

Marriage Navigation: The Ethical Foundations and Political Realism of Tirukural and Arthaśāstra

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Abstract: This article embarks on an exploration of the moral, ethical, and political dimensions within the ancient texts *Tirukkural* and *Arthaśāstra*, unraveling profound insights into the societal fabric of their respective eras. Specifically, it delves into the nuanced portrayal of the concept of a wife in these revered texts, aiming to comprehend the cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts that have shaped their distinctive perspectives. Through a comparative lens applied to the concepts of a wife in *Tirukkural* and *Arthaśāstra*, a captivating interplay of cultural values, ethical considerations, and political pragmatism emerges. *Tirukkural*, renowned for its ethical teachings, establishes a moral benchmark within familial relationships, emphasizing virtues such as loyalty and compassion. Conversely, *Arthaśāstra*, a treatise on statecraft, introduces a political calculus to the notion of a wife, highlighting the strategic implications of marital alliances. Both texts, each in its unique manner, contribute significantly to our comprehension of the intricate complexities surrounding the concept of a wife in ancient Indian societies.

Keywords: Tirukkural, Arthaśāstra, Ancient India, Cultural Values, Philosophical Perspectives, Statecraft, Economic Policy, Military Strategy, Political Science, Righteousness, Ethical Conduct, Marriage, Polygamy, Roles of Husband and Wife, Virtuous Family Life, Ancient Indian Societies, Relationships in Ancient India

1. Introduction

The *Arthaśāstra* and *Tirukkural*, originating from distinct cultural and historical contexts, serve as invaluable repositories of the philosophical and societal values prevalent in ancient India. Composed around the 4th century BCE, the *Arthaśāstra* is a comprehensive ancient Indian treatise encompassing statecraft, economic policy, military strategy, and political science. Traditionally attributed to Cāṇakya (also known as Kautilya or Viṣṇugupta), an advisor to Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Maurya Empire, the text pragmatically guides rulers on governance, law, diplomacy, economics, and military strategy for the stability and prosperity of the state.

On the other hand, the *Tirukkural*, attributed to Thiruvalluvar, an ancient Tamil poet and philosopher, is believed to have been written around the same period as the *Arthaśāstra*, approximately 2,000 years ago. The text is organized into three books—Aram (virtue), Porul (wealth), and Inbam (love). The *Tirukkural* primarily focuses on ethical and moral principles of the human life. While the third book, Inbam, touches upon the theme of love and relationships, including marriage, its emphasis is on individual conduct and ethical values rather than statecraft.

The *Arthaśāstra* is renowned for its pragmatic and utilitarian approach to politics, advocating realpolitik and addressing various facets of statecraft. Conversely, the *Tirukkural*, while not providing an extensive political or economic treatise like the *Arthaśāstra*, offers insights into various societal aspects. Known for its emphasis on virtue, righteousness, and ethical conduct, the *Tirukkural* delves into governance, justice, morality, and the significance of leading a righteous life.

Despite their differing primary focuses and content, both the *Arthaśāstra* and *Tirukkural* share common themes, underscoring the importance of justice, ethical conduct, and

societal well-being. Together, these texts significantly contribute to our understanding of ancient Indian thought, providing profound insights into political philosophy, governance, and moral principles.

Aspect	<i>Arthaśāstra</i>	<i>Tirukkural</i>
Origin	4th century BCE	Approximately 2,000 years ago
Authorship	Traditionally attributed to Cāṇakya (Kautilya or Viṣṇugupta)	Attributed to Thiruvalluvar
Content	Statecraft, economic policy, military strategy, political science	Ethical and moral principles, divided into Aram, Porul, Inbam
Emphasis	Pragmatic and utilitarian approach to politics	Focus on virtue, righteousness, ethical conduct
Themes	Governance, law, diplomacy, economics, military strategy	Governance, justice, morality, righteous living
Political Approach	Advocates realpolitik and addresses various facets of statecraft	Limited political and economic treatise, societal insights
Significance	Guides rulers for stability and prosperity of the state	Emphasizes individual conduct and ethical values
Common Themes	Justice, ethical conduct, societal well-being	Justice, ethical conduct, societal well-being
Contribution	Significant insights into political philosophy and governance	Profound insights into moral principles and societal aspects

This table provides a structured comparison between the *Arthaśāstra* and *Tirukkural*, highlighting their differences and commonalities in terms of origin, authorship, content, emphasis, themes, political approach, significance, and contribution.

2. Society

Within both the *Arthasāstra* and *Tirukkural*, the concept of society is a focal point, yet each text uniquely approaches it through the lens of its distinct cultural, historical, and philosophical perspective.

