

Article

Understanding Man-management and managerial skills as in the Tamil Classic “Tirukkural”

Journal of Development Economics and Management Research Studies (JDMS), A Peer Reviewed Open Access International Journal

ISSN: 2582 5119 (Online)



Crossref Prefix No: 10.53422

08(09), 42-50, July-September, 2021

@Center for Development Economic Studies (CDES)

Reprints and permissions

<http://www.cdes.org.in/>

<http://www.cdes.org.in/journal/>

Understanding Man-management and managerial skills as in the Tamil Classic “Tirukkural”

Dr V.Chandrasekar¹

Abstract

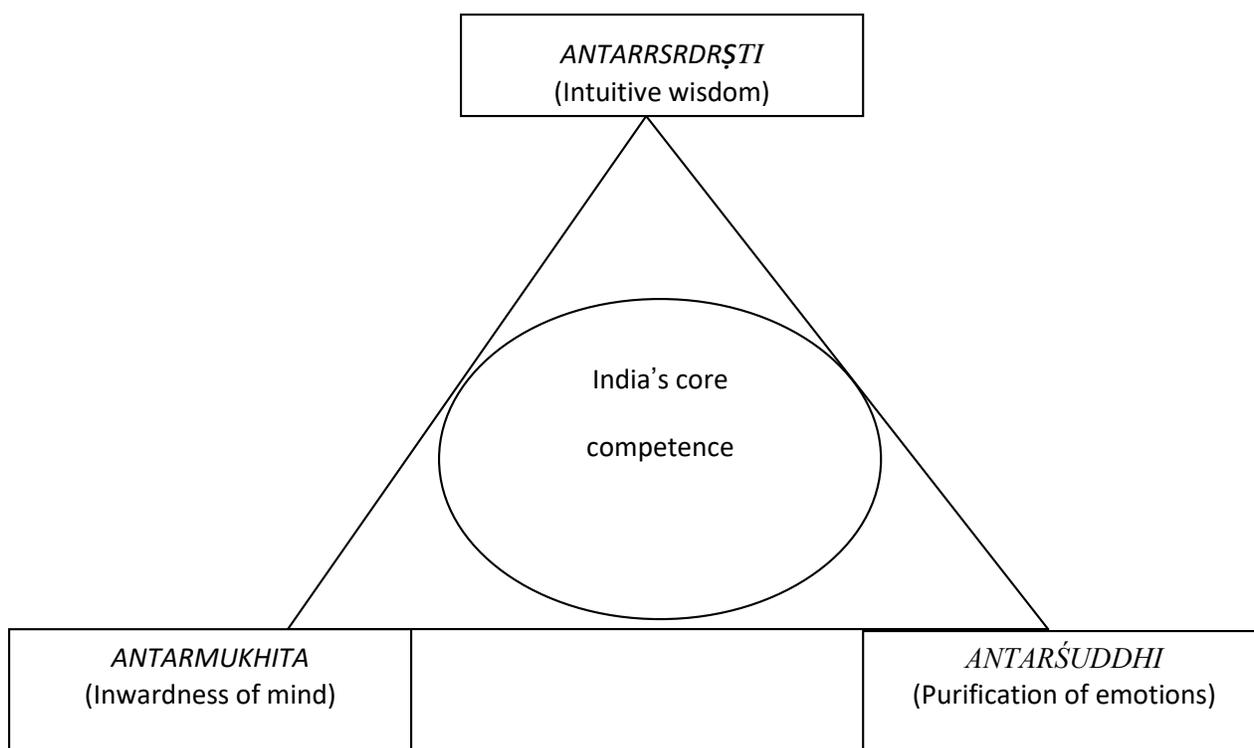
In this article, we are interested to look into the suggestions made by an ancient saint-poet of Tamil Nadu, namely, Tiruvalluvar (whose work, Tirukkural, is considered to be a universal canon - ulaga podumarai). This attempt is made in line with the exhortation made by Bhagawad Gita, the holy text of the Hindus, Guru Granth Sahib, the holy text of Sikhism; alongside the pronouncements of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and that the core competence should guide any development. The wealth of spirituality with its emphasis on human values is the core competence of India. Hence I have tried to see if anything can be suggested from an ancient text, namely, Tirukkural. It is to be noted that this attempt is a thematic appraisal of some of the couplets from that work (out of the 1330 couplets) as Tiruvalluvar has suggested these to the common man and to the ruler with respect to identifying the right act, planning, coordination, execution and management. The most important aspect of management is man-management and that is taken us so as to result in better utilisation of the resources on hand (be it the economic backing or the skills of the person involved). In this attempt, we try to look into the suggestions given by the Tirukkural on managerial aspects of planning, coordination and execution with an eye on human values for the betterment of the organisation and also those who contribute to the organisation.

