

ON THE MEANING AND END OF LIFE: PLATO AND THIRUVALLUVAR MARUDANAYAGAM

In TirukkuRal, there are some couplets which make us wonder if VaLLuvar was aware of the life and teachings of Socrates as reported in Plato's writings. But, unfortunately, there is no other evidence, literary or historical, to corroborate this. It is traditionally believed that in the following Kural there is a veiled reference to the death of the reputed greek philosopher:

“பெயக்கண்டு நஞ்சுண்டு அமைவர் நயத்தக்க
நாகரிகம் வேண்டுபவர்” (குறள்: 580)

Those who are desirous of the quintessence of courtesy will drink the poison that poured for them before their very eyes.

The last part of “Phaedo” gives a heart-rending account of the final moments of Socrates:

Crito made a sign to the servant, who was standing by; and he went out, and having been absent for some time, returned with the jailer carrying the cup of poison.

...At the same time he handed the cup to Socrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, without the least fear or change of colour or feature, looking at the man with all his eyes, Echecrates, as his manner was, took the cup and said: What do you say about making a libation out of this cup of any god? May I, or not? The man answered: We only prepare just so much as we deem enough. I understand, he said: but I may and must ask the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world – even so – and so be it according to my prayer. Then raising the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank off the poison.

(Plato 251)

Throughout the tragic happening, Socrates alone is said to have retained his calmness, while everyone else breaks out in a loud and passionate cry. He proves to be the very image of courtesy.

The Socratic dialogue method consists in his demand for clear thinking and exact analysis of complex concepts. VaLLuvar insists as much on listening to the words of the wise as on learning by oneself. Listening to learned men may be better than learning because it will be one a stick to lean upon at times of despondency. One of Socrates' interlocutors, Cephalus, expressing his desire to listen to Socrates as often as possible tells him,

“கற்றலின் ஆயினும் கேட்க அ.தொருவற்கு
ஒற்கத்தின் ஊற்றம் துணை” (குறள்: 414)

I find, I can assure you, that in proportion as bodily pleasures lose their savor, my appetite for the things of the mind grows keener and I enjoy discussing them more than ever.

To tell the truth, Cephalus, I answered, I enjoy talking with very old people. They have gone before us on a road by which we too may have to travel, and I

think we do well to learn from them what it is like, easy or difficult, rough or smooth.
(Cornford 4)

VaLLuvar, in ten of his couplets drives home the benefit of audio-education.

“செவிக்குண வில்லாத போழ் சிறிது
வயிற்றுக்கும் ஈயப் படும்” (குறள்: 412)

When there is no food for the ear, the stomach may be offered a little

“பிழைத்துணர்ந்தும் பேதைமை சொல்லாற் இழைத்துணர்ந்து
ஈண்டிய கேள்வி யவர்” (குறள்: 417)

The man that has mediated much and has gained a lot of instruction by listening to the wise doesn't talk nonsense even when in error.

“கேட்பினும் கேளாத் தகையவே கேள்வியால்
தோட்கப் படாத செவி” (குறள். 418)

The ear, even if it can hear, is deaf if it has not been drilled by words of instruction.

“நுணங்கிய கேள்வியர் அல்லார் வணங்கிய
வாயினர் ஆதல் அரிது” (குறள். 419)

Those who have not listened to the subtle words of wise will seldom attain humidity of speech.

செவியிற் சுவையுணரா வாயுணர்வின் மாக்கள்
அவியினும் வாழினும் எண் (குறள். 420)

What does it matter if those that know the taste of the tongue but not of the ear live or die.

In every dialogue penned by Plato, his teacher is seen taking enormous pains to elucidate every minute point and to discern all the subtleties of words heard from others. VaLLuvar says that this is hat wisdom demands.

எண்பொருளவாகச் செலச் சொல்லித்தான் பிறர்வாய்
நுண்பொருள் காண்பது அறிவு (குறள். 424)

Whatever the wise man speaks, he speaks in such a way that he is understood by everyone; whatever he hears, he understands it profound meanings.

Socrates asks the young and the old not to be bothered about the authour of a particular view but to ponder over it before accepting or rejecting it.

But what matter, said Charmides, from whom I heard this?

No matter at all, I replied for the point is not who said the words, but whether they are true or not

(Plato 5)

The famed philosopher Chides Phaerus for being determined to know about the source of anything he hears before deciding its validity.