2.1 Concept of Society in *Arthasāstra*

The *Arthasāstra*, offering a comprehensive perspective, delves into social order, justice, economic policies, education, and the overall well-being of the populace. Rooted in ancient Indian thought, the text acknowledges societal divisions into varnas—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—assigning specific duties and responsibilities to each class. With a primary focus on statecraft and governance, the *Arthasāstra* outlines the ruler's duties, the importance of law and order, and the role of the state in ensuring citizen well-being.

The *Arthasāstra* places considerable emphasis on ethical conduct for householders, advocating for honesty, integrity, and adherence to dharma across various life aspects. Recognizing the interdependence of household stability and state well-being, it introduces *grhasthāśramadharmā* within a broader framework encompassing other life stages—Brahmacarya, Vānaprastha, and Sanyāsa. Serving as a comprehensive guide, the text navigates personal, social, and political conduct within the expansive context of dharma and statecraft.

Addressing matters of social order, the text discusses the regulation of prostitution and the management of courtesans, aiming to maintain harmony within society. The text emphasizes the importance of social order and hierarchy¹.

गृहस्थस्यस्वधर्माजीवस्तुल्यैरसमानर्षिभिर्वैवाह्यामुतुगामित्वदेव्यत्रिति
थिभृत्येषुत्यागःशेषभोजनं॥(अ.शा-०१.३.०९)
ब्रह्मचारिणःस्वाध्यायोऽग्निकार्यभिषेकौभैक्षव्रतत्वमाचार्येप्राणान्तिकी
वृत्तिस्तदभावेगुरुपुत्रेसब्रह्मचारिणिवा॥(अ.शा-०१.३.१०)
वानप्रस्थस्यब्रह्मचर्यभूमौशय्याजटाजिनधारणमग्निहोत्राभिषेकौ
देवतापित्रतिथिपूजावन्यश्चाहारः॥(अ.शा-०१.३.११)
परिव्राजकस्यसंयतेन्द्रियत्वमनारम्भोनिष्क्रान्तत्वंसङ्गत्यागो
भैक्षव्रतमनेकत्र
अरण्यवासोवाह्याभ्यन्तरंचशौचम्॥(अ.शा-०१.३.१२)
सर्वेषामहिंसासत्यंशौचमनसूयानृशंस्यंक्षमाच॥(अ.शा-०१.३.१३)

The *Arthasāstra* recommends that the monarch uphold a meticulously organized society to secure the prosperity and welfare of the state. The well-being of the populace is deemed pivotal to the success of the state, prompting the king to implement policies and practices fostering the overall welfare of society. The text extensively deliberates on the significance of justice and the enforcement of law within the societal framework.

अनुग्रहपरिहारौ चेभ्यः कोशवृद्धिकरौ दद्यात्। कोशोपघातकौ वर्जयेत्
॥(अ.शा-०२.०१.१५)

अल्पकोशो हि राजा पौरजानपदानेव ग्रसते ॥(अ.शा-०२.०१.१६)
निवेशसमकालं यथागतकं वा परिहारं दद्यात् ॥(अ.शा-०२.०१.१७)

¹Arthasāstra- 1.3.1

निवृत्तपरिहारान् पितेवानुगृह्णीयात् ॥(अ.शा-०२.०१.१८)²

It delineates the responsibilities of the monarch in upholding *danḍa* (justice) and preserving law and order. The text deems economic policies as indispensable for societal well-being, dedicating a substantial portion to topics such as taxation, trade, agriculture, and the effective management of economic resources.

Acknowledging the pivotal role of education, the text expounds on the significance of teachers (*acharyas*) and educational institutions in imparting knowledge and skills to the younger generation. The maintenance of diplomatic relations and alliances with neighbouring states is deemed critical for the security and stability of the society overseen by the king. Additionally, the *Arthasāstra* underscores the importance of public morality, delving into the necessity for individuals to adhere to ethical principles and social norms.

2.2 Concept of Society in *Tirukkural*

While the *Tirukkural* may not offer an expansive political or economic treatise akin to the *Arthasāstra*, it does provide valuable insights into various facets of society. Thiruvalluvar, the author, underscores the foundational role of agriculture in sustaining both society and the livelihoods of its inhabitants. Within this framework, he accentuates the crucial importance of justice, portraying love as the minister of justice and emphasizing the pivotal role of fairness in societal harmony.

Moreover, Thiruvalluvar contemplates the significance of compassion and charity, proposing that acts of kindness are not only virtuous but also integral to the sustenance of life itself. Household duties, according to Thiruvalluvar, extend beyond personal realms to include active participation in economic activities. This involvement is seen as a means of contributing to the economic prosperity of the community, whether through trade, agriculture, or other productive endeavours.

