

# CSR and Corporate Governance Through Thirukural



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**W**hat is not mentioned or discussed in ancient Indian ethos and philosophy is not in existence in the world and we Indians have every reason to be proud of it. Of late we hear a lot about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Governance (CG). Huge emphasis is being given for achieving better and more transparent Corporate Governance among the Regulators, Corporate, Professionals and Investors. The kind of discussions at various forums makes one to feel as if governance is a newly invented and most desired angel. For some it may be a demon too!

India is a land of governance more specifically, self-governance. Lots of stories are told and heard by till recent generation about the governance, its importance and benefits in our life and the importance of sharing wealth with needy. For generations, Indians built their living around governance and self-governance only. In this article an attempt has been made to read through Thirukkural written by Saint Thiruvalluvar in Tamil language and his avowals on governance and social responsibilities. Thirukkural, written more than 2000 years ago, is a moral code and is divided into 3 sections. The first on Virtue, the second on Wealth and the third on Love. Most of the couplets in the first two sections refer to the best way of life that one should lead.

India is a land of governance more specifically, self-governance. Lots of stories are told and heard by till recent generation about the governance, its importance and benefits in our life and the importance of sharing wealth with needy. For generations, Indians built their living around governance and self-governance only. This article is not yet another attempt to talk about definitions of CG, Companies Act and SEBI regulations. Herein, an attempt has been made to read through Thirukkural written by Saint Thiruvalluvar in Tamil language and his avowals on governance and social responsibilities. Thirukkural, written more than 2000 years ago, is a moral code and it is one of the few works translated into almost all the languages of the world. Thirukkural consists of 1330 aphorisms grouped into 133 chapters of ten couplets each. Thirukkural is divided into 3 sections. The first on Virtue, the second on Wealth and the third on Love. Most of the couplets in the first two sections refer to the best way of life that one should lead. Thirukkural is translated into more than 50 languages worldwide. In this article, the English Translation by Rev. G U Pope, Rev. W H Drew and Rev. John Lazarus from the book published by M/s. Kumaran Publications, Chennai has been followed. Further, references from the book "Tirukkural with English Translation and Explanation" by Dr. S M Diaz has also been taken liberally. Each of the Kural referred to in this article is given the Sanskrit translation. Further, all the great scholars who have done great service to the society have also been covered by translating such great work in Sanskrit.

A few couplets from the first two sections have been considered to bring in an introductory to my fellow professionals that governance is not new to this country and indeed our country was the torch bearer to the world when it comes to governance. Couplet (Kural) No.33 reads as follows:

*Ollum vakaiyan aravinai ovate  
Cellum vayellan ceyal.*

“ The men of virtue, who have a clear understanding of their functions, as trustees of the society around them will not fail in their socially beneficial duties because of strained circumstances. They will continue to give even if it hurts them. This is in fact an instruction to the corporate that even if they are not generating profit enough, it is part of their duty to take care of the society and to continue to do good to the society.

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

मनोवाक्कायकरणैः धर्मकार्ये यथाविधि ।  
कर्तव्यं ख्यात् यथाशक्ति समयस्यानुरोधतः ॥

Translation of the same in English would read as follows:

Do all the good you can, at all times and places,  
And in all the ways possible.

It is not just a direction to an individual as to how one should lead his or her life, but, we can easily equate it to a Corporate with regard to its social responsibilities. Society needs not only personal effort and financial assistance but also it needs a concerted effort from an organised body to mobilise the community's thinking, its resources and its understanding mind to work in a focussed direction to spread the benefits of the goodwill and today we are talking about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) directing at corporate to take up activities that would benefit the society. Thiruvalluvar had said it comprehensively more than 2000 years ago. A good corporate is expected to look for opportunities to serve the countrymen, needs of a community and its common needs. Can we have a clearer CSR policy than this?

Thiruvalluvar has dedicated one full Chapter (Chapter No.22) with ten couplets titled “Social Co-operation”. In all the ten couplets, he has stressed the importance of sharing and caring of the society by every one from the rulers, rich, businessmen and poor common men.

Couplet (Kural) No. 212 reads as follows:

*Talarrit tanta porulellam takkarkku  
Velanmai ceytar poruttu.*

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

२१२ लोकोपकर्तृभिर्वित्तं प्रयत्नात् समुपार्जितम् ।  
सत्पात्रे दीयमानं सत् प्रयोजनकरं भवेत् ॥

English translation of the above couplet reads as follows:

Good men industriously produce wealth, so that  
They may dutifully use it for the benefit of society.

The purpose of working hard and earning wealth is to practice



the right type of benevolence i.e., to distribute it dutifully for the benefit of all the deserving in society. What more needs to be told for CSR activity? Similar principle is also advocated in Christianity, wherein Lord says, “As you did it to one of the least of those my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:40). The principle here is not giving alms to others but a service in return to the society. Gandhiji preached and practised this idea of positive helpfulness till his end. This is an important economic philosophy advocated by Thiruvalluvar more than 2000 years ago. A good CSR code indeed!!

In couplet (Kural) No. 218, Thiruvalluvar says that, “Even when the resources are limited those who know their duty will not shrink from their efforts of social co-operation.”

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

२१८ लोकोपकारमाहात्म्यं जानन्तो ज्ञानिसमत्तमाः ।  
स्वस्य दारिद्र्यकालेऽपि परेषामुपकर्तव्यम् ॥

The men of virtue, who have a clear understanding of their functions, as trustees of the society around them will not fail in their socially beneficial duties because of strained circumstances. They will continue to give even if it hurts them. This is in fact an instruction to the corporate that even if they are not generating profit enough, it is part of their duty to take care of the society and to continue to do good to the society.

Corporate are made of individuals. If every individual understands his or her responsibility towards the society, and fulfils it irrespective of one's own capabilities, where is the need for us to have a law insisting for CSR?

Couplet (Kural) No. 515 reads as follows:

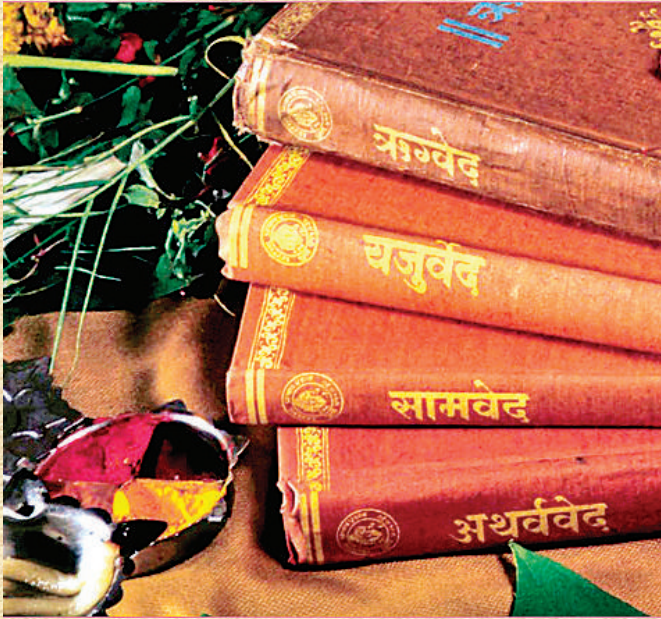
*Arintarric ceykirparku allal vinaitan  
Cirantanenru evarpar ranru*

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

५१५ बुध्वोपायं विघ्नराशिमपोहा कृत्तिसाधने ।  
समर्थमन्तरा नान्यं राजकार्यं निवेशयेत् ॥

English translation of the above couplet reads as follows:

Work should be entrusted to men of expert knowledge and



painstaking application,  
And not merely to the king's favourites.

Do we need an explanation for this? How better one can explain the importance and appointment of Key Managerial Personnel in a corporate environment than Thiruvalluvar? The King should appoint only men with proven ability and knowledge to important positions. We can easily replace the reference to the King to the Corporate and all the rules and regulations relating to Key Managerial Personnel is described just in two lines with eight words.

In couplet 466, Thiruvalluvar says:

*Ceyttakk aalla ceyakketum ceytakka  
Ceyyamai yanum ketum.*

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

४६६ अकर्तव्यस्य करणं कर्तव्यस्य विसर्जनम् ।  
इत्येददुभयं नृणां विनाशास्पदमिष्यते ॥

English translation of the above couplet reads as follows:

Doing what is forbidden as well as not doing the obligatory,  
Are both equally ruinous courses.

A similar version is also found in Gita. "Performance of action is superior to renunciation of action" (Gita: V,2).

"Do thou always perform actions, which are obligatory, without attachment, by performing action without attachment, one attains to the highest." (Gita, III 19)

This is the essence of Corporate Governance. Be transparent. Display all your efforts. Do what is to be done under law. Do not avoid your actions thinking of better results or actions. It will be ruinous for any corporate today to avoid what it is expected to perform under the law.

Corporate Governance is not just adhering to the statutory

Governance is using the available resources effectively and to ensure that necessary resources are available before embarking on any action so as not to waste the other available resources. This is possible only with proper planning, analysis of financial viability and economic feasibility. When an action is done with proper planning, it is well began and will result in growth for the organisation.

obligations and laws of the land. It includes proper analysis and usage of the available resources for better achievement and higher results systematically for effective performance of Management.

In couplet 675 Thiruvalluvar says:

*Porul karuvi kaalam vinai itanotu aintum  
Irutira ennic ceyal*

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

६७५ द्रव्यकालक्रियाहेतुस्थलानामनुकूलताम् ।  
पञ्चानापि विस्पष्टं बुद्ध्या कार्यं विधीयताम् ॥

English translation of the above couplet reads as follows:

Resources, means and action-plan as well as time and place  
are the five factors,  
which need to be considered and cleared, before embarking  
on action

Governance is using the available resources effectively and to ensure that necessary resources are available before embarking on any action so as not to waste the other available resources. This is possible only with proper planning, analysis of financial viability and economic feasibility. When an action is done with proper planning, it is well began and will result in growth for the organisation.

In continuation of the above in couplet 676 Valluvar says, "Before commencing any action, it is wise to consider in depth the objective, obstacles, as well as benefits or reactions on completion. Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

६७६ क्रियासम्बन्धिनो यत्नान् विघ्नान् सम्भावितान् तथा ।  
अन्ते महाफलप्राप्तिं त्रयं बुद्ध्या क्रियां कुरु ॥

Very true! This holds good not only for individuals in their personal life but also for Corporate. What we need to understand is that any decision by a Corporate should be based on proper planning, analysis of good that may result for the stakeholders. Ultimately, the interest of the stakeholders should be kept high. This is the true Corporate Governance. Good governance is possible only when good resources are used appropriately and at appropriate time. Employing the right people is very important for an organisation in achieving

its objectives. Thiruvalluvar knows the importance of employing the right people at the right place. Therefore, he has dedicated one full chapter with ten couplets on "Employment of chosen men". In couplet No.511, he says:

*Nanmaiyaum timaiyaum naadi nalampurinta  
Thanmaiyaan alap patum.*

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

५११ शुभाशुभे परामृश्य शुभकार्येककारिणम् ।  
पुरुषं योजयेत् कार्ये निभयं पृथिवीपतिः ॥

Everybody is good unless proved otherwise is universally accepted. In the above couplet, Valluvar says that on assessing the good and evil that men do, the choice for public service, will be only on the basis of their good performance. Performance decides the purpose of existence in a corporate world. Either employment of people or any resources, if does not provide the desired result or yield then it is of no use and deserves to be discarded. Hence, it is essential to have not just a performance but good performance that ensures proper governance of the resources.

How one can contribute for achieving the highest level of governance? There could be hundreds of answers for this. Buddha says, "Be detached from worldly desires." J. Krishnamurthy says, "There is nothing called detachment. One is always attached to something." According to him being attached to a good thought would be far better than being thoughtless. Thiruvalluvar in couplet No.513 says that the four essential and vital qualifications for selection of a person for a highest post be it in government or in a body corporate are "Affectionate loyalty, discriminating mind, decisiveness and freedom from desires". If the leader is clean minded so be his subjects.

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

५१३ ज्ञानं प्रीतिरकालुष्यं निराशा धनसञ्चये ।  
गुणैरेतः समायुक्तो राजकार्ये नियोज्यताम् ॥

Several Corporate frauds, scams and scandals have occurred in the recent past not only in India but worldwide, raising the

“ The object of any business is to make profit legally. Valluvar says that, yes, acquiring wealth is important, what is more important is equitable distribution of it among the stakeholders and for public good. This is the spirit of CSR that is being discussed today. Nobody could remain rich at the cost of others. Wealth, if distributed among the public multiplies faster and helps faster growth of economy.

anxiety of the regulators as well as the common men about the way governance is practiced in Corporate world. Each of such frauds and scams involves theft of crores of rupees belonging to lakhs of people who suffer from unemployment, sickness and loss of investment by small and gullible investors. If such frauds are not controlled, they do have the potential to spoil the economy. It is in this context the importance of Thirukural is felt. Thirukural is abound with necessary guidance for good governance not only in one's personal life but also for corporate, government, people with authority, in fact in almost every field of life.

A good corporate governance principles should aim at generating, nurturing and sustaining wealth not just to the corporate but to all its stakeholders and equally distribute it among all. In Chapter 39, couplet 385, Valluvar says:

*Iyartralum eetalum kattalum kaaththa  
Vaghuthalum valladhu arasu*

Translation of the same in Sanskrit would read as:

३८५ कुर्याद्धनार्जनोपायमार्जयते पालयेद्धनम् ।  
रक्षितं ख यथाशास्त्रं दद्यात् पात्रेषु भूमिप ॥

The English translation of the above couplet reads as follows:

A great king will be able to acquire wealth, develop and guard it; for equitable distribution on State expenditure and public good.

Though in the above couplet the reference is made to the King and the Government, we can directly connect it to a Corporate and its top management team. The object of any business is to make profit legally. Valluvar says that, yes, acquiring wealth is important, what is more important is equitable distribution of it among the stakeholders and for public good. This is the spirit of CSR that is being discussed today. Nobody could remain rich at the cost of others. Wealth, if distributed among the public multiplies faster and helps faster growth of economy.

Thiruvalluvar has written hundreds of such couplets through which he insists for self-governance, trust, honesty, transparency, goodwill, support to needy etc. Let us be clear and understand very clearly that governance is not new to us. Our cultures, our society, our way of life are all built around governance. Our granny stories are another example of how goodness, respect to others not barring animals, and lot of other good inter personnel qualities were injected into our mind / brain for us to lead a life governed by our own principles. Today, we are required to remind ourselves the need for transparency, goodwill, good governance through various legislations in view of the fact that, we have come a long way from the simple life style that our forefathers followed.

*My sincere thanks to:*

1. Rev. G U Pope, Rev. W H Drew and Rev. John Lazarus from the book "Thirukkural" published by M/s. Kumaran Publications, Chennai.
2. Dr. S M Diaz author of "Tirukkural with English Translation and Explanation".
3. All authors who have translated Thirukkural into Sanskrit.