

# VALLUVAM INSPIRED MAHATMA GANDHI

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(The world - Nation - India- a Great Nation - Tamil Nadu its contribution to India and the world -Tamil, an ancient but vibrant and dynamic language - Thiruvalluvar- rarest gift of Tamil Nadu to India and the World - Mahatma Gandhi-one of the greatest human beings the world has come across - Karam Chand Gandhi to Mahatma Gandhi- an arduous path - Valluvam Inspired Mahatma Gandhi- Valluvam-an Utopian ideal or practical proposition? - Cardinal Values cherished by Mahatma Gandhi propounded by Thiruvalluvar - Valluvam inspired Gandhi inspired India and the world - Mahatma- the true practitioner of Valluvam)

**THE WORLD:** The world in which we live and enjoy living is not to be simply dismissed as 'full of sound and fury signifying nothing' as expressed by Shakespeare through his character King Lear. The great world with its vast natural resources and human potential, flora and fauna, land and sea, deserts and forests, hills and dales, people with their different culture and language, civilization and behavior, intellect and intelligence, feelings and emotions is verily a heaven to enjoy not withstanding strife and wars, weaknesses and threats, trials and tribulations, struggles and sufferings!

**NATION:** A nation is not simply a geographical entity with earth and water, roads and buildings, but indeed is made up of men and women with their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual personalities fully blossomed. Various attributes such as kindness and humanism, valor and fearlessness, hard work and patriotism of the people and their contribution through art and literature of the highest type, language and grammar, culture and civilization make the nation great!

**INDIA - A GREAT NATION:** With one of the most ancient civilizations of the world, India with its age old culture and heritage has talked about the universal brotherhood and oneness of humanity and in fact has practiced the noble concept. This core philosophy treats the entire universe as one family. India has provided inspiration to several countries of the world to become free. North and South, East and West all over the world look to India for peace and serenity. In that way Mahakavi Bharathiyar was right when he declared in ecstasy that India is a great nation in the world!

**TAMILNADU - ITS CONTRIBUTION TO INDIA AND THE WORLD:** With its ancient civilization and rich heritage, Tamilnadu, has contributed in enormous measure for the progress and greatness of India through its language and literature, scientific achievements and technological attainments, economic development and social advancement, patriotic leadership and political niceties, unassailable laws of good governance, advanced principles in archaeology and architecture, agriculture and engineering, medicines and technology - all lending colour to the glory of India!

**TAMIL:** One of the most ancient languages yet vibrant and dynamic with its inexhaustible thoughts in every realm influencing humanity through its art and literature has provided guidelines for happy living, just governance, noble behavior etc. A classical language with richness of grammar and vastness of literature, scintillating thoughts and inspiring philosophy has contributed splendidly for building up the national character and human values.

**THIRUVALLUVAR:** He is one of the greatest thinkers the world has witnessed. Born more than 2300 years ago in the famous city of Chennai in India, he through his magnum opus 'Thirukkural' has given the art and science of life and living. When the values propounded are practiced truthfully, it will surely bring the unseen heaven to this very earth. Hardly there is any subject in the world that has not been dealt with by Thiruvalluvar and that in fact has made this work universally accepted as common scripture of eternal truths. This is probably the only work that has been translated into more than ninety languages of the world, of course, excepting Bible and Quoran, which are the valued possession of the respective religions. That indicates the universality of the great work. Monumental contribution and rarest gift of Tamilnadu to India and the world are versatile Saint Thiruvalluvar and his marvelous Thirukkural!

**MAHATMA GANDHI:** He is one of the greatest human beings the world has come across. Who is he? Is he a philosopher, thinker, political leader, spiritual head, a great Barrister- at- Law, the greatest leader of Indian nationalism, champion of the downtrodden, a great votary of peace and nonviolence, a messiah for the oppressed classes, a great saint or a venerable yogi who made his life an experiment with truth?

**KARAM CHAND GANDHI TO MAHATMA GANDHI AN ARDUOUS PATH:** Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1869. He died as Mahatma Gandhi on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948. In the course of 79 years - who was sure to cross 100 years as he himself declared, but for the assassin's bullet - M K Gandhi became Mahatma Gandhi and what made him so is an important dimension to be deeply deliberated by all and in particular the youth of today. Gandhians would say that he became a Mahatma not through a path of roses but through an arduous path. He carefully treaded the path shown by Thiruvalluvar all his life.