There was a tradition in the temple of Dodona that Oaks first gave prophetic utterances. The men of old, unlike in their simplicity to young philosophy, deemed that if they heard the truth even from “Oak or rock”, it was enough for them; whereas you seem to consider not whether a thing is or is not true, but who the speaker is and from what country the tale comes.

(Plato 139)

Even when he is incarcerated after being sentenced to death, he tells friends not to take even his words or trust but to examine their worth impassionately.

And I would as you to be thinking of the truth and not of Socrates; agree with me, if I seem to you to be speaking the truth; or if not withstand me might and main, that I may not deceive you as well as myself in my enthusiasm and like the bee, leave my sting in you before I die.

(Plato 238)

VaLLuvar expects this attitude to knowledge from every wise man and stresses it in more than one context.

எப்பொருள் யார்யார்வாய்க் கேட்பினும் அப்பொருள்
மெய்ப்பொருள் காண்ப தறிவு (குறள். 423)

It is wisdom that comprehends the true import of whatever one may hear from whomsoever.

எப்பொருள் எத்தன்மைத் தாயினும் அப்பொருள்
மெய்ப்பொருள் காண்பத அறிவு (குறள். 355)

Whatever be the nature of whatsoever an object, wisdom consists in apprehending the truth of it.

வெண்மை எனப்படுவது யாதெனின் வண்மை
உடையம்யாம் என்னும் செருக்கு (குறள். 844)

If you ask what immaturity is, it is the conceit that tells itself “I possess wisdom”

The lesson that Socrates constantly teaches is that humility is wisdom. If he was called the wisest man by the Oracle, it might have been because he is one who knows that he doesn't know. It is with missionary zeal that he almost forces everyone by a series of questions to realize that he does not know what he thinks h knows. VaLLuvar glorifies the wisdom of being aware of one's ignorance in a casual simile used to describe the pleasure the lover derives from the union with his beloved.

அறிதோறும் அறியாமை கண்டற்றால் காமம்
செறிதோறும் சேயிழை மாட்டு (குறள். 1110)

Just as the more one learns the more one becomes aware of one's ignorance, the more I enjoy her company the more intense my passion for her becomes.

The Republic, in its first book, outlines some contemporary views of justice, later speaks at length of justice in the state and in the individual and finally describes the reward of justice in this life and after death. Socrates willingly takes upon himself the task of proving that justice not merely brings external rewards but is intrinsically good as an inward state of the soul, even though the just man may be persecuted rather than rewarded. He contends that “justice belongs to that highest class of good things which are worth having not only for their consequences, but much more for their own sakes – things like sight and hearing, knowledge, and health, whose value is genuine and intrinsic, not dependent on opinion” and that justice in itself, benefits a man who has it in him, and injustice harms him, leaving rewards and reputation out of account.

(Conford 530).

He holds that man's happiness consists in the full realization of his characteristic virtue and function and that his virtue, as a rational beings, is a clear insight into the true end of life, knowledge of the good. Justice is better than injustice for its own sake and for the happiness it brings to its possessor. Portraying the philosopher-king and the despot, Socrates contrasts the ideally just man and the ideally unjust and accepts that it may be proclaimed that “the

happiest man is he who is first in goodness and justice, namely the true king who is also king over himself and that the most miserable is that lowest example of injustice and vice, the born despot whose tyranny prevails in his own soul and also over his country”.

(Cornford 306).

At the end of The Republic, after narrating the story of Er., Socrates concludes that the myth demonstrates the immortality of the soul and teaches us that “we shall keep always to the upward way and in all things pursue justice with the help of wisdom. Then we shall be at peace with Heaven and with ourselves, both during our sojourn here and when, like victors in the games collecting gifts from their friends, we receive the prize of justice; and so, not here only, but in the journey of a thousand years of which I have told you, we shall fare well.

(Cornford 359).

What VaLLuvar calls Aram has to be pursued for its own sake as well as for its rewards in this life and after death.

சிறப்பினும் செல்வமும் ஈனும் அறத்தினூஉங்கு
ஆக்கம் எவனோ உயிர்க்கு (குறள். 31)

Righteousness brings eminence and wealth; what else ennobles one more than righteousness?

அறத்தின்னாங்கு ஆக்கமும் இல்லை அதனை
மறத்தலின் ஊங்கில்லை கேடு (குறள். 32)

There is nothing more profitable than righteousness, nor any things more degrading than forgetting of it.

