

“Understanding Thirukkural: A Positive Psychology Perspective”

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Abstract:

The current study takes a conceptual approach to the mind and how it relates to wellbeing. The prevalence of mental health problems in countries has increased alarmingly during the past ten years. When a person's internal stability permits them to use their ability to align with society's ideals through basic cognitive and social abilities, emotional expression, empathy, and flexibility, they are said to be in a productive state of mental health. Thirukkural is regarded as a highly moral work of Tamil literature that was passed down from man to man over 2,000 years ago. Life, development, death, decay, reputation, money, feeling, and passion are all based on the human mind. There are differing views on the resides of the mind, but everyone agrees that the mind is the source of all speech, cognition, and behaviour. All of life's activities will be pure and moral acts will occur in accordance with a pure thought. The study employs a qualitative approach to provide an overview of the mental framework utilizing ancient Tamil scriptural texts. Finding entails, a thorough investigation and examination of Thirukkural, its practice, and the literature in terms of its background and content for a comprehensive mental understanding.

Keywords: Thirukkural, Thiruvalluvar, Wellbeing, Mental Health, Positive Psychology and Integrated Health.

Introduction

Over the past decade, mental health problems have significantly increased in both industrialized and developing nations. The productive state of mental health is characterized by internal stability that enables a person to use their own potential to uphold societal values through basic emotional expressions, cognitive abilities and social skills such as empathy and adaptability (Galderisi et al., 2015).

Ancient Tamil Literature - Thirukkural

Thiruvalluvar, a Tamil philosopher, wrote Thirukkural. Deivappulavar and Poyyappulavar are other names for Thiruvalluvar. Thirukkural, a work of enlightened Tamil literature that was passed down from man to man more than 2,000 years ago, is regarded as a highly ethical text (Muniapan & Rajantheran, 2011).

The term ‘Thiru’ indicates holy or sacred, while ‘Kural’ means abbreviated or condensed (Chandran, 2017). There are 133 chapters in this literary work, and each chapter has 10 couplets or kurals, for a total of 1330 couplets.

When Thirukkural first emerged, other scholars did classify its divisions and chapters until much later. According to the classification, the couplet is similar to a fourfold life aim consisting of freedom from the cycle of reincarnation (veedu), love and passion (inbam), material living (porul), and virtuous living (aram) (Nagarajan, 2005).

Thirukkural only described the first three objectives because the fourth objective can be accomplished by living according to the three extremely moral guidelines that Thirukkural established. Thirukkural's three sections highlight all facets of human existence and offer moral and ethical information that transcends all borders.

Thirukkural is an eternal, moral and ethical manual that offers guidance on a number of topics, such as leadership, virtue, righteousness, and individual wellbeing. Despite having been composed more than 2,000 years ago, Thirukkural is consistent with contemporary psychological ideas, especially positive psychology, which places an emphasis on resilience, human flourishing, and well-being. By examining particular Thirukkural that illustrate important ideas of this psychological framework, this research investigates the connection between Poyyaamozhi (words that never fail)/Thirukkural and positive psychology.

Methodology

Qualitative approach is implied, where text extraction is made and then it is interpreted. We refer to this as the hermeneutic approach. Oliver (2015) defines hermeneutics as a discipline focused on establishing and justifying an approach for interpretation, initially concerning texts but subsequently applicable to various forms of interpretation. Hermeneutics, according to Dyer (2010), is the theory and practice of interpretation. It entails comprehension and interpretation that may be supported. It outlines a philosophy of understanding and clarifies several approaches to text, object, and concept interpretation.

Thirukkural and Mental Illness

Life, death, growth, fame, decay, money, emotion, and passion are all based on the human mind. There are differing views on where mind resides, but everyone agrees that the mind is the source of all speech, cognition, and behaviour. All of life's activities will be pure if the mind is pure, and moral behaviour will follow suit (Anuratha and Muniandy, 2023).

Thiruvalluvar states that the mind is beneficial for a person's various development. He also makes it very evident that righteousness and just deeds, rather than dishonesty, greed, or immoral methods, are the sources of true success. Acquiring wealth without character is fleeting and might even result in disaster. On the other hand, aram-guided wealth benefits society as a whole in addition to individual well-being.