**VALLUVAM INSPIRED MAHATMA GANDHI:** It is a misfortune in the society that a great work of human science and art of life and living - the Thirukkural is - seems to be used only for academic purposes and not beyond. Academically research is made, Doctoral degree is obtained, seminars and conferences are conducted, papers are presented displaying depth of knowledge and mastery of the individuals in this universal scripture, school text books contain a chapter or two for memorization for examination purposes, competitions are organized in recitation, volumes are written on the theme and content of Kural and rewritten, translated works are brought out at different levels and at different places in different languages-all at an academic level - alas! Our youth and elders in general, when referred to, are not in a position to remember and recite, not to speak of following the injunctions of Thirukkural in their day-to-day life! It is unfortunate that even the authorities in Thirukkural do not appear to follow the great thoughts of Thiruvalluvar and put them into practice in their life. A great movement is required to make the people follow the tenets of Valluvam! Surely this is not the outburst of a pessimist or a frustrated mind but an expression of the anxiety of a devotee of Thiruvalluvar who sincerely feels that the well being of the society depends on the arduous practice of what Valluvar has preached. Voice of Valluvar is indeed the guiding star that can lead the humanity in the path of virtues - virtues of kindness and hospitality, sweet speech and gratitude, equity and self control, good decorum and forgiveness, charity and compassion, non-violence and non- killing, renunciation and desirelessness, truthfulness and

free from jealousy etc. which are bound to elevate the human beings to the level of divine beings. Indeed herein lies the peace and harmony of the society!

Silver lining in the present day society is the active service rendered by the organizations like the Mayilai Thiruvalluvar Tamil Sangam, Chennai, International Society for Tamil Cultural Studies, Madurai, the Thamizh Associations of Greater Washington USA, the Federations of Tamil Sangams of North America and similar organizations who are involved in genuine efforts to bring in an awareness in the society on the need to put into practice the Valluvam in life through their tremendous activities.

In this Scenario it is relevant and significant to recall how inspired by Valluvam, Mahatma Gandhi practiced the same and proved that Valluvam is not a Utopian ideal but a practical proposition.

Gandhiji said "I learnt Tamil only to enable me to study Thiruvalluvar's Kural through his mother tongue itself. There is none who has given such a treasure of wisdom like him!"

Gandhiji's respect for Thiruvalluvar and regards for Thirukkural can be seen in a note he published in his journal 'Harijan' dated 6<sup>th</sup> July 1935 under the Caption "Tamil Holy Book".

"Thiruvalluvar is a Tamil saint. Tradition says that he is a weaver. He gave us the famous Thirukkural -holy maxims described by the Tamils as the Tamil Veda and Mariel as one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought! The maxims number 1330. There are several English translations. The late V.V.S. Iyer has produced the latest translation. To wet the reader's appetite I quote two maxims at random.

"Take not away from any living thing that the life that is sweet unto all, even if it be to save their own".

Compare Goldsmith

No flocks that range the valley free To slaughter I condemn Taught by the power that pities me I learn to pity them.

The other selection is 'Death is like unto sleep and life is like the waking after that sleep' Compare Wordsworth's 'Death is but a sleep and forgetting'

Gandhiji's philosophy and thoughts, views and values were to a great extent inspired by the thoughts of Valluvar. Gandhi in fact has made several references to Thirukkural on various occasions. They inspired him to lead the life as shown by Thiruvalluvar.

### **VALLUVAM- A UTOPIAN IDEAL OR PRACTICAL PROPOSITION?**

Valluvam is not a set of Utopian ideals but surely a practical proposition. The message conveyed by Thiruvalluvar in his couplets on various aspects of human life can be practically followed if one makes an honest attempt and sincere efforts. They are practical tips prescribed by a great thinker whether on God or religion, people or society, education or medicine, agriculture or good governance, friendship or enmity, economics or management - every dimension influencing human life and living!

**CARDINAL VALUES CHERISHED BY MAHATMA:** Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on universality of God and virtues, the need for ahimsa and vegetarianism, womanhood and self control, righteousness and truthfulness, agriculture and

medicines, friendship and enmity, non discrimination and renunciation, humanism and social cooperation, fear of evil and hypocrisy, avoidance of fraud and alcoholism, compassion and wisdom, non-violence and non-killing, desirelessness and purity in action, courage and fortitude, gambling, and governance were shaped by Valluvam and that indeed is the secret of Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi blossoming into Mahatma Gandhi.!

Great Tamil Scholar Mu. Varadharasanar attributed the greatness of Mahatma Gandhi to his assiduous adherence to 'truthfulness' known as 'vaimai' in Tamil.

*Ullathhalpoyyadhu ozhugin ulagaththaar; Ullaththul ellaam ulan* (Kural 294). He lives in loving hearts of all. Who serves the truth serene in soul, (in English by Yogi Suddhananda Bharathi). Yes. He titled his autobiography as "The Story of My Experiments with Truth". He says "These will of course include experiments with non-violence, celibacy and other principles of conduct believed to be distinct from truth. But for me, truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal principle, that is God".

*Manaththukkann maasilan aadhala anaithu aran Aagula neera pira* (Kural 343)

In Spotless mind virtue is found and not in show and swelling sound. (YSB)

Gandhi proved that it is possible to reach the heights of renunciation and yet serve the society. *Ozhukkaththu neeththaar perumai vizhuppaththu Venndum panuval thunivu* (Kural 21). No merit can be held so high. As theirs who sense and self deny. (YSB)

He was one leader who led the millions of Indians to freedom and self-respect as well as to a refurbishing of spiritual values.

Gandhi believed in the power of virtue. "Virtue is the sole path to the attainment of all good, including wealth and love, in this life, the next one in the cycle and in the final release". According to Thiruvalluvar

*Sirappu eenwn, selvamum eenum, araththinoongu Aakkam evanoe uyirku* (Kural 31)

From virtue zeal and wealth outflow what greater good can mankind know? (YSB). 'Virtue only finds eternal fame' and Gandhi virtually led a virtuous life throughout. Now let us see how Gandhi lived his life as an example for the Kural.

*Anbilaar ellaam thamakuriyar; anbudayaar*

*Enbum uriyarpirarkku* (Kural 72)

To selves belong the loveless ones. To others the loving e'en to bones. (YSB).

This kural though appears to mean the self-effacing love of a member of the family, its real import would cover all the self-sacrificing great men of the world. Inspired by this, Gandhi belonged to the Nation to the very last drop of his blood. Mahatma Gandhi loved his fellowmen intensely. It was this all encompassing and self-sacrificing love that transformed the shy and self-effacing Bar at Law led Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi into one of the greatest men of the world. It was this virtue that gave the Mahatma his soul strength that enabled him to wrest India's independence from British rulers in a manner not seen by the world earlier. When unfortunately communal riots broke out in the aftermath of partition and brought a holocaust in Punjab, it was his strength of the soul which made no discrimination on the basis of caste and community that kept peace in Calcutta and East Bengal as a

single man boundary force. Ultimately it was this compassion that led Gandhiji to the sacrificial altar.

Three toy monkeys kept on the desk of mahatma Gandhi speaks volume of inspiration Gandhiji got from the Kural

*Ozhukkamudayavarkku ollaave theeya*  
*Vazhukkiyum vaayaar solal* (Kural 139)

Foul words will never come from lips Of righteous men even by slips (YSB)

Yes! A man of righteousness will not speak evil even by an unconscious slip. Such a man will see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. Mahatma always held this principle high and followed throughout his lifetime

Forbearance is a great virtue to be acquired through sustained efforts.

*Oruthaarku orunaalai inbam; poruththaarkku Ponrunthunaiym pugazh*  
(Kural 156)

Revenge accords but one day's joy

Patience arises praise for age (YSB):

For the sake of short lived satisfaction of having taken it out on the opponent "an eye for an eye and the tooth for tooth" it is unwise to give up the permanent reward of forbearance which is really the esteem of good man for all time. Temporarily one may be happy with the feeling that he has achieved what he intended but in due course it will lead to ruinous loss. Hence it is not wise to sacrifice the greater gains for the fleeting pleasure. Gandhiji followed this message meticulously while dealing with the incorrigible Britishers till he could secure freedom or succeed in South Africa and he has in his life, time and again, demonstrated the glory of forbearance effectively.

Mahatma Gandhi was waging a war against the British, of course, on the plank of 'Non violence'. But then, he never considered the British as his enemies. In South Africa, though M K Gandhi was kicked off by a policeman from the train, he did not nurture any animosity against the policeman but he organized Indians against the racial discrimination. Gandhi's inspiration was *Thiranalla tharpirar seyyinum noenondu Aranalla seyyaamai nanru* (Kural 157)

Though others cause you wanton pain

Grieve not, from unjust harm refrain (YSB)

The essence of goodness is not to avenge even though one may be badly hurt by a personal wrong sustained.

"When Mahatma Gandhi uttered the word 'Hey Ram' with his dying breath, on being mowed down with the assassin's bullet, one wonders whether he was praying for himself and those in his prayer meeting or for his assassin himself. He could have been doing both"-Dr.S M Diaz.

Mahatma Gandhi's economic philosophy was based on social justice that when a person earns, for what ever is left beyond required to meet his needs , he must act as a trustee of the surplus to be spent for the benefit of the Society- else he is to be taken as a thief. Gandhi's inspiration for this value flows from Thiruvallur's *Thaalatrithandha porulellaam thakkaarku Velaanmai seiydhar poruttu* (Kural 212)

All the wealth that toils give

Is meant to serve those who deserve. (YSB)

The purpose of working hard and earning wealth is to practice the right type of benevolence - to share it, distribute it dutifully for the benefit of all the deserving in the society. The point here is not mere almsgiving but Social Justice.

Rajaji says "Wealth is not to be earned for the purpose of self indulgence or for satisfaction of greed. Wealth should be treated as the society's instrument of helpfulness. The word 'velaanmai' is not just helpfulness but helpfulness combined with a sense of duty". Gandhiji preached and practiced this message of Thiruvallur-idea of positive helpfulness- till the end of his life.

Gandhi's political, social, economic philosophy was based on 'Compassion'- an ascetic virtue. Compassion is the all-encompassing love that a person of virtue develops in respect of all living creatures, in his steady progress towards righteousness. In the evolution of the virtue 'Compassion' first the love and care of the wife and children then the kith and kin and friends, thereafter the immediate community and finally the entire world - human, plant and animal- animate and inanimate. It is indeed the fully spirited 'Compassion' is the most valuable wealth, the other wealth of material possessions could be found even with the worst of men.

*Arutchelvam selvaththull selvam, porutchelvam Pooriyar kannumm ula* (Kural 241)

The wealth of wealth is wealth of grace Earthly wealth even the basest has (YSB)

It was compassion arising out of the early exposure and experience of Mahatma Gandhi to the racialism of South Africa and to the ignorance, poverty and disease of the millions of his motherland that led him through the path of social reform, constructive work and political freedom to the supreme sacrifice that he consummated at the alter of his own principles and convictions for the people.

Mahatma Gandhi, as seen earlier, named his Autobiography the "Story of his experiment with Truth". He was a staunch seeker of truth- he found Truth in God and God in Truth. His definition of truth is not merely not telling lies. Truth is non-violence, compassion, service to mankind, knowledge etc. According to Thiruvalluvar 'truth' is 'speech that is free from all evil'. Truth is not if it is spoken to further some wrong. The acid test of truth for right conduct is essential harmlessness.

*Vaaimai enappaduvadhu ydadhenin yaadhonrum Theemai ilaadha solal* (Kural 291)

If 'what is truth?' the question be It is to speak out evil free (YSB)

This is the concept of 'Sathya' - truthfulness preached and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi from schooldays to the end of his life.

Mahatma Gandhi inspired by Thiruvalluvar's

*Yaakaavaaraayinum naa kaakka kaavaakkaal Sockaappar jollizhukku pattu* (Kural 127)

Rein the tongue if nothing else

Or slips of tongue bring all the woes. (YSB)

*Iniya ulavaaga innaadha kooral Kaniyimppa kaa kavarntharu* (Kural 100)

Leaving ripe fruits the raw he eats

Who speaks harsh words when sweet word suits (YSB)

wrote in 'Young India' of 17<sup>th</sup> September 1925 "one should speak the truth in gentle language. One had better not speak it, if one cannot do so in a gentle way; meaning thereby that there is no truth in a man who cannot control his tongue"!

*Aravinai yaadhenil kollaamai koaral Piravinai ellaamtharum* (Kural 321)

What is virtue? It is not to kill. For killing causes every ill. (YSB)

The avoidance of the sin of killing is itself an outstanding virtue and the failure to observe the code of non- killing will bring about sins of all description.