மனத்துக்கண் மாசிலன் ஆதல் அனைத்தறன்
ஆகுல நீர் பிற (குறள். 34)

Be pure in heart; righteousness is just that; all other things are nothing but ostentation.

அன்றறிவாம் எண்ணாது அறம்செய்க மற்றது
பொன்றுங்கால் பொன்றாத் துணை (குறள். 36)

Start practicing righteousness right now without saying, “I will do it later”, for righteousness will be your undying companion when death comes.

அறத்தான் வருவதே இன்பம்மற் றெல்லாம்
புறத்த புகழும் இல (குறள். 39)

That which comes of righteousness alone is happiness; all else is misery and devoid of fame besides.

In VaLLuvar’ view also, righteousness is a must for the king.

அறன்இழுக்காது அல்லவை நீக்கி மறனிழுக்கா
மானம் உடையது அரசு (குறள். 384)

The princess is one that does not lapse not from righteousness, eradicates all that is unrighteous, and guards his humour without ignoring the laws of Valour.

But elsewhere VaLLuvar makes it clear that one should be just, righteous and helpful to others even if there is no heavenly recompense.

நல்லாறெனினும் கொளல் தீது மேலுலகம்
இல்லெனினும் ஈதலே நன்று (குறள். 222)

Receiving is bad even if it may be said that it is the right path (to heaven); giving is good even if it may be said that there is no heaven.

Here VaLLuvar is true to the ancient Tamil tradition. A poem by Kopperuncolan in Purananuru admonishes those men without will who wonder whether or not they should perform a righteous act.

Only the wavering with a heart not bereft of dense dirt will not stop doubting if they can do good deeds or not, the one that goes hunting tuskers may catch them, the hunter of small birds may return empty handed, if the great with great aims may enjoy the fruits of their good deeds, they can even gain the pleasures of paradise; if there is no heavenly joy, they can even be freed from the cycle of births; if there is no rebirth, it is great to perish with a blameless body leaving a fame as high as the Himalayan peak.

(Purananuru 214)

It is underscored that skepticism about the rewards of virtue should not lead one to a rejection of righteous deeds.

A traditional maxim of greek morality was that it must be right to help friends and harm enemies. When Polemarchus gives expression to this belief, Socrates denis it and contends that we might to do good even to those that hate us and that the only thing that is good in itself is a virtue.

It can no more be the function of goodness to do harm than of heat to cool or of drought to produce mixture. So if the just man is good, the business of harming people, whether friends or not, must belong to his opposite, the unjust.

(Cornford 14)

It is noteworthy that Socrates, while in prison, dwells at length on the question of doing evil in return for evil, “Which is the morality of the man”.

The we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him. But I would have you consider, Crito, whether you really mean what you are saying. For this opinion has never been held, and never will be held and those who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point have no common ground, and can only despise one another when they see how widely they differ. Tell me then, whether you agree with and assent to my first principle, that neither injury nor retaliation nor warding off evil by evil every right. And shall Usat be the premiss of our arrangement

(Plato 216)

What Socrates, with much hesitation, labours to demonstrate after a series of question and answers is that a virtuous man should not think of revenge. VaLLuar goes a step further and insists on doing good to one’s enemies. Rejecting the path of punishment and violence”, he recommends not even the path of forbearance and forgiving but the path of forgetting the evil after doing good.

சிறப்பீனும் செல்வம் பெறீனும் பிறர்க்கின்னா
செய்யாமை மாசற்றார் கோள் (குறள். 311)

The way of the pure in heart is not to injure others even if they may gain the wealth that glorifies a man.

இன்னாசெய் தாரை ஒறுத்தல் அவர்நாண
நன்னயம் செய்து விடல் (குறள். 314)

How should a man punish those that have injured him? Let him put them to shame by doing them a good turn and forgetting both.

அறிவினால் ஆகுவதுண்டோ பிறிதின் நோய்
தந்நோய்போல் போற்றாக் கடை (குறள். 315)

Of what use is intelligence to a man if he does not treat others pain as his own?
On the eve of his death, Socrates tells his friends that a live philosopher wont
be feared of death for death is but sleep and like waking eventuates in return to life.

Well, and is there not an opposite of life, as sleep is the opposite of waking.

The state of sleep is opposed to the state of waking, and out of sleeping waking
is generated, and out of waking, sleeping and the process of generation is in the one
case falling asleep, and in the other waking up.