In emphasizing compassion and charity once more, Thiruvalluvar underscores the divine and moral underpinnings of society. This Kural, or verse, illuminates the inherent connection between virtuous living and the sustainable foundation of society, emphasizing the perpetual importance of virtue and righteousness.

Aravinaiyaatheninkollamaikoral
Piravinaiellantharum³
Pagutthundupalluyirombuthalnoolor
Thogutthavarrulellanthalai⁴
Onraaganallathukollamaimarruathan
Pinsaarappoyyaamainanru⁵

In a broader context, the *Tirukkural* serves as a steadfast advocate for ethical conduct across diverse aspects of life. It imparts the timeless wisdom of embracing honesty, integrity,

²Arthasāstra-2.1

³Thirukkural:321

⁴Ibid: 322

⁵Ibid: 323

and the adherence to dharma (righteousness) in both personal and social interactions. While the text doesn't explicitly delineate duties associated with different life stages, as some other Indian philosophical texts do, its verses offer enduring insights into ethical living and virtuous conduct. The principles articulated in the *Tirukkural* are not confined by life stages; instead, they resonate with individuals in various phases, including householders. The text underscores the paramount importance of leading a life guided by moral and ethical values.

Within this ethical framework, Thiruvalluvar, the author, accentuates the foundational role of agriculture in society and the sustenance of its people. Additionally, Thiruvalluvar highlights the pivotal importance of justice, portraying love as the minister of justice and underscoring the essential role of fairness in societal harmony. These ethical precepts contribute to the comprehensive ethical fabric espoused by the *Tirukkural*, shaping a philosophy that integrates individual conduct with broader societal well-being.

ArRRrammarraikkumperumaichirrumaithaan
*Kurr rramekoorividum*⁶
Kadanenpanallavaiyellamkadanarrinthu
*Chaanraanmairerkolpavarkku*⁷
Kunanalanjchchaanrrorpirranalam
*Ennalaththullathoومانrru*⁸

The *Tirukkural* meticulously delves into ethical and moral principles that govern individual behaviour within the intricate fabric of society. It expounds on virtues, righteousness, and the paramount importance of leading a virtuous life. Emphasizing family harmony and social cohesion, the *Tirukkural* offers guidance on fostering relationships within the family, placing a strong emphasis on love, loyalty, and ethical conduct. The text further underscores the critical role of compassion and charity, urging individuals to actively contribute to society's well-being through acts of kindness.

In stark contrast, the *Arthaśāstra* takes on a more politically pragmatic stance. It acknowledges polygamy, permitting kings to form marital alliances with other rulers strategically. While *Tirukkural* profoundly influences Tamil culture and morality, shaping the ethical foundation of society, *Arthaśāstra*'s impact is rooted more in the political and strategic aspects of governance. Marital alliances, central in state affairs, play a significant role within this political treatise. While the *Arthaśāstra* provides a comprehensive guide to statecraft and governance, the *Tirukkural* places a greater emphasis on individual conduct within society, championing moral and ethical values. Both texts, however, converge in their recognition of the fundamental importance of social order, justice, and ethical conduct for the overall well-being of society.

3. Family

Both the *Arthaśāstra* and *Tirukkural* engage with the concept of family, although they do so within their distinct cultural and philosophical frameworks.

3.1 Concept of Family in *Arthaśāstra*

The *Arthaśāstra* recognizes the family as a vital component of society, viewing it alongside the village and the guild as integral units contributing to social order.⁹ The text delves into guidance on inheritance rules, specifying the distribution of property and wealth among family members post the head of the family's demise. It underscores the importance of preserving family wealth and facilitating a seamless transfer of assets.¹⁰ This perspective positions family stability as crucial for the overall well-being of the state. It touches upon the macro-level governance of family affairs, emphasizing domestic harmony and advising the king to prevent disputes within families¹¹. Acknowledging the significance of dharma in individual conduct, the *Arthaśāstra*, while not explicitly addressing the role of a husband, implies a broader ethical framework extending to familial responsibilities.