To Mahatma Gandhi Ahimsa means not only non- killing but in fact it is universal love. It is nonviolence a soul force or the power of Godhood within us. We become Godlike to the extent we realize non-violence. Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer. We should love even those who hate us. Gandhiji believed that the doctrine of harmlessness is the basis for all the ultimate solution of all violence and wars in the world and taught his most cherished principle of Ahimsa - nonviolence - non-killing. He taught it by principle and practice. He built a whole national movement for freedom on it and finally succeeded to the surprise of the entire world. Of Course Gandhiji's principle of Ahimsa was a larger concept as seen above with the idea on non- violence extending beyond just non-killing.

All are aware of Gandhiji's plea for vegetarianism. Even to save one's own life, it is unethical and sinful to take another's life. Gandhi and his family while in South Africa rigidly abstained from animal soups including cow's milk even on medical advice.

Gandhiji's concept of non-violence is the non-violence of the strong and not the weak.

*Thannuyir neeppinum settarka than piridhu Innuyir neekum vinai* (Kural 327)

Kill not life that other's cherish

Even when your life must perish (YSB)

was obviously his inspiration (derived from valluvam) which he himself meticulously followed and practiced. Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have liked the kural

*Uranguvadhu poalum saakkaadu urangi Vizhipadhu poalum pirappu*

(Kural 339)

Death is like a slumber deep

And birth like waking from that sleep.

and quoted frequently.

True learning transcends the frontiers of countries, wherever they are situated in the world - languages and cultures. For the learned, the process of learning other languages, literature and culture is a continuous process.

Formal education can at best be the beginning of the process of real learning. A man of learning would never close the windows of his mind, to refreshing new winds from different avenues of learning, from all sources and at all times. Inspired by

*Yaadhaanum naadaamaal ooraamaal ennoruvan*

*Saanthunaiyum kallaadhavaary* (Kural 397)

All lands and towns are learner's own Why not till death learning go on (YSB)

Mahatma Gandhi learnt and imbibed much of the basics for his life's work from Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau much later than his regular education in India and abroad was completed.

On means and ends, Mahatma Gandhi observed in Young India of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1924 as below:

"They say 'means are after all means'. I would say 'means are after all everything'. As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and end. Realisation of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits no exception". On 11<sup>th</sup> December 1924 he supplemented. " However much I may sympathize with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of the causes". This was inspired by

*Ellaadha ennnni seyavendum thammodu*

*Kolllaadha kollladhu ulagu* (Kural 470)

Do deeds above reproachfulness

The world refutes uncomely mess (YSB)

The prince will never act in a manner that the enlightened world despises, as regards worthiness of ends and means. Any act, not in keeping with princely standards of end and means, will only bring him public disgrace. Valluvar's concept of 'means justifying the end was so dear to mahatma's heart that he followed the same throughout his life - his struggle and success in Pretoria or Champaran, Nowkali or Ahmedabad!

*Arul karudhi anbudayar aadhal pond*

*karudhi Pochaappu paarpaarkann* (Kural 285)

Love and grace are not their worth

Who watch to waylay dozer's wealth. (YSB)

The implication is that those, who are just waiting for an opportunity to approach other's possession, can never progress along the path of righteousness.

Observance of non-stealing or absence of fraud is indeed deemed to be a virtue. Deeply inspired by the above, Mahatma Gandhi said the "theft may be termed external or physical theft. There is besides another kind of theft subtler and far more degrading to the human spirit. It is theft mentally to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others or to cast a greedy eye on it.

Inspired by Thiruvalluvar's strong injunction against liquor, Mahatma Gandhi exhorted his Congress party and congressmen to work more vigorously in this area. He wrote "Although like communal unity and removal of untouchability, prohibition has been on the Congress programme since 1920, congressmen has not taken the interest they might have taken in this very vital, social and moral reform".

### **VALLUVAM INSPIRED GANDHI INSPIRES INDIA AND THE WORLD:**

Inspired strongly by Valluvar, Mahatma Gandhi inspired all sections of the society to fight for freedom from the foreign yoke through his deliberately chosen path of truth and non-violence. He provided inspiration to many oppressed nations in the world to fight against colonization and become free. He continues to inspire the world even today after 55 years of his martyrdom!

**MAHATMA GANDHI- THE TRUE PRACTITIONER OF VALLVAM:** The above exposition and a close study of the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi will amply prove that he literally designed his programmes based on the injunctions prescribed by Thiruvalluvar and that he was indeed one of the staunch practitioners of Valluvam indicating that Thirukkural is not a set of Utopian ideals but is a practical proposition!

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