

A Review of Vallalar's Principles, Kindness (Jeevakarunyam) and Shrine of True Wisdom

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Abstract: This paper reviews about the Vallalar's principles (Saint Ramalinga Adigalar also known as Tiru.Arut Prakasa Vallalar or Vallal Peruman), the significance of Jeevakarunyam, which translates to compassion or mercy towards all living beings and shrine of true wisdom. It emphasizes the natural enlightenment that stems from recognizing the inherent connection among living beings. Just as human compassion leads to the cultivation of mercy, divine enlightenment arises from an awareness of this intrinsic bond. Practical experience shows that such spiritual grace cannot be attained by any other means, underscoring that the grace of the Almighty is accessible only through a disciplined life imbued with sincere compassion. Saint Ramalinga Adigalar articulated the principles of Jeevakarunyam in three key writings within Thiruvartupa. This paper is dedicated to exploring his divine teachings, which guide us toward spiritual transformation and godliness.

Keywords: Jeevakarunyam, Compassion, St. Ramalinga Adhigalar, Vallalar.

1. Introduction

In this context, Jeevakarunyam embodies two key principles. First, it advocates for compassion by assisting those in distress due to hunger, thirst, illness, ignorance, poverty, and fear. Second, it promotes non-violence by abstaining from killing animals and consuming meat. Vallalar's primary emphasis lies on addressing starvation and alleviating hunger. The significance of Jeevakarunyam is underscored by its role as the ethical cornerstone of various religions, linking compassion to higher spiritual experiences. It symbolizes a culture rooted in kindness and respect for all living beings, representing the divine within every heart. This philosophy is eloquently conveyed through Vallalar's prose in *Thiruvartupa* (Refer to Fig. 1). Fig. 1. Thiruvartupa written by St. Arut Prakasa Vallalar.

2. The Mission of the Saint Vallalar

The central theme of this mission is the commitment to selfless service to humanity, a principle emphasized across all religious traditions by saints. For Vallalar, compassion is the foundation of higher spiritual experience. He believed that those who love most deeply serve best, and that divine love manifests only in the human spirit, not in other creatures. When an individual develops profound compassion for others, they

prepare themselves to receive God's grace. Without this grace, enduring love for God is unattainable. Vallalar introduced the concept of *Jeevakarunyam*—deep compassion—and discussed its importance in seven parts, though only three are currently available. Mercy, as a fundamental attribute of saints, is reflected in his poetic appeals to the Almighty. Compassionate service, according to him, encompasses two key dimensions: alleviating hunger, which he regarded as the most vital, and providing other forms of assistance that extend life and well-being. Vallalar stressed that individuals should help others through their earnings and physical efforts, and if unable, they should at least offer prayers. He highlighted the need for financial prudence, particularly among low-income families, who are often mindful not only of their own needs but also those who depend on them for sustenance.



Fig. 1. Thiruvartupa written by Tiru.Arut Prakasa Vallalar

Vallalar criticized the wealthy for extravagant spending on lavish family ceremonies, urging them instead to focus on feeding the needy. He believed that everyone, regardless of financial status, could contribute to alleviating suffering according to their means. He condemned the indifference of the rich, who, while indulging in grand feasts and entertainment, often overlook the hungry and destitute in their midst. Vallalar's own experiences, expressed through his poetry, demonstrate his unwavering commitment to selfless service. He condemned the so-called "great men" who, despite their miraculous acts, lacked

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compassion and deceived the public, arguing that without mercy, such acts were mere illusions and did not reflect true spiritual wisdom (*Gnani*). Vallalar led by example, making selfless service his guiding principle. In one of his poems, he revealed that through merciful service and the resulting grace, he attained knowledge of God. This hands-on approach to compassion was not just his teaching but his life's mission.

3. The Act of Non-Killing and Not Taking Flesh

Vallalar fervently condemned the sacrifice of life in the name of various deities, a practice that has been entrenched in religious traditions since ancient times. Throughout history, village deities were often appeased through the ritualistic slaughter of cattle and poultry, a custom that eventually spread across the country. The animals sacrificed were then consumed, with people mistakenly viewing the act as a divine offering. This practice, far from diminishing in modern times, has grown significantly, with societal norms increasingly associating meat consumption with health, strength, and courage. In direct opposition to this deeply ingrained custom, Vallalar initiated a movement to advocate for non-violence and vegetarianism. Even from a young age, he had been a staunch opponent of killing animals for food. His response to this pervasive practice was the formation of a unique path, which he called the 'Samarasa Shuddha Sanmarga Sangam.' This path represents a virtuous way of living that upholds the sanctity of life and rejects violence in any form. Notably, Vallalar's philosophy transcended religious boundaries, offering a moral framework acceptable to all faiths. He was also deeply opposed to hunting, viewing it as an unnecessary taking of life.

Vallalar's views on meat-eating were grounded in his spiritual philosophy. He equated the consumption of meat with the killing of innocent beings, asserting that such acts were detrimental to spiritual growth. According to his teachings, meat consumption fosters lower instincts and hinders the development of higher consciousness. He argued that true spiritual realization, including the awareness of God's eternal presence, was impossible for those who consumed flesh. The soul of a meat-eater, he believed, was too clouded by lower tendencies to perceive the inner self, which is essential for attaining spiritual enlightenment. The saint thus strongly advocated for vegetarianism as the only true path to realizing divine grace. His insistence on a plant-based diet was not merely a lifestyle choice but a moral and spiritual imperative. Vallalar foresaw that over time, his teachings would resonate beyond his immediate cultural context. Indeed, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift, particularly among Westerners who were once devoted to non-vegetarian diets. Many have begun embracing vegetarianism, perhaps fulfilling the saint's vision of a world where compassion and non-violence prevail.

Today, several organizations continue to uphold Vallalar's ideals, hosting annual programs that promote vegetarianism and non-violence in alignment with his teachings. These initiatives, which seek to raise awareness and foster compassion, reflect the enduring relevance of Vallalar's message in modern society. His prophetic call for a world where life is preserved and respected remains a beacon for those striving for spiritual growth and

ethical living.

4. Importance of Vegetarian Food

Numerous studies have concluded that a vegetarian diet reduces the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. For example, a meta-analysis by Huang *et al.* (2012) found that vegetarians had a 29% lower mortality rate from ischemic heart disease compared to non-vegetarians. Similarly, the EPIC-Oxford study (Appleby *et al.*, 2016) showed that vegetarians had a lower body mass index (BMI) and lower cholesterol levels than meat-eaters. A well-balanced vegetarian diet is nutrient-dense, providing essential vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants. According to a study by Clarys *et al.* (2014), vegetarian diets tend to provide higher intakes of fruits, vegetables, and dietary fiber, while being lower in saturated fats, which contributes to better overall health outcomes. Beyond personal health, the adoption of vegetarian diets is linked to lower environmental impact. Tilman and Clark (2014) highlight that shifting to plant-based diets could reduce global mortality by 6-10% and food-related greenhouse gas emissions by 29-70% by 2050. This aligns with ethical perspectives on minimizing harm to animals, as discussed by Singer (1975) in his foundational work on animal rights.

5. Promotion of Universal Love and Brotherhood

Vallalar's call for universal brotherhood mirrors the sentiments of contemporary humanistic and spiritual leaders. Thich Nhat Hanh (2012), in *The Art of Communicating*, emphasizes the importance of treating everyone with compassion, stating that "we are all interconnected through our shared humanity." Similarly, Swami Vivekananda's vision of "universal brotherhood" stressed that no individual or group is inherently superior to another. The idea that past deeds influence current suffering is echoed in the concept of karma, which appears in various spiritual traditions. For instance, in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies, karma is seen as a fundamental principle that connects ethical actions with future consequences (Flood, 1996).

6. Right to Life for All

Vallalar's assertion that all beings have the right to life is consistent with the teachings of many spiritual and religious leaders. For example, Mahatma Gandhi's principle of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) emphasized respect for all living beings, regardless of status, caste, or creed (Gandhi, 1940). In his works, Gandhi advocated for a life of simplicity and compassion, rooted in the idea that all humans are equal before God. The concept of interconnected souls is a common thread in many spiritual traditions. In Christianity, for instance, the doctrine of the "Body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) states that all individuals are members of a single, unified spiritual body. This aligns with Vallalar's teaching that harming others is equivalent to harming oneself since all souls share a divine origin.

7. Realization of Soul Awareness

Vallalar's emphasis on transcending physical distinctions to recognize the soul's innate connection to others can be compared to the teachings of mystics like Rumi, who wrote about the illusion of separation in the material world and the unity of all souls under God (Schimmel, 1975). This spiritual awareness, often referred to as *tawhid* in Sufism, underscores the interconnectedness of all beings. Many philosophers and spiritual leaders have similarly argued that ignorance obscures the recognition of universal brotherhood. In *The Republic*, Plato describes ignorance as the root of societal discord, while knowledge of the *Form of the Good* leads to enlightenment and harmony (Plato, trans. 1992). Vallalar's teachings align with this idea, as he posits that soul awareness leads to compassion and a deeper understanding of divine will.

The belief that all souls are manifestations of divine essence is echoed in various theological traditions. In Vedanta philosophy, for example, the concept of *Atman* (the self) is understood to be a part of *Brahman* (the ultimate reality), suggesting that all living beings share a divine source (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Vallalar's teachings of interconnectedness and compassion thus resonate deeply with the idea of the unity of all life under the influence of the divine. The literature examples highlight how Vallalar's teachings on vegetarianism, universal love, and the interconnectedness of souls are reflected in both contemporary scientific findings and timeless spiritual traditions.

8. Anmaneya Urimai

A. The Saint's Vision of Equal Rights for All Souls

The concept of *Anmaneya Urimai* (Fig. 2) emphasized by the saint reflects his belief in the equal right of all souls to love and compassion. This principle signifies that all beings, regardless of their status, caste, or creed, are entitled to the same divine love and grace. Despite living in a period of significant political unrest across India, the saint chose not to engage directly in political movements. Instead, his efforts were focused on a more profound, moral revolution through his writings and teachings. In his poems, the saint frequently criticizes the existing government for its lack of sympathy toward the poor and marginalized. His vision was for a government composed of compassionate and just individuals who would work toward the welfare of the people. Rather than engaging in the political conflicts of the time, his ideal was a spiritual government driven by the values of kindness and equity.

B. Early Literary Work and Compassionate Message

In his early prose work, *Manumurai Kanda Vasagam*, the saint demonstrated his inherent compassion, which he nurtured from a young age. The text reveals his inner calling to spread this sense of compassion among people, especially the younger generation. Written at the request of a schoolteacher, the prose was designed specifically for children, as the saint believed that young, delicate hearts were most receptive to messages of love and empathy. The work served as an educational tool to instill humanitarian values in children. Through this early text, the

saint aimed to foster a sense of shared humanity, encouraging the next generation to grow up with compassion at the forefront of their actions. While the text was outwardly aimed at young readers, its underlying message was a subtle call to awaken broader societal awareness of kindness and equality.

C. Indirect Humanitarian Influence

The saint's approach was notably indirect but powerful in spreading his humanitarian ideals. Rather than directly confronting the socio-political issues of his time, he used literature as a vehicle to subtly influence the collective conscience of society. His work sought to instill a spirit of compassion, which he believed was fundamental to any social or political change. By focusing on moral education through his writings, particularly for children, the saint hoped to plant the seeds of a compassionate society, which would later bear fruit in the form of equitable governance and social justice. His vision transcended the immediate political context, aiming for a long-term transformation based on universal love, equality, and the fundamental rights of every soul.



Fig. 2. Anmaneya Urimai

9. Story Behind the Sahtya Dharama Sala

Concerns have often been raised regarding the expenditure of funds for the welfare of the poor. While some individuals voluntarily contribute to such causes, the saint observed that many do so merely to gain social approval rather than from genuine compassion. He emphasized that such superficial acts cannot be considered as true mercy. According to the saint, only deep compassion, stemming from inner devotion, holds significant value.

After reflecting on these issues, the saint envisioned the creation of a space where all people, regardless of status, could live without the threat of hunger. This desire led to the founding of a free home. His disciples, aware of the saint's profound wish, took immediate steps to make his vision a reality. In Vadalur, villagers, inspired by the saint's mission, donated approximately 80 kanis of land for the project.

A. The Establishment of Sathya Dharma Sala

Construction of the *Sathya Dharma Sala* began promptly, under the direct guidance of the saint. The building was completed swiftly, and the inauguration ceremony took place on a Thursday, the 11th day of Vaikasi, in the Tamil year of

Prabhava (1867). At 6:00 a.m., in the presence of the saint, the stove was lit for the first time, marking the beginning of a tradition that continues to this day (Fig. 3). Thousands of people were fed over the course of three days during the inauguration ceremony. Following the saint's instructions, the stove that was lit on that day has continued to burn uninterrupted, symbolizing the ongoing provision of food for all who need it. Remarkably, the facility has never faced a shortage of food grains, thanks to the generous and voluntary donations from the public.

B. Ongoing Legacy and Significance

Each year, on the day of *Poosam* in the month of *Thai* in the Tamil calendar, thousands of people gather at Sathya Dharma Sala to contribute according to their capacity, fulfilling the saint's dream of a world without hunger. Both the rich and the poor are fed equally, as per the saint's vision. The timing of the inauguration, down to the hours, days, and year, was seen as highly significant, symbolizing the coming of divine grace (*Arul*) to alleviate human suffering and bring about a state of eternal bliss. The Sathya Dharma Sala continues to stand as a testament to the saint's vision of compassion, equality, and mercy, providing nourishment and sustenance to all in need.



Fig. 3. Sathya Dharama Sala

10. Conclusion

This paper provides a comprehensive review of the principles outlined in *Jeevakarunya Ozhukam* and offers the following conclusions:

Achieving divine bliss requires feeding the hungry, showing mercy to the suffering, preventing acts of violence, and cultivating an attitude of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in both thought and deed. Most importantly, all human actions must be approached with deep compassion. Arutprakasa Vallalar emphasized that merely witnessing suffering should move us deeply. The sight of people in distress should weaken our hearts with compassion. Only when this genuine compassion arises can we truly realize the natural manifestation of God, leading to spiritual immortality.

Vallalar proposed a set of guidelines known as the "Jeevakarunyam Discipline," which include:

- 1) It is essential to give food to a truly hungry person without hesitation. This act of kindness should be practiced daily, ensuring at least one person is helped each day.
- 2) The understanding of 'Jeevakarunyam' must come through personal experience and direct realization, as Vallalar intended.
- 3) Vallalar stated that adhering to this discipline would provide further spiritual guidance, which he referred to as "ஆன்ம இயற்கை விளக்கம்" (Anma Iyarkai Vilakkam), or the illumination of the soul's natural essence.
- 4) The mysteries of compassion and spiritual practice are meant to be experienced firsthand, rather than merely studied or theorized.
- 5) Instead of focusing solely on research and development, it is recommended to prioritize food research studies, as the benefits of feeding the poor are immense. Vallalar elaborates on this in detail in his teachings on *Jeevakarunyam*.
- 6) The daily practice of feeding the hungry is not exclusive to individuals, but a universal routine that everyone, including Vallalar himself, must follow. This practice is a fundamental part of the saint's compassionate philosophy.

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