*Then here is a new way by which we arrive at the conclusion that the living
come from the dead, just as the dead come from the living, and this, if true,
affords a most certain proof that the souls of deed exist in some place out of
which they come again,*

(Plato 227)

Without much ado, Valluvar uses the same metaphor to aver that just as sleep
follows waking, death inevitably follows living.

உறங்குவது போலும் சாக்காடு உறங்கி
விழிப்பது போலும் பிறப்பு (குறள். 339)

Death is like falling into sleep and firth is like waking from sleep.

And Valluvar has more to mock the stupidity of fear of death.

நெடுதல் உளனொருவன் இன்றில்லை என்னும்
பெருமை யுடைத்திங் வலகு. (குறள். 336)

The man that was yesterday has ceased to be today – this greatness this world
has.

The Tamil poet doesn't stop here but ventures to express his doubt and
sympathy regarding the plight of all living beings.

புக்கில் அமைந்தின்று கொல்லோ உடம்பினுள்
துச்சில் இருந்த உயிர்க்கு (குறள். 340)

Is there no permanent home for the soul which has taken shelter in the body?

At the end of the republic and in other dialogues, Plato expresses his firm belief
that the soul is indestructible, immortal and able to endure all good and ill. It is
evident that he believes in the divine origin of the soul, in its fall to be incarnated in a
cycle of births as a punishment for former sins, in the judgement after death, in the
sufferings of the unjust and the happiness of the just in the millennial intervals
between incarnations and in the hope of final release for the purified.

To a philosopher, death is but the deliverance of the soul from the body.

*And in this the philosopher dishonours the body; his soul rums away from his
body and desires to be alone and by herself.*

(Plato 224)

In “Meno”, the grad philosopher affinous that virtue cannot be taught and that
what we call learning is only a process of recollection.

*The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times,
and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world
below, has knowledge of them all ; and it is no wonder that the should be able
to call to remembrance all that the ever know about virtue and about every
things.*

(Plato 180)

Some of these ideas are repeated in “Phaedo” with greater emphases and conviction.

If death had only been the end of all, the wicked would have had a good bargain in dying, for they would have ban happily quit not only of their body but of their own evil together with their souls. But now, inasmuch as the soul is manifestly immortal, there is no release or salvation from evil except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom. For the soul when on her progress to the world below takes nothing with here but nurture and education; and these are said greatly to benefit or greatly to injure the departed, at the very beginning of his journey thither.

(Plato 246)

Since the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, intellectual, uniform, indissoluble and unchangeable and the body is in the very likeness of the human, mortal, un intellectual, multiform, dissoluble and changeable, “when the soul and the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern and the body to obey and serve”.

(Plato 232)

There are kurals which witness to valluvar’s belief in the after death and in the efforts a human being should make in order to escape the cycle of births.

குடம்பை தனித்தொழியப் புன்பறந் தற்றே
உடம்போடு உயிரிடை நட்பு (குறள். 338)

The intimacy between the body and the soul is like the one between the bird and the egg that is left behind when the former flies away.

The need to keep the sense under control is stressed by the Tamil poet also.

குடம்பை தனித்தொழியப் புன்பறந் தற்றே
உடம்போடு உயிரிடை நட்பு (குறள். 338)

The man that control with his will power all his five senses just as the goading hook controls the elephant is a seed fit for the best of all lands.

ஒருமைக்கண் தான்கற்ற கல்வி ஒருவற்கு
எழுமையும் ஏமாப்பு உடைத்து (குறள். 398)

What one learns in one’s birth is retained in future births.

The knowledge that a man acquires in one birth will help him in all seven births.

A man that is blessed with good children may not be tainted by evil in all seven births.

எழுபிறப்பும் தீயவை தீண்டா பழிபிறங்காய்
பண்புடை மக்கட் பெறின் (குறள். 62)

If one has children of immaculate character, one won’t be touched by evil in all seven births.

In order to emphasise the value of education in one case and to glorify the joy of having one’s children in another, Valluvar refers to traditional belief in seven births but avoids indulging in speculations about the life after death or about the various firths and the nature of the final cessation of birth but Plato does not mind doing these while narrating the myth of Er. Unlike Valluvar, he presents his wild surmises about the journey of the soul and the structure of the universe as through they were confirmed truths. At the circumference of Plato’s spherical universe the fixed stars revolve in 24 hours from East to West, with a motion which carries with it all the

contents of the world whereas the earth at the centre rotates daily on its axis (which is also the axis of the universe) so as exactly to counteract the daily rotation in the opposite sense of the whole universe, with the result that the earth is at rest in absolute space, while the heavenly bodies revolve around it. (Cornford 349-50)

Valluvar, on the other hand, has no such cosmology of his own and makes the minimum use of Indian mythology only when it is required to explain some idea forcefully. Because of this practice on his part, there is very little in Tirukkural which modern science would reject.