Keywords: Tiruvalluvar, Tamil Nadu, human values, purification of emotions,

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College (Autonomous), Mylapore, Chennai – 600 004.

Introduction

The paper begins with the words of Swami Vivekananda that everything external should be conducted through internal spirituality for enduring effectiveness. This can be extended to the field of management also today. The Bhagawad Gita, Guru Granth Sahib, Rabindranath Tagore also have spoken on similar linesⁱ. In other words, any development should be commensurate with its core competence. Now, what is the core competence of India? The wealth of spirituality with its boundless values is the core competence of India. The values include frugality, sincerity, humility, etc, - called human values - and these depend on three core values, namely intuitive wisdom, the inwardness of mind and purification of emotions – diagrammatically represented thus by S.K.Chakrabortyⁱⁱ –



The 80's and '90s of the previous century awakened, to a certain extent, to the need to indigenize the outlook in management. Similarly, Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and several others epitomised this outlook in their thoughts. One such towering personality in ancient Tamil literature and culture is Thiruvalluvar.

Suggestions from Tirukkuraḷ:

Thiruvalluvar is a celebrated Tamil poet who wrote the Thirukkuraḷ. This Tamil work of wise sayings is on ethics and it is very much practical. It teaches that man should not leave the family or become a sannyasin in order to lead a divine life of purity and sanctity. For instance,

kuṛaḷ 280ⁱⁱⁱ suggests that “*there is no need of a shaven crown, nor of tangled hair, if a man abstain from those deed which the wise have condemned*”

மழித்தலும் நீட்டலும் வேண்டா உலகம்
Mazhiththalum nittalum vēṇḍā ulakam

பழித்தது ஒழித்து விடின்
Pazhiththathu oziththu viṭin

This work is universal in approach and hence called *ulaga podhu marai* (the world's common scripture). An important feature of this book is that it does not advocate any specific religion then prevalent in India – Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism. On the other hand, it expounds various aspects of life. *Thirukkuṛaḷ* is a collection of 1330 Tamil couplets organized into 133 chapters under 3 sections. Each chapter consists of 10 *Kuṛaḷs* and has a specific subject ranging from “ploughing a piece of land” to “ruling a country”. The three sections are:

அறத்துப்பால் – *araththuppāl* – on law/virtue (*dharma*) – deals with good ethical behavior with conscience and honour

பொருட்பால் – *poruṭpāl* – on wealth/politics (*artha*) – deals with the right manner of conducting worldly affairs

காமத்துப்பால் – *kāmaththuppāl* – on desire/love (*kāma*) – dealing with love between man and woman.

Though a very old text, *Thirukkuṛaḷ*, nevertheless offers new insights pertaining to the times. True to this tendency, one can recognize various gems of wisdom from this text addressing the present-day management requirements. Management can be understood as the art of getting the desired work from its people or as synchronizing the contribution of one and all working in a concern with similar objectives. If that be the case, what are the essential skills needed? Some have identified it as planning, worker's participation or involvement, the administration that involves controlling, coordinating etc. A point to be remembered here is that the great saint-poet *Thiruvalluvar* has dealt with these in his own way. A thematic presentation of these views will definitely showcase the contribution of *Thirukkuṛaḷ*.

Tirukkuṛaḷ on Planning

எண்ணித் துணிக கருமம்; துணிந்தபின்
eṇṇiththuniga karumam; thuninthapin

எண்ணுவம் என்பது இழுக்கு - 467
eṇṇuvam enpathu izhukku

Consider, and then undertake a matter; after having undertaken it, to say "We will consider," is folly.