He has also explained that we can access different energies by using mental energy to regulate our senses. It is believed that the mind is in good condition if it behaves in accordance with lofty ideals like truth, hard labor, humanity, determination, and elevation. The mind is considered ill if it moves away from the above or comparable high norm as stated above, loses control, and attempts to hurt both itself and others. (Moganaraj 2005).

Mental diseases have a wide range of causes. The expressions of the mind are numerous. There are numerous harms that arise from the appearances. To the best of his ability, Thiruvalluvar disclosed a few remedies for mental disease.

There is a close relationship between Thirukkural and positive psychology. While contemporary psychology conducts rigorous research on mental health, Thirukkural has long offered philosophical counsel on virtue, happiness, and resilience. The Kurals provide profound explanations for positive psychology concepts such as "gratitude, self-efficacy, resilience, emotional intelligence, and meaning in life." Thiruvalluvar's observations are still applicable today, providing ageless guidance for both individual and collective well-being.

Positive Psychology's Main Ideas and Associated Thirukkural

1. Happiness and Well-being (Sukham and Ananda)

Thirukkural 628:

"Inbam vizhaiyaan idumbai iyalpenpaan thunbam urudhal ilan"

(He who does not pursue happiness and regards adversity as normal will not suffer.)

This Thirukkural highlights that A virtuous, knowledgeable individual does not go after materialistic pleasures. Rather, he leads a morally upright life, avoiding grief since he is well aware of its causes. A life of virtue and intelligence, rather than pleasure-seeking, is where such a person achieves true serenity and well-being. According to positive psychology, inner contentment, not material belongings, is the source of true well-being.

Thirukkural 34:

“Manaththukkan masilan adhal anaittharan Agula neera pira.”

This couplet suggests that virtue is a practical requirement as well as a moral ideal, a determining factor in whether riches leads to happiness and peace or conflict and destruction.

This Thirukkural emphasizes a crucial idea in positive psychology: the role happiness and mental health.

2. Virtue and Moral Strength (Aram and Dharma)

Thirukkural 32:

“Araththin oongu aakkamum illai, adhanai
maraththalin oongu kedu.”

(There is no gain greater than virtue; hence, there is no greater loss than losing it.)

The significance of virtue (aram) as the cornerstone of all material wealth (porul) is emphasized in this Thirukkural. It claims that while everyone aspires to be prosperous, only good deeds can bring about true success. Being righteous is a practical route to prosperity as well as a moral code. This couplet, which highlights the connection between ethics and riches in a just society, can be found in the chapter on "The Possession of Virtue" (Arathuppaal - Aravazhi).

According to positive psychology, those who practice virtue-based living report feeling more fulfilled and purposeful.

Thirukkural 35:

“Aḷukkaru avavekuḷi inṇachol naṅkum
iḷukka iyaṇṇatu aram.”

(“Tis virtue when, his footsteps sliding not through envy, wrath, Lust, evil speech-these four, man onwards
moves in ordered path.”)

This Thirukkural explains what virtue (Aram) is not by outlining the four main bad feelings or actions that a virtuous person must refrain from avoiding jealousy, excessive desire, rage, and harsh speech, one can attain virtue. It emphasizes how these drawbacks obstruct the way to morality.

Positive psychology and virtue share a same goal of fostering inner strength, moral character, and meaningful relationships in order to help people thrive.

3. Resilience and Overcoming Hardship (Mudivu and Porulodu Thunivu)

Thirukkural 621:

"Idukkan varungaal nakuka adhanai
aduththoorvadhu aqdhoppa thil "

("Smile, with patient, hopeful heart, in troublous hour; Meet and so vanquish grief; nothing hath equal power.") A fundamental idea in positive psychology is resilience. In the face of hardship, this couplet highlights the strength of having an optimistic and upbeat outlook. It implies that smiling when facing challenges can help one overcome them more successfully than giving up. "Laugh away the trouble when it comes; nothing equals it to conquer pains" is the implication of this couplet. It highlights the strength of optimism in the face of hardship, implying that a grin can be a potent tool for conquering obstacles even during trying times. Research indicates that engaging in such activities strengthens emotional resilience.

Thirukkural 669:

"Thunpam uravarinum seika thuNivaatri
inpam payakkum vinai."