Another notable difference between their contentions regarding the relationship between the body and the soul is that the Greek valorizes the soul at the expense of the body.

For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true bearing : it fills us full of loves and lusts, and fears and fancies of all kinds and endless follery and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. It has been proved to us by experience that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body. (Plato 224)

This belief leads Plato's philosopher to be entirely concerned with the soul and not with the body. He is waiting restlessly for the day when he can get away from the body and turn to the soul.

This kind of demigration of body Valluvar won't approve of through he has a word of praise for the ascetics who lead a life of renunciation. They are not slaves but masters of the sense-organs and have renounced earthly pleasures for the sake of good conduct. Unlike plato's philosophers, these don't treat life with contempt but known the various truths of the fire, namely, taste, light, touch, sound and smell, which constitute the experience of this world.

சுவைஒளி ஊறுஒசை நாற்றம்என்று ஐந்தின்
வகைதெரிவான் கட்டே உலகு (குறள். 27)

The world is comprehended only by him who has researched into the ways of the five – taste, light, touch, sound and smell.

In his case, there is no life-negation. To Plato, the philosopher is the roof and crown of all created beings but to Valluvar, it is the householder accepting life with all its miseries and living it properly who has to be privileged over the ascetic.

Plato's philosopher will be absorbed in the pleasures of the soul and will not think much of human life. Plato himself disliked the distractions of family affections. His attitude to the physical relationship was one of contempt as he considered the instinct any unruly one. Valluvar, on the other hand, celebrates family life, the blessings of a helpmate and the joy of having one's own children in three different chapters of ten completes each.

அறத்தாற்றின் இல்வாழ்க்கை ஆற்றின் புறத்தாற்றின்
போலய்ப் பெறுவ தெவன் (குறள். 46)

If one leads family life in the righteous manner, what is he going to gain by seeking asceticism, the other way of life?

வைத்துள் வாழ்வாங்கு வாழ்பவன் வான்உறையும்
தெய்வத்துள் வைத்துப் படும் (குறள். 50)

He who lives life here as he ought to live will be placed among the gods who live in heaven.

மங்கலம் என்ப மனைமாட்சி மற்றதன்
நன்துலம் நன்மக்கட் பேறு

(குறள். 60)

The best blessing is an honourable home; and having worthy children is its crowning glory.

This is a far cry from Plato's conviction that among the guardians of the ideal republic both family and private property should be abolished.

The question of fate versus the freedom of the will is discussed in some detail in the last dialogue of the Republic. Every human being chooses his or her own destiny. The daemon (guardian spirit, genius, personified destiny) does not cast lots for the should but an individual is allotted to it as its portion..

Let him to whom the first lot falls choose first a life to which he will be bound of necessity. But virtue owns no master; as a man honours or dishonours her, so shall he have more or her or less. The blame is his who chooses; Heaven is blameless.

(Cornford 355)

Plato believes that in life there is an element of necessity or chance, as well as an element of choice, which makes us, and not Heaven, responsible for the good and evil that happen to us. Homer's description of Zens as 'the dispenser of both good and ill,' is condemned as a foolish error and it is added that the divine, being good is not responsible for everything in human life, but only for a small part; for the good things in human life are far fewer than the evil and whereas the good must be ascribed to heaven only, we must look elsewhere for the cause of evils. (Cornford 71).

Poets may be allowed to represent any examples of self-control and fortitude on the part of famous heroes but young men must not hear that gods and great princes may be won by gifts.

Very much like the Greeks of his time, Plato accepts the Oracle at Delphi as the national authority and concedes that religious institutions will be regulated by it, The founding of temples, sacrifices, and the cults of gods, demi-gods and heroes, the burial of the dead, and services to propitiate the powers of the other world, believed to be institutions of the highest worth, must be left to the Delphian Apollo.