Here, *Thiruvalluvar* speaks of the need for administering care in the selection of a job and also the need for the proper execution of the same without hesitation. This is a very important aspect of planning that has been well pointed out by *Thiruvalluvar* not only here but also in *Kuṛaḷ* 470 –

எள்ளாத எண்ணிச் செயல்வேண்டும் தம்மோடு
eḷḷātha eṇṇic seyalvēntum thammōṭu

கொள்ளாத கொள்ளாது உலகு
kollātha kollāthu ulagu

Let a man reflect, and do things which bring no reproach; the world will not approve, with him, of things which do not become of his position to adopt.

Kuraḷ 468 suggests

ஆற்றின் வருந்தா வருத்தம் பலர்நின்று
Āṟṟin varunthā varuththam palarninṟu
போற்றினும் பொத்தப் படும்
Pōṟṟinum poththap patum

The work, which is not done by suitable methods, will fail though many stand to uphold it.

Tiruvalluvar gives one more suggestion in regard to this and that pertains to identifying the criteria for determining the right act by us.

எற்று என்று இரங்குவ செயற்க செய்வானேல்
Eṟṟu enṟu iranguva seyyarka seyvānel
மற்று அன்ன செய்யாமை நன்று
Maṟṟu Anna seyyāmai Nanṟu - 655

Do not indulge in a world which will cause you to repent later. However, he quickly adds that we should not repeat that mistake if we had committed it already.

These couplets suggest that Thiruvalluvar (i) not only speaks of selection and execution (ii) but also the way in which the work has been selected and executed. Thus he does not stay contented with suggesting what is to be selected and what is to be executed but also highlights the need for a proper method to be used both in the selection and in execution. This is where man-management comes into focus.

Another significant contribution of the Tirukkuraḷ that could be read alongside the preceding couplets is the one that highlights the result of the possession of wealth in the hands of the benevolent.

மருந்தாகித் தப்பா மாத்தற்றால் செல்வ
Marunthākith thappā māththarṟāl selva
பெருந்தகை யான்கண் படிந்
Perunthagai yānkaṇ patin - 217

This couplet means that wealth in the hands of the benevolent (good-hearted) soul is compared to the herbal tree that helps to heal one and all. Similarly, the administration (including planning, execution and coordination with workers) should be in the hands of the right person. But, who is the right person? How to identify the right person? Are there any criteria for identifying the right person? A deeper analysis of the Tirukkuraḷ gives answers to these questions by its suggestion for instilling some human values in human beings. Kuraḷ 501 is an eyeopener in this regard and it is brought out in the next section.

Tirukkural on Worker's participation/involvement of workers

There will be many departments in an organization. So, the organization will require the right person for the right job and the right manner of executing the job. In this situation, the management cannot stay quiet after selecting the right man for the right job; the management will also have to hone the skills of the people through proper training. When once all these are done, it should not revert to stage 1 to see if the selection has been done correctly. Thus, Thiruvalluvar insists on a proper method of selecting the correct man for the correct job and at the same time, with an eye on the outcome for the organisation^{iv}. The reason for this is well brought out in the couplet 507 quoted a few pages from here. It is true that all people are capable of doing all works in this world but it is essential for the management to identify the unique talents innate in every individual. What is the benefit here and who benefits here? It is both the management and the individual who benefit from this. That is, it brings out the individual's unique talent, on the one hand, and the execution of the work (from the management's point of view) highlights the utmost perfection that has gone into it. A manager should remember that he should not repose faith in an individual just because he knows the other or that the other is his relative or friend. Instead, he should explore and ascertain to himself if the person can do the job in the right way befitting his potential and also act in line with the goals of the institution. He says in *Kural* 509 –

தேறற்க யாரையும் தேராது தேர்ந்தபின்
Thérarka yāraiyum thérāthu thérnthapin

தேறுக தேறும் பொருள்
*Théruka thérum porul**

Let (a king) choose no one without previous consideration; after he has made his choice, let him unhesitatingly select for each such duties as are appropriate.