("Though toil and trouble face thee, firm resolve hold fast, and do the deeds that pleasure yield at last.") "Pursue with firmness the act that yields bliss, no matter how great the hardship," this couplet counsels. This emphasizes how crucial it is to pursue objectives with tenacity and resolve in the face of setbacks. The couplet essentially exhorts people to focus on the long-term advantages and enjoyment that can be attained through steadfastness and endurance rather than letting short-term setbacks discourage them.

Thirukkural 597:

"Sidhaivitaththu olkaar uravoar pudhaiyampir
pattuppaa toondrung kaliru"

("The men of lofty mind quail not in ruin's fateful hour, the elephant retains his dignity mind arrows' deadly shower.")

This couplet makes use of the image of an elephant, which remains towering and powerful even after being hit by arrows. It suggests that, like an elephant that does not falter in the face of suffering, one should be resilient and not let failures or setbacks deter one from trying.

4. Self-Actualization and Purpose (Uyarntha Vazhkai)

Thirukkural 122:

"Kaakka porulaa adakkaththai aakkam
adhaninooung killai uyirkku"

(Guard thou as wealth the power of self-control; Than this no greater gain to living soul.)

There is no greater source of good for man than self-control, so let it be treasured. This Thirukkural bolsters Albert Bandura's "self-efficacy" theory, a cornerstone of positive psychology. It places a strong emphasis on self-assurance and autonomy, two qualities that are essential to reaching self-actualization.

5. Emotional Intelligence and Relationships (Anbu and Aramuyarchi)

Thirukkural 7:

"Thanakkuvamai illaadhaan thaalsaerndhaark Kallaal
manakkavalai maatral aridhu."

(Unless His foot, 'to Whom none can compare,' men gain, 'Tis hard for mind to find relief from anxious pain.)

A crucial component of positive psychology is emotional intelligence, or the capacity to comprehend and control one's feelings and interpersonal interactions. According to this Thirukkural, only those who are joined to the foot of the peerless him can be freed from anxiety.

Thirukkural 27:

"Suvaioli ooruosai naatramena aindhin
vagaidherivaan katte ulagu."

(Taste, light, touch, sound, and smell: who knows the way of all the five, the world submissive owns his sway.) We must be conscious of who we are and the world around us. Always be attentive or aware of what is going on around you, and know how to react—or not—to those situations. To put it another way, we need to be emotionally literate in order to manage our emotions, relationships with others, and ourselves.

6. Optimism and Positive Thinking (Nalamum Sindhanaiyum)

Thirukkural 596:

"Ulluva thellaam uyarvullal matradhu
thallinunh thallaamai neerththu."

("Whate'er you ponder, let your aim be lofty still, fate cannot hinder always, thwart you as it will.")

This Thirukkural promotes setting high standards for oneself and staying optimistic despite any setbacks. It implies that setting lofty goals is intrinsically worthwhile and shouldn't be abandoned, even if such goals are not immediately achieved. This Thirukkural emphasizes focusing on positive experiences rather than dwelling on negativity, aligning with the principles of cognitive reframing.

Thirukkural 661:

"Vinaiththitpam enpadhu oruvan manaththitpam
matraiya ellaam pira."

(What men call 'power in action' know for 'power of mind' externe to man all other aids you find.)

This Thirukkural says that all other abilities are not of this type; firmness in action is (only) one's firmness of thought. The determination of the mind is the execution focus; everything else is secondary.

7. Gratitude and Compassion (Nandri and Anbu)

Kural 108:

"Nandri marappadhu nandrandru nandralladhu
andrae marappadhu nandru."

("Tis never good to let the thought of good things done thee pass away;
Of things not good, 'tis good to rid thy memory that very day.")

In positive psychology, gratitude is a well-established element that improves wellbeing and life satisfaction. This Thirukkural emphasizes the value of being thankful in day-to-day interactions. Also, it says benefits should not be forgotten, but injuries should be remembered even as they are being caused.

Kural 103:

"Payan-thookkaar seydhya udhavi nayan-thookkin
nanmai kadalai peridhu"

(“Kindness shown by those who weigh not what the return may be:

When you ponder right its merit, 'Tis vaster than the sea.”)

A benefit is greater than the sea if its greatness is evaluated without considering its return.

Thirukkural - 844, 845, 401 and 402. This is the point at which their acts have the opposite effect. The Thirukkural above mention people with this mental state. This temperament type has a humorous outlook (Kayalvizhy, 2021). For instance, when someone who hasn't seen something claims to have seen it, it makes him feel inferior because he is reflexively a humble person who fears that people will think less of him if he claims not to have seen it. He will therefore claim to have seen it as well.

"Sometimes people show low attitude if they see others superior to them in something," adds Thiruvalluvar, with a tinge of humor. According to Thiruvalluvar, envy and blaming others have grown commonplace among those with inferiority complexes (Moganaraj, 2005). The strength of "filthiness" is to highlight the perils of this kind of thinking. Individuals who suffer from this mental disorder will eventually develop a condition that is irreversible. The individual will experience the hardship of not being able to achieve fame or glory in this situation. In this case, when someone calls attention to their shortcomings, they are insulting and hurting people who do so rather than attempting to fix the issue. Additionally, Thirukkural -237 mentions this.

Sometimes, condescension can manifest as violence. It is impossible for these people to put up with others who are powerful in their industry. They frequently harass these individuals to the point that they attempt to completely eradicate them. Ultimately, though, this will only hurt the person or oneself. Thirukkural 894 provides a good explanation of this.

Way to deal with this mental health issue. Medicines cannot treat this inferiority complex, which is referred to as a mental illness. Only mental clarity will be able to cure it. The person must cultivate a strong belief that, with unwavering labor and effort, they can reach any great level or height. Their hearts should progressively become deeply ingrained with this notion.

Fear

Thiruvalluvar says that fear might be characterized as,

I. Fear that has a psychic bent towards it. Following an action without fearing of consciousness

Thirukkural - 428, 88, 201, 44, 325, 366, 464

The Thirukkural mentioned above highlight the importance of being mindful of and afraid of one's consciousness, which determines mental health. Living a healthy life will be guided by this dread of consciousness. – Kural - 497, 382, 778, 647, 686, 585. These people ought to be free to live their lives as freely as their consciences, according to Thiruvalluvar. Fear is a psychological disorder. Many people have a generalized fear of everything. Some people may have this illness naturally from childhood, while others may have it as a result of a traumatic experience in their past. Some people may have been afraid of unexpected things that happened to them.

Action without fear: Selfish people are used to committing bad deeds. These people will continue to experience fear of consciousness. Thirukkural -1075. It has been stated here that defying authority and causing

harm to society out of fear is a terrible way to conduct things. For instance, mistaking someone else's wife for your own is a social offense. It is a social offense to mistake the legitimate wife for someone else. Furthermore, it is a more serious social crime to mistreat her. As his consciousness will kill him, it is said that the person committing this act will be distressed and regretful even on his deathbed. Thirukkural -146 provides a clear explanation of this.

II. Fear that is seen as a mental illness

Cowards are indifferent to and unconcerned with performing nice deeds. They don't even care that people will hold them accountable for their conduct when they don't do nice deeds. They will resume and give them what they want, though, if they witness someone kicking and giving them the finger. Thirukkural - 1077. Fake preachers are those who act evilly while posing as virtuous. False preachers commit sins in order to get wealth, promotions, and other benefits. The same group includes those who profit from illegal activities like smuggling marijuana. These phony preachers worry about being betrayed every day, and they get scared when someone tells them they will betray them. People with this mind-set may easily vanquish their opponents if they have any. Thirukkural - 863, 869.

III. Fear of the environment and surrounding

It is frequently observed that people stumble because they are reluctant to express their opinions plainly in front of numerous onlookers. Their dread is the primary cause of this. This dread of the environment prevents people from saying what they wanted to express in the first place. Even if they can offer and are aware of a lot of concepts and things, their anxiety can lead one to believe that they don't know anything. Instead of being famous, such people become infamous. Thirukkural -723, 729, 730. Individuals who wish to speak in front of an audience should be wary if they arrive with incomplete understanding of the subject. If the person has a clear notion of what he wants to talk about and comes to it, he can overcome this phobia (Anuratha and Muniandy, 2023).

Conclusion

Thirukkural is a manual for "positive living and mental well-being" in addition to being an ethical text. Ancient Tamil knowledge foresaw important psychological concepts, as evidenced by the fact that many of its teachings are consistent with contemporary positive psychology. People can develop self-actualization, resilience, and happiness by applying these lessons to their everyday lives, which will ultimately result in human flourishing.

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