These are matters we do not understand ourselves, and in founding our commonwealth, we shall be wise to consult no other religious authority than our national divinity. Indeed in religious matters, the authority of this god, from his seat at the very navel of the earth, may be said to be extended to all mankind. (Cornford 118)

It is also believed by Plato that when each generation has educated others like themselves to take their place as Guardians of the commonwealth, they will depart to live in the Islands of the Blest. (Cornford 262). In fact, Plato held that the heavenly bodies themselves are immortal living creatures, ie, gods (Cornford 218).

In the last chapter of Arattuppall, Valluvar speaks of fate, which is denoted by the Tamil words,.

Means something ripe for enjoyment and an order involving cause and effect. Niyati indicates uniformity of nature in the universe which includes mental, moral, spiritual and material spheres. Pal is one's innate nature or inborn endowment or

one's own natural share in the universe. Though the commentator parimelalakar equates Unmai with 'fate', in the phrase Unmai arivu used by Valluvar, it may mean one's own inmate knowledge, a concept very close to what Plato mentions when he contends that all knowledge is only a recollection. Valluvar uses 'teyvam' and Ulakattu Iyarkai (the nature of the world) also to refer to fate. Akul and Pokul mean benign fate and malign fate (fortune and misfortune) respectively. Ilavul is a synonym of the latter. All these terms bear testimony to the traditional Tamil concern with the idea of destiny and its role in life. Some of the completes in the chapter on fate are, unfortunately, too pithy to yield a simple definite interpretation.

If determination is born of fortune, sloth takes hold at the time of misfortune. When testing is malignant, one's intelligence is confounded; when destiny is benign, it gets enriched. Though one may study several complex and abstruse writings one's own true intelligence will ultimately prevail. The nature of the world is of two different kinds: wealth is one thing, becoming an enlightened being is another. When one wants to acquire wealth, fortune makes all things favourable, misfortune makes every thing detrimental. What is not decreed to be one's own will not stay even if it is painstakingly guarded; what is destined to be one's own will not leave even if thrown out. Even to those who have amassed wealth to the tune of crores, enjoyment is not possible except as ordained by the ordainer. The poor that cannot enjoy life would renounce the world if destiny would pass by without afflicting them with miseries that are their share. Those that rejoice when things go well, why should they feel miserable when things go away. What are there that can be mightier than destiny? Even if its victim is hatching a plot to overcome it, it will prevail. (371-80)

Valluvar also seems to feel that since the ways of destiny are inextensible and inexplicable in terms of what happens in this birth, one has to seek recourse to a belief in iruvina (two kinds of deeds accounting for our joys and sorrows) as well as in the cycle of births. But very much like Plato, he does not approve of lack of will and determination to achieve what one can under the pretext that all efforts will be set at naught by an over riding destiny. He stresses again and again that there is absolutely no excuse for discarding the path of righteousness. Also one comes across completes in other chapters which advise those desirous of fame to bodily face misfortune and not be cowed down by calamities which are inevitable.

பொறியின்மை யார்க்கும் பழியன்று அறிவறிந்து
ஆள்வினை யின்மை பழி (குறள். 618)

It is no shame if fortune fails a man; but it in a disgrace to lack perseverance.

தெய்வத்தான் ஆகாதெனினும் முயற்சி தன்
மெய்வருத்தக் கூலி தரும். (குறள். 619)

Even if an attempt fails because of divine decree, industry will pay the wages of labour.

ஊழையும் உப்பக்கம் காண்பர் உலைவின்றித்
தாழாது உளுந்து பவர் (குறள். 620)

Those who strive hard without succumbing to despair will vanquish Fate.

Though apparently contradicting what he has said earlier about the omnipotence of fate, Valluvar, in the last couplet (620) drives home the point that man should not lose heart when assailed by misfortune in the form of adverse circumstances.

Many of Plato's literary and philosophical tools are at his beck and call in Symposium, in which Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates claiming to the mouth piece of Diotima pay eloquent tributes to love identifying and revealing in vivid detail its characteristic features through more than one myth. Love is a mighty god, wonderful in his birth for he is the oldest of the gods and the foremost author and given of virtue in life and of happiness after death. As there are two goddesses, the heavenly Aphrodite and the common Aphrodite, there must be two kinds of love associated with them. The former is the daughter of Uranus and has no mother while the latter is the daughter of Zeus and Dione. The love which is the off spring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, indiscriminate, mean and vulgar in as much as it is apt to be of women as well as youths and is of the body rather than of the soul. But since the off spring of the heavenly Aphrodite is derived from a mother in whose birth the female has no part, there is nothing of wanted ness in her. The double love is not merely an affection of the soul of man towards the fair or anything to be found in the bodies of all animals, in productions of earth and in all that is. The Aexes were not two as they are now but originally three in number; there was man, woman and the union of the two. Since human nature was originally one and we were a whole, love is nothing but the desire and pursuit of the whole.