Next are the major management techniques, that is, the proper utilization of the worker potential after the identification of the right man for the right job. Thus this requirement can be divided into two: (i) identification of the potential and (ii) utilization of the available potential. The manager and his subordinates are two inseparable units of management. How the manager selects and executes jobs with his people is very significant. It assumes more meaning as it involves the need for instilling some human values too. Saint poet Thiruvalluvar gives some clues (of course for a King) that can be adopted here:

அறம்பொருள் இன்பம் உயிரச்சம் நான்கின்
Aram porul inpam uyiraccam nānkin*

திறந்தெரிந்து தேறப் படும்
Thirantherinthu thérappatum -- 501

Let (a minister) be chosen, after he has been tried by means of these four things, viz, -his virtue, (love of) money, (love of) sexual pleasure, and fear of (losing) life.

Kural 502 says –

குடிப்பிறந்து குற்றத்தின் நீங்கி வடுப்பரியும்
Kuṭippiranthu kurratthin nīngi vaṭuppariyum

நாணுடையான் கட்டே தெளிவு
nāṇuṭaiyān katté thelivu

(The king's) choice should (fall) on him, who is of good family, who is free from faults, and who has the modesty which fears the wounds (of sin).

While these two couplets speak of selection, there are others that speak of the method of execution of jobs after entrusting it with the subordinate. Today, every organization has training programmes both for the fresher and for those who are serving (like orientation programmes and refresher programmes). These programmes help the management in identifying the attitude of its employee and allocate work accordingly. These help the subordinate to identify his weak points for rectification. The onus is on the management for allocating the jobs and getting it done in the best possible way. Thiruvalluvar has said –

இதனை இதனான் இவன்முடிக்கும் என்றாய்ந்து
Ithanai ithanān ivanmutikkum enṛāynthu
அதனை அவன்கண் விடல்
Athanaṭ avankaṇ viṭal – 517

Having considered what work a man is fit for, let (the king) employ him in that work. (the management has to allocate work based on the talent and attitude of the employee).

Thus the management should monitor the job done for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the organization and the welfare of its employee. It should rather refrain from interfering in the methodology of the work. In the same way, the work should not be entrusted based on favour. The management should strictly look for the (unique) skill of the person as also the method by which he executes the work in line with the requirement of the job and the organization. There should be no consideration beyond this apart from looking into the values of the person engaged in the work. Today's management looks not merely at the skills of the person but also gives importance to the values attached in the execution of work. There is no one who is perfect in this world. On closer analysis, it can be found that there are faults with everyone. What should be done in that situation. Thiruvalluvar comes to the rescue once again.

குணம் நாடிக் குற்றமும் நாடி அவற்றுள்
kuṇam nāṭik kurramum nāṭi avarruḷ
மிகை நாடி மிக்க கொளல்
Mikai nāṭi mikka koḷal - 504

Let (a king) consider (a man's) good qualities, as well as his faults, and then judge (of his character) by that which prevails.

One important point has been addressed by the poet in the couplet quoted above and that relates to the presence of good and bad in man today. The King (according to the text) or the management (in today's context) should consider the overall nature of man, weigh the good and the bad and then take a decision based on that. Another important exhortation of the Tirukkuraḷ that is more relevant in today's context is Kuraḷ 507 which lays down an important guideline in the selection process. It says that the selection process should be transparent and free of nepotism. The couplet is:

காதன்மை கந்தா அறிவு அறியார்த் தேறுதல்
Kādanmai kandā Aṟivu aṟiyarth therūthal
பேதைமை எல்லாம் தரும்
Pedamai ellām tharum - 507

In other words, the saint-poet suggests that one should not be selected just because he is familiar. This kind of selection might result in danger if that person is not good at the job. Hence, care should be taken to select only those who are capable of the job and not otherwise. These facts have been reiterated here as it leads to the next aspect of management, namely, administration.

Tirukkural on administration

The well-being of an organization, no doubt, depends on the identification of the person as well as the execution of the work by that person. It also depends on good governance. This again relies on sharing of duties and responsibilities (or delegation of power, in modern terminology) and controlling and coordinating. It is not necessary (as has been pointed out earlier) for the management to interfere and control every action of its worker. On the other hand, it should not hesitate to keep track of the work done to see how effectively the worker has performed. Hence all corporate institutions now have appraisal meetings which help them to put their work in proper perspective. This can be called control and coordination. *Kural* 520 states –

நாடோறும் நாடுக மன்னன் வினைசெய்வான்
Nāṭōrum nāṭuka mannan vinaiseyvān
கோடாமை கோடா துலகு
Kōṭāmai kōṭā thulaku – 520

Let a king daily examine the conduct of his servants; if they do not act crookedly, the world will not act crookedly.

It suggests that the management should constantly monitor the worker and his actions. While talking of control, the *Kural* also talks of sharing the responsibility as in *Kural* 527 –

காக்கை கரவா கரைந்துண்ணும் ஆக்கமும்
Kākkai karavā karainthuṇṇum ākkamum
அன்னநீ ரார்க்கை உள
Annanī rārkkai ula

The crows do not conceal (their prey), but will call out for others (to share with them) while they eat it; wealth will be with those who show a similar disposition (towards their relatives).

This *kural* should be read along with the one that speaks of the action down by a benevolent person, namely, *kural* 217 cited earlier.

Thus, Thiruvalluvar simultaneously shows the importance of control and also reveals the need for sharing^v. Notwithstanding these, Thiruvalluvar has also highlighted when one should be restrained and when one should act. *Kural* 490 states –

கொக்கொக்க கூம்பும் பருவத்து மற்றதன்
Kokkokka kūmpum paruvaththu marrathan
குத்தொக்க சீர்த்த இடத்து
Kutthhokka cīrththa iṭathu

At the time when one should use self-control, let him restrain himself like a heron; and, let him like it, strike, when there is a favourable opportunity.

That is, wait like a crane before embarking on a job. Nevertheless, having decided to take the plunge, wait for the opportune moment, says Thiruvalluvar (new arrivals during festival occasions, the new variety of stationery, shoe, uniform material etc at the time of school reopening, embarking on a new launch or up-gradation etc can be cited here as examples). In addition to this, one must also ensure that he works unhesitatingly towards the goal in the face of suffering too.

துன்பம் உறவரினும் செய்க துணிவாற்றி
Thunpam uṛavarinum seyka thunivāṛri
இன்பம் பயக்கும் வினை
Inpam payakkum vinai – 669

Though it should cause increasing sorrow (at the outset), do with firmness the act that yields bliss (in the end)

Having realized that an act will finally result in the good of the organization and the individuals working for it, intermediate sufferings should not deter it. Thus, Thiruvalluvar speaks of steadfastness here and therefore most of the concepts gaining supremacy in today's management techniques are found in his famous work (though in an unthematic manner). In conclusion, it must be remembered that whatever Thiruvalluvar has said for a king is applicable in today's context, to management and managerial skills. This should highlight the importance of the contribution made by Thiruvalluvar in the field of management.

REFERENCES

1. Tirukkuraḷ, English Translation and Commentary by Rev Dr G U Pope. The pdf of pope's translation was downloaded from <http://www.cincinnatiemple.com/downloads/thiruKural.pdf> on 30-08-2010 at 7.55 pm
2. Tirukkuraḷ with English Translation by Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati is taken from <http://pm.tamil.net/pub/pm0017/pm0017.pdf> on 30-08-2010 at 7.55 pm
3. S K Chakraborty, *The Management and Ethics Omnibus*, p. xiii

Notes and References

ⁱ If you want to bear fruits, you have to reach for the roots, said the Guru Granth Sahib; *swadharme nidhanam shreya, parodharma bhayavaha* (it is desirable to follow one's own law of being even if it may bring death, for another's law of being is surely perilous), says the Bhagawad Gita. Rabindranath Tagore 'We in the east have had to arrive at our own solution of the problem of life'; and warned that 'artificial uniformity leads to lifelessness'. Japan, China, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia can be cited here as examples.

ⁱⁱ S K Chakraborty, *The Management and Ethics Omnibus*, p. xiii

ⁱⁱⁱ The couplets and translations have been referred from G U Pope's translation of the Tirukkural and Kaviyogi Shuddhananda Bharati

^{iv} This view should be looked at only in respect of division of labour based on one's skill and not misunderstood in any other way

^v a spark of communism in his own way, we can say
