35

As one by one you detach yourself from the things of the world you are saved from pain in respect of it :

யாதனின் யாதனின் நீங்கியான் நோதல்
அதனின் அதனின் இலன்.

Attachment being a source of pain, every renouncement brings happiness. It need not be done all at one time. The advantage is not lost by spreading it out. As each thing is renounced, to that extent pain is escaped. Loss of goods is not loss but an escape from pain inevitably associated with it.

*

The absence of something to that extent makes it easier to give it up wholly, i.e., even the thought of it. Possession tends to bring the mind back to delusion and therefore is a hindrance :

இயல்பாகும் நோன்பிற்கு ஒன்று இன்மை உடைமை
மயலாகும் மற்றும் பெயர்த்து.

*

If one's heart is set on ending the round of births, there is no purpose in keeping any attachments alive. Even the body is a burden to be got rid of soon :

மற்றும் தொடர்ப்பாகு எவன்கொல் பிறப்பு அறுக்கல்
உற்றார்க்கு உடம்பும் மிகை.

*

Pain holds him in its grip, who holds on to the things of the world :

பற்றிவிடாஅ இடும்பைகள் பற்றினைப்
பற்றி விடாஅ தவர்க்கு.

*

Those who renounce wholly, i.e., giving up even the thought of things to be desired have saved themselves. The rest are deluded and are still in the net :

தலைப்பட்டார் தீரத் துறந்தார் மயங்கி
வலைப்பட்டார் மற்றை யவர்.

*

Deliverance comes only with the abandonment of attachments. Else the fleeting world must be one's home again and again :

பற்றுஅற்ற கண்ணே பிறப்புஅறுக்கும் மற்று
நிலையாமை காணப் படும்.

i.e., mere privation enforced on oneself will not help. What is required is the giving up of attachment and desire.

*

Let attachment to the Lord be your one attachment. That attachment will help you to free yourself from other attachments :

பற்றுக பற்றுஅற்றான் பற்றினை அப்பற்றைப்
பற்றுக பற்று விடற்கு.

TRUE KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 36

The miseries of life are born of error that takes the unreal for real :

பொருளல் லவற்றைப் பொருள் என்று உணரும்
மருளான் ஆம் மாணப் பிறப்பு.

The cause of all our griefs is that we base life on false values. Life based on true values ends in deliverance.

*

Heaven is as nearer as earth to the enlightened who have freed themselves from the entanglement of doubt :

ஐயத்தின் நீங்கித் தெளிந்தார்க்கு வையத்தின்
வானம் நணியது உடைத்து.

*

If there is no true understanding, all the knowledge that the five senses give is of no avail :

ஐயுணர்வு எய்தியக் கண்ணும் பயமின்றே
மெய்யுணர் வில்லா தவர்க்கு.

*

True understanding is that which uncovers and shows the one reality behind the apparent and diverse exteriors of all things :

எப்பொருள் எத்தன்மைத் தாயினும் அப்பொருள்
மெய்ப்பொருள் காண்ப தறிவு.

*

The enlightened man perceives the one immanent substance in the diverse phenomenal appearances of the world.

*

Those who have learnt to perceive the Reality will surely take the path leading to deliverance from rebirth :

கற்றுநீண்டு மெய்ப்பொருள் கண்டார் தலைப்படுவர்
மற்றுநீண்டு வாரா நெறி.

*

Root out the three evils, Desire, Anger and Delusion, and all grief shall end :

காமம் வெகுளி மயக்கம் இவைமூன் றன்
நாமம் கெடக்கெடும் நோய்.

RENOUNCING OF DESIRE

Chapter 37

Desire is the seed out of which is born the unending cycle of birth and death :

அவாஎன்ப எல்லா உயிர்க்கும்எஞ் ஞான்றும்
தவா அப் பிறப்புநனும் வித்து.

*

There is no worthier object to be desired than deliverance from birth, and this desire can be fulfilled if we renounce desires :

வேண்டுங்கால் வேண்டும் பிறவாமை மற்றது
வேண்டாமை வேண்ட வரும்.

*

There is no possession so great as Non-desire either in this world or in the worlds beyond :

வேண்டாமை அன்ன விழுச்செல்வம் ஈண்டு இல்லை
ஆண்டும் அஃதுஒப்பது இல்.

*

Purity is attained by freedom from Desire. And this freedom from Desire can be attained if one desires to attain the Real :

தூஉய்மை என்பது அவாவின்மை மற்றது
வாஅய்மை வேண்ட வரும்.

If the desire to attain the Real is truly strong, the dropping of any form of worldly desire becomes easy.

*

It is only those who have given up Desire also that can be said to have renounced. Those who have not done this have not truly renounced :

அற்றவர் என்பார் அவாஅற்றார் மற்றையார்
அற்றாக அற்றது இவர்.

*

Desire is the greatest deceiver. It is therefore to be dreaded and guarded against. This vigilance is the whole of the code.

அஞ்சுவதோரும்அறனை ஒருவனை
வஞ்சிப்பதோரும் அவா.

*

If the pain of pains called Desire be removed, one can even in this life attain unbroken happiness :

இன்பம் இடையறுது ஈண்டு அவாவென்னும்
துன்பத்துள் துன்பம் கெடின்.

THE LAW OF KARMA

Chapter 38

The industry that produces wealth and the indolence that brings about adversity are brought about by Law. Past deeds produce industry and indolence which are the apparent causes of the acquisition and the loss of wealth :

ஆகுஊழால் தோன்றும் அசைவின்மை கைப்பொருள்
போகுஊழால் தோன்றும் மழை.

ஊழ் is the Tamil word for the law that the sum of man's thoughts, desires and actions become his start in the next birth or re-embodiment of his soul.

*

Folly seizes even the wise when it is decreed by the law that they must lose their possessions, and the dull become shrewd when their past good deeds are ripe for being rewarded by prosperity.

பேதைப் படுக்கும் இழவுஊழ் அறிவு அகற்றும்
ஆகல்ஊழ் உற்றக் கடை.

*

Men are of two categories. Some are decreed by the law of Karma to be prosperous and some are decreed to be wise :

இருவேறு உலகத்து இயற்கை திருவேறு
தெள்ளியர் ஆதலும் வேறு.

i.e., the wise need not necessarily be prosperous, and the prosperous need not be intellectually very capable.

*

Prosperity comes by the decree of the law of previous good and bad deeds. The best efforts in this life may not produce good results where it is not so decreed, and the least may yield prosperity when it is so ordained :

நல்லவை எல்லா அந் தீயதாம் தீயவும்
நல்லவாம் செல்வம் செயற்கு

All this is not to be mistaken for belief in blind luck. The Hindu doctrine of Karma links all good and bad luck in one birth to effort in previous births. Men reap the just and natural reward of every act. The law is unfailing in its application but the account is not closed in one birth. Causes not traceable to oneself now must be traced to oneself in past births.

*

The possession that do not belong to one according to the unchangeable decree of Karma cannot be retained in spite of the most vigilant care, and that which belongs to a man by that decree cannot be lost even if he is most careless about it :

பரியினும் ஆகாவாம் பால்அல்ல உய்த்துச்
சொரியினும் போகாதம்

*

Even those who have no possession to renounce will will not give up the world and earn the fruits of renuncia-

tion, because they have not earned that wisdom by previous good deeds :

துறப்பார்மன் துப்புரவு இல்லார் உறற்பால
ஊட்டா கழியுமெனின்

It may be easy for the poor and homeless to become hermits, but they will struggle with poverty and continue wallowing in worldly attachments and misery, if they have not earned by their past deeds a mind inclined to renunciation.

*

When men have good luck as a result of good deeds in past births, they accept it without raising any question and enjoy the full benefit of it. But when they get bad luck, they complain and vex themselves. Truly men are unreasonable !

நன்று ஆங்கால் நல்லவாக் காண்பவர் அன்று ஆங்கால்
அல்லற் படுவது எவன்

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