Moreover, the text, while primarily focused on political and administrative matters, recognizes the ruler's responsibility to set an example of proper conduct in family life. It emphasizes the king's duties, indirectly influencing family life by maintaining order and justice in the state. The text allows for polygamy in the context of rulers, presenting rules regarding inheritance and the treatment of children born to different queens.¹² It highlights the significance of efficient household management, implying shared responsibilities for maintaining order and prosperity in the household, including managing resources and relationships. Although not explicitly focusing on husbands, the *Arthaśāstra* suggests that individuals, especially within familial roles, should actively contribute to the well-being of society.¹³

3.2 Concept of Family in *Tirukkural*

Conversely, the concept of "grhasthāśramadharmā" in the *Tirukkural* pertains to the duties and virtues associated with the householder's stage of life. Although the *Tirukkural* lacks specific life stages, it provides ethical guidance applicable to householders, emphasizing harmony within the family. It extols virtues like love, understanding, and cooperation among family members, contributing to a peaceful and supportive family environment. The *Tirukkural* dedicates verses to the qualities and role of a husband, emphasizing love, humility, loyalty, and virtuous conduct, viewing the husband's responsibilities in maintaining a harmonious family life. The text underscores the importance of a virtuous husband and wife, considering them sources of pride for the family.

⁹*Arthaśāstra*- 1.4.1

¹⁰*Arthaśāstra* 3.1.18-21

¹¹*Ibid*-3.4.17.

¹²*Ibid*- 6.1.132

¹³*Ibid*- 1.15.1-8.

⁶*Ibid*: 980

⁷*Ibid*: 981

⁸*Ibid*: 982

Vaiyathulvaazvaanguvaazpavanvaanurayum
Thaivatthulvaikkappadam¹⁴

The *Tirukkural* emphasizes love, humility, loyalty, and virtuous conduct as essential elements for a harmonious family life. It views the relationship between spouses as one of companionship, highlighting mutual support and understanding. The text advises that ruling households with love contributes to societal well-being.

Anbumaranumudaitthaayinilvaazkai
Panpumpayanumadu¹⁵

Furthermore, it stresses the importance of a virtuous wife as a source of pride for the family. Overall, the *Tirukkural* places a stronger emphasis on the ethical and moral aspects of family relationships, while the *Arthasāstra* introduces a political dimension, where the wife's role extends beyond the familial to the strategic, contributing to the ruler's political standing.

In summary, the *Arthasāstra* addresses the family within the broader framework of societal order and governance, emphasizing macro-level governance and the ruler's influence on family life. In contrast, the *Tirukkural* places a strong emphasis on the ethical and moral dimensions of family life, highlighting virtues and qualities essential for harmonious familial relationships. Both texts recognize the importance of mutual love, respect, and virtuous conduct in maintaining a harmonious family environment, understanding the significance of family for the well-being of individuals and society.

Aran enappattadeilvaazkai a *sthum*
Piranpazhippathillaayinnanru¹⁶

Aspect	Arthasāstra	Tirukkural
Recognition of Family	Vital component of society, integral to social order	Emphasis on duties and virtues associated with householders
Family Stability	Crucial for the overall well-being of the state	Contributes to a peaceful and supportive family environment
Governance of Family Affairs	Emphasizes macro-level governance, domestic harmony	Provides ethical guidance for harmonious family life
Ruler's Influence on Family	Recognizes the ruler's responsibility for proper family conduct	Views spouses' relationship as companionship and mutual support
Polygamy and Household Management	Allows polygamy in rulership context	Stresses the importance of a virtuous husband and wife, shared responsibilities
Ethical and Moral Dimensions	Political dimension with strategic implications	Strong emphasis on ethical and moral aspects of family life

This table highlights the distinctive approaches of the *Arthasāstra* and *Tirukkural* toward the concept of family, covering aspects such as recognition, inheritance, stability,

governance, ruler's influence, polygamy, household management, and ethical/moral dimensions.

4. Marriage

Both texts significantly contribute to our understanding of the complexities surrounding the role of a wife in ancient Indian societies. *Tirukkural's* ethical focus provides insights into fostering harmonious family life, while *Arthasāstra's* political perspective recognizes the strategic importance of marital alliances. Together, these venerable texts paint a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted nature of the institution of marriage, capturing the ethos and dynamics that shaped relationships in ancient India.

4.1. Concept of Marriage in *Arthasāstra*

विवाहपूर्वोव्यवहारः।
कन्यादानं कन्यामलङ्कृत्य ब्राह्मणो विवाहः।
सहधर्मचर्याप्राजापत्यः।
गोमिथुनादानादार्षः।¹⁷

The *Arthasāstra*, with a focus on the stability and well-being of the state, addresses the significance of family and marital relationships. In the context of ancient India, it recognizes the political advantages of strategic marriages for building alliances and strengthening diplomatic ties. The text's pragmatic approach toward statecraft is evident in its emphasis on strategic marriages, inheritance, and the family's role in governance. While discussing family life within the framework of political stability and social order, the *Arthasāstra* delves into the duty of householders to marry, have children, and ensure the continuity of the family lineage. The duty of individuals to marry and procreate is briefly mentioned, emphasizing the importance of fulfilling family responsibilities.