Love is the most blessed because he is endowed with beauty, grace, courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. He is a poet and the cause of poetry in others. Love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom who is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant for his father is wealthy and wise and his mother poor and foolish. It may be generally described as the love of the everlasting possession of the good. One need not marvel at the love which all men have of their offspring because that love is for the sake of immortality. (Plato 152 – 166)

These fulsome praises of love are followed by Socrates's recollection of his meeting with Diotima who once initiated him into the nites of exalted eroticism, a series of steps to philosophical wisdom. First a man develops an appreciation for the physical beauty of a young boy. He then learns to realize that no one body is any more beautiful than another and thus he loves al bodies equally. Later he comes to value mental beauty (Customs, activities and laws) more than physical beauty, and he wants to cultivate the former in others. Seeking knowledge he gives birth to many beautiful theories and ideas till he finds a unique kind of beauty. Finally, he is able to see a singular beauty that is external, absolute, divine, constant and independent of particular beautiful things. The initiation evidently involves a series of abstractions away from particular sensible objects towards objects of thoughts culminating in a vision of Beauty itself. (Holowchak 420-21)

One third and final part of Tirukkural is reserved for an unparalleled celebration of the passionate love of youth and maid, of man and wife, and its joys and sorrows. In twenty five chapters of ten complets each, in two sections called secret courtship and wedded love, Valluvar, following the conventions of the unique Tamil akam tradition, reveals in matchless dramatic dialogues the varied moods of lovers in union as well as in separation. There are soliloquies by one or the other of the lovers or dialogues between the hero and his male companion or between the heroine and her confidante and occasionally between the lovers expressing their intimate feelings

indicative of the author's absolute mastery of human psychology leaving much to the imagination of the reader and never for a moment indulging in vulgarity, these exquisite verses describe carnal love and moments of carnality without any attempt at debasing love of man and woman or at making it an explicit belogory of the spiritual yearnings of the human being for union with god. This is one of the rarest cases of a philosopher and a philosophy of love accepting this aspect of man-woman relationship as a praise worthy part of human life.

Valluvar, of course, speaks of other forms of human love, especially love for fellow human beings as well as for all earthly beings in other chapters. There are separate chapters called Children, love, hospitality, sweet speech, gratitude, charity and giving up meat, all of which stress in different ways universal love. The innate feeling of love, according to Valluvar, is the hall mark of every human being.

They say that it is to taste the life of love that the soul has been united with the body (73)

The very bliss on earth is the result of a life of love (st 75). Just as the boneless worm is burnt up by the sun, the loveless being will be destroyed by Aram (st 77). Loveless beings live in vain. Their life is like the flourishing of a withered tree upon parched desert (st 78). If what avail is a lovely outside, when the soul within is devoid of love? (st 79). Love is natural for every being; bodies of loveless beings are only bodies in skin (st 80). Valluvar doesn't want the ascetics to leave the world of men and women and live in jungles. They should, on the other hand, cultivate the highest and most divine form of love for all creations, which is called Arul (grace).

That would is not for those lacking in Arul just as this world is not for those lacking in wealth (st.247)

Plato and Valluvar are found to be kindred spirits with regard to many of their views on the meaning and end of life though there are certain vital differences which cannot be ignored. But when it comes to cosmopolitanism and internationalism, the Tamil poet scores heavily over the Greek philosopher. Cornford, an authority on Greek literature has observed that Plato, chiefly inspired by a feeling for the unity of the Greek race, expresses no humanitarian sympathy extending beyond the borders of Hellas (168). This is quite evident from the statement attributed to Plato:

" I thank God, "he used to say, " that I was born Greek and not barbarian, freeman and not slave, man and not woman; but above all, that I was born in the age of Socrates."

He preferred to be a man of his time, his nation, his race and his society. Valluvar, on the other hand given his worldview, would have nothing to do with any single caste, creed, race, religion, society or nation. All men and women are his kin and every place on this earth is his.

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All the stanzas quoted from Tirukkural have been translated into English prose by me, though, I am indebted to the well known translations by G.U. Pope, V.V.S. Aiyar and G. Vanmikanathan.