A, as its first of letters, every speech maintains;
The "Primal Deity" is first through all the world's domains
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Office: Tamil Valarchi Manram
15 Station Street Wentworthville NSW 2145 Australia
E: tamilvalarchimanram@gmail.com

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Dr S Kumaran, a Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the University of Malaya, has authored more than 100 research papers and more than 60 books in English, Tamil and Malay. His research papers were published in ISI and Scopus indexed journals, academic journals and as chapters in books. He is specialized in Tamil Language, Tamil Classical Literature, Indian Civilization, Comparative Study of Japanese Manyoshu Songs and Tamil Classical Literature, Tamil cultural studies, Tamil journalism and social media networking, and Tamil–Malay–English dictionary. He has attended and presented numerous research papers in International Conferences, Seminars and Symposiums. He was a Research Fellow in the University of Jaffna (Sri Lanka) in 2003 and at the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya. He was the Head of the Department of Indian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya from 2006 to 2013. He has supervised 18 Ph.D. Candidates including international candidates and 22 M.A. candidates.

Abstract:

Thiruvalluvar has written extensively on friendship. Thiruvalluvar covers friendship from the point of view of an ordinary individual as well as that of a king. Thiruvalluvar considers that although developing good and intimate friendship is difficult, it is still worth doing it. The purpose of true friendship is not for mutual entertainment and pleasant companionship. The paper covers, friendship of undependable people, toxic friendship, nature of enemy’s friendship, kinds of friendships to be avoided and more.

Loveless, lacks right companions, and on his own has no strengths –
the might of his foes shall shred even his bones.
Ethics of Friendship in Thirukkural

Dr. Kumaran Suberamanian
skumaran.um@gmail.com

Thiruvalluvar (Second century A.D.) is the author of Thirukkural. This work presents ethical and moral instructions in 1330 couplets or kural verses. Each kural has two lines, first line has four “words,” and the second line three “words.” Kural has a very compact structure. The couplets in Thirukkural are divided into three divisions, namely, Arattuppaal (Virtue), Porutpaal (Generation and Use of Wealth, world order) and Inpattuppaal (Nature of Love).

Thiruvalluvar has also written extensively on friendship. Thiruvalluvar considers love as the quintessence of life. If love is missing in one’s life, then he is nothing but a frame of bones covered with skin (kural 80). Love begets affection in one’s heart and affection begets the immeasurable excellence of friendship (kural - 74). Since love is the quintessence of life, it follows that human beings are quite capable of developing friendship and many people considered friendship as an important aspect of their life.

Thiruvalluvar covers friendship from the point of view of an ordinary individual as well as that of a king (or leader of a nation). He has described his ideas regarding friendship in more than seventy kurals. He discusses the value of good friendship, the dangers of toxic (or evil) friendship, the friendship that is to be avoided, critical importance of diligence in making friendship, advantages of befriending great men and the need to avoid the association with evil men. His philosophic yet pragmatic approach to friendship is indeed amazing.

The importance and nature of good friendship
What Thiruvalluvar considers as good friendship is very much similar to Aristotle’s concept of friendship of virtue. As Aristotle observed, man is a social animal and as such he needs the interaction with other members of the society. In the initial stages, he develops casual acquaintances. If there are common values and mutual bond, then over the course of time, the acquaintances turn into friendships. Thiruvalluvar considers that although developing good and intimate friendship is difficult, it is still worth doing it. There is nothing like good and intimate friendship that can offer protection and support for one’s efforts.

Seyarkariya yavula nadpin athupol
vinaikariya yavula kaappu (kural - 781)

Is there anything that is more difficult than developing good and intimate friendship? Is there anything that can offer more protection and support for one’s activities than such a friendship?

Of course, the answer to both the questions raised in kural 781 is in the negative. Thiruvalluvar contends that a good and intimate friendship will continue to grow and become stronger. He compares such a friendship to a waxing moon and a great book. These
comparisons are very illustrative and informative to understand and appreciate Thiruvalluvar’s ideas about the nature of good and intimate friendship. At the time of the new moon, the moon is invisible. Then, during the ensuing days, it is increasingly more and more visible and eventually becomes the full moon. According to Thiruvalluvar, good and intimate friendship among men of good character is like the waxing moon and the friendship among fools deteriorates like a waning moon. Of course, the waxing moon begins to wane after the full moon. But, like all metaphors, this comparison should not be taken literally. In addition to comparing the good friendship to a waxing moon, Thiruvalluvar also compares the good and intimate friendship among men of good character to a great book. Every time one reads a great book one appreciates the value of that great book and gets more insight. So also, the good and intimate friendship among men of character grows stronger. The kurals describing these comparisons are as follows:

\textit{Nirainiira niiravar kenmai piraimathip}  
\textit{pinniira pethaiyaar nadpu} (kural - 782)  

The friendship of worthy men is like the waxing moon and the friendship of the fools is like the waning moon.

\textit{Navilthorum nuunayam polum payilthorum}  
\textit{panpudai yaalar thodarpu} (kural - 783)  

Every time one studies a great book, one appreciates the beauty and the value of that great book. So also is the noble friendship among good men.

\textbf{Friendship of Pleasure}  

According to Thiruvalluvar, the purpose of true friendship is not for mutual entertainment and pleasant companionship. Superficial smiles and merry making are not the objectives of true friendship.

\textit{Muganaga nadpathu nadpandru nenjatthu}  
\textit{akanaga nadpathu nadpu} (kural - 786)  

Friendship does not mean simply a smiling face. More than a mere smiling face, true friendship offers real delight to the heart of the friends.

\textit{Nagunar poruddandru naddal muguthikkan}  
\textit{mersen ridithar poruddu} (kural - 784)  

Friendship is not for pleasant laughter alone; it is to step forward and provide criticism and correct a friend for his transgressions.

\textit{Nagaivagaiya raagiya nadin pagaivarai}  
\textit{patthaduththa kodi urum} (kural - 817)  

93
What comes from the enemies is hundred million times better than what comes from the friendship of those who are interested only in merry making and laughter.

**Friendship of undependable people**
According to Thiruvalluvar, friends should help each other under all circumstances. To emphasize the importance of dependability among friends, Thiruvalluvar says,

\[
Nadpirku \text{ viidri}rulkai \text{ yathenil kod}pindri
\]
\[
o\text{llumvaay uundrum nilai (kural 789)}
\]

Friendship may be said to be on its throne when it possesses the power of supporting one at all times under all circumstances in life.

However, there are people who are not very dependable, they will desert their friends when their friends are undergoing adverse situations in life and they cannot be counted upon for any help. Thiruvalluvar compares such people to a horse which deserts its rider at a critical time in a battle. It is better to be alone than be in their company. There are people whose deeds do not match their words. They are likely to promise more than what they can deliver. In a sense these people are also not really reliable and they are hypocrites. Thiruvalluvar is of the opinion that the friendship with undependable people should be discontinued.

\[
Amarakat \text{ thaatrarukkum Kallaamaa annaar}
\]
\[
\text{thamarin thanimai thalai (kural - 814)}
\]

Solitude is more desirable than the company of those who resemble the untrained horses which desert their riders in the battlefield.

\[
Seytheemanj \text{ saaraarc ciriyavar punkeenmai}
\]
\[
\text{eythalin eythaamai nandru (kural - 815)}
\]

It is better to avoid than to continue the evil friendship of those mean people who offer no protection during adversity.

**Toxic friendship**

In the course of life, one comes across many people and some of them are found to be compatible with mutual interests. Then, as a result of further interactions, acquaintances become friends. Sometimes, people do not take time to analyze the character and behavior patterns of the people they come across and they develop friendship without sufficient investigation. As the friendship develops, they begin to understand more and more about their friends. Some of these friendships may turn out to be what Aristotle considers as friendship of pleasure or friendship of utility.

Thiruvalluvar considers the friendship of pleasure as well as the friendship of utility as toxic friendships. In addition to these two kinds of friendships, there is also another kind of friendship which Thiruvalluvar considers as toxic.
That is the friendship with people who are undependable. This phenomenon of friends being undependable is not new. Throughout the ages, there have been several instances of infidelity, betrayal and other disgraceful acts under the guise of friendship. In addition to the above mentioned three types of friendship, Thiruvalluvar is also not in favor of friendship with fools, people who create problems and people who do not possess good character. In all these cases, Thiruvalluvar’s advice is to discontinue such friendships.

Nature of enemy’s friendship
Thiruvalluvar uses an interesting metaphor to describe the false friendship of the enemies. He says that it is like an anvil which supports the iron before it is being beaten into shape or being cut. Sometimes, enemies may pretend like they are offering support while waiting for the right time to attack. The kural is as follows:

\[
\text{Siiridang kaanin eritharkup paddadai}
\]
\[
\text{neeraa niranthavar nadpu (kural - 821)}
\]

The false friendship of an enemy is like an anvil to strike on when the opportunity is right

Enemies may wear a smile on their face and successfully hide their evil intentions. They may speak nicely to give the impression of real friendship. One should be careful not to trust someone’s word if there is any incompatibility in altitude or thinking. When a bow is bent, it is an indication that it is being prepared to launch an arrow. So also, when an enemy speaks sweet words, it is an indication of the enemy’s hidden intentions to inflict harm. Even when someone has tears in his eyes, his hands may conceal a dangerous weapon. In all these cases, one should be shrewd to distinguish between genuine friendship and false friendship of the enemy.

\[
\text{Manattin amaiyaa thavarai enaithondrum}
\]
\[
\text{sollinaal teerarpaar rantru (kural - 825)}
\]

If there is no accord in mind with someone, their words should not be trusted

Other kinds of friendships to be avoided
In addition to those who are fair weather friends and those who are undependable, Thiruvalluvar mentions four different kinds of people whose friendships should be avoided. First, one should avoid the friendship of fools because it is just a waste of time and there is no virtue in it. Second, there are those who raise objections and put up obstacles for things that can easily be accomplished. Third, there are those who are very loving in private and ridicule their friends in public.

Finally, there are people who do not have good characters. They are likely to influence their friends and tempt them into bad habits and lead them towards immoral or illegal activities. Thiruvalluvar says,
Water takes characters of the soil through which it flows. So also men’s character changes with their associations.

For example, it is uncommon for the youngsters to get into the habit of smoking, experiment with drugs, or use alcohol due to the influence of their friends who have such afflictions. The following four kural explain how to deal with the friendship of these four different kinds of people.

**Ollum karumam udatru pavarkeenmai**
sollaadaar soora vida (kural - 818)

Gradually abandon the friendship of these who create problems for accomplishing tasks that can be easily performed.

**Paruguvaar poolinum panpilaar keenmai**
perugalir kunral inithu (kural - 811)

Even if a friend shows excessive love towards you, it is better to reduce the friendship with him, if he lacks good character.

**Importance of due diligence in the selection of friends**

More than any other philosopher, Thiruvalluvar has emphasized the need for proactively analyzing the character of people with whom friendship is likely to be developed. Thiruvalluvar says,

**Seyarkariya yaavula nadpin athupol**
vinaiikkariya yaavula kaappu (kural - 791)

Once friendship is made, it cannot be easily abandoned and therefore it is important not to make friends indiscriminately.

He warns that friendship made in a haphazard fashion leads to misery (kural - 792). Therefore, before making friends, one should pay sufficient attention to the character, family background, personal shortcomings and the close association of the one with whom friendship is contemplated (kural 793). In addition to the importance of careful investigation before developing friendship, Thiruvalluvar also emphasizes the significance of cultivating friendship with those who can counsel with right advice and avoid friendship with those who are likely to forsake during times of adversity.

**Alaccolli alla thiditthu valakkariya**
valaarnad paaynthu kolal (kural - 795)
Examine and secure the friendship of the wise and hold men who will counsel you even if it hurts and rebuke you severely when you go astray

_Utranooy niikki uraamai murkaakkum_
_petriyaarp penik kolal (kural - 442)_

Cherish as friends those who can remove present ills and guard against future ones

_Ullarka ullanj sirukuva kollarka_
_Allarkan aatraruppaar nadpu (kural - 798)_

Do not entertain thoughts that would restrain your enthusiasm and do not have friendship with those who forsake you in adversity

Thiruvalluvar’s ideas about friendship is applicable to an ordinary individual as well as for a king (leader of nation or organization). When Thiruvalluvar talks about things that are very important for a king, he says. “The king who has an army, citizens, wealth, ministers, friends and fortifications is a lion among kings. Regarding friendship, in the section on kingship, Thiruvalluvar emphasizes the need for a king to disassociate himself with the evil people and maintain friendships with the wise men that would give him the right advice and be helpful to him under all circumstances. The impact of toxic friendships and false friendships of enemies would have serious consequences for a king as well as for his kingdom. Thiruvalluvar explains friendship is one of the qualities which makes man superior to other beings.