The *Arthasāstra*, in addressing family and marital relationships, places a significant emphasis on their repercussions for the stability and well-being of the state. Recognizing the potential political and diplomatic advantages of marriages, it advises rulers to strategically form alliances through matrimonial relationships, thereby fortifying political ties and building strategic alliances. The *Arthasāstra's* perspective on marriage is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural context of ancient India, emphasizing strategic marriages, inheritance, and the family's role in governance within the pragmatic and utilitarian approach of the text toward statecraft. While discussing certain aspects of family life, it predominantly does so within the framework of political stability and social order. Interpretations of these aspects should be considered within the historical context of the text. Additionally, the *Arthasāstra* underscores the significance of marriage and procreation, emphasizing the duty of householders to marry, have children, and ensure the continuity of the family lineage, as mentioned in *Arthasāstra*.¹⁸

Moreover, the *Arthasāstra* acknowledges polygamy, permitting a king to have more than one wife as a political

¹⁴*Tirukkural*-50

¹⁵*Tirukkural*-45

¹⁶*Ibid*-49

¹⁷*Arthasāstra*- 59

¹⁸*Arthasāstra*- 3.4.15.

strategy to form alliances with other rulers through matrimonial relationships. It delineates the duties of a queen, including ensuring the welfare of the king and the state, producing heirs, and actively participating in state affairs while maintaining virtuous conduct.¹⁹ The text further suggests that a king's happy married life contributes to his overall well-being, fostering harmonious family life as conducive to effective governance²⁰. Individuals are seen to have a duty to marry and procreate as part of the social order and the continuation of the family lineage, as highlighted in *Arthaśāstra*, with an emphasis on loyalty and fidelity in marriage.²¹

Acknowledging polygamy as a political strategy for forming alliances, the *Arthaśāstra* allows kings to have more than one wife. The text outlines the duties of a queen, highlighting her role in ensuring the welfare of the king, the state, and producing heirs. A happy married life is suggested to contribute to the king's well-being and effective governance. Additionally, the *Arthaśāstra* underscores the duty of individuals to marry and procreate, considering it integral to the social order and the continuation of the family lineage. Loyalty and fidelity in marriage are also emphasized.

4.2 Concept of Marriage in *Tirukkural*

Transitioning to the *Tirukkural*, it emphasizes faithfulness and commitment between spouses, offering moral and ethical guidance for individuals in marital relationships. Though not a comprehensive guide, the *Tirukkural*'s third book focuses on ethical conduct, love, and familial relationships, contributing to the broader social fabric.

*Anbumaranumudaitthaayinilyaazkai
Panpumpayanumadu*²²

Speaking highly of virtues associated with marital life, the *Tirukkural* emphasizes the importance of a harmonious and supportive relationship between spouses. Mutual respect and understanding are highlighted, encouraging couples to cherish and respect each other. The *Tirukkural* dedicates a section to virtues in married life, stressing the significance of mutual respect, loyalty, and fidelity between spouses.

*Ilvaazvaanenbaaniyalbudaiyamoovarkkum
Nallarrinninrathunai*²³
*Thaivamthozhaa al kozhanarrozahthezhavaal
Peyyenneppayum mazhai*²⁴
*Tharkaaththutharkondaarpenithagaisaanra
Sorkaatussorvilaal pen*²⁵
*Siraikaakkumkaapevanseyyumagalir
Niraikaakkumkaappethalai*²⁶

In essence, the *Tirukkural* and *Arthaśāstra*, emerging from distinct cultural and historical contexts, enrich our

understanding of ancient Indian thought. Together, they provide a comprehensive perspective on the complexities of societal values, individual ethics, and political pragmatism, offering enduring lessons that resonate across the ages. The exploration of the concept of a wife in *Tirukkural* and *Arthaśāstra* unveils a rich tapestry of cultural, ethical, and political considerations that profoundly influenced ancient Indian societies. Despite their distinctive perspectives, these texts collectively provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted role of a wife in a bygone era. Delving into the nuances of these venerable texts yields valuable insights into the intricate interplay between individual ethics, cultural values, and political calculations that shaped the institution of marriage in ancient India.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the *Tirukkural* and *Arthaśāstra* reveals a nuanced understanding of ancient Indian society, ethics, and governance. While the *Tirukkural* emphasizes the moral and ethical dimensions of individual conduct within the family and society, the *Arthaśāstra* introduces a pragmatic and strategic perspective, particularly in the realm of politics and statecraft. The *Tirukkural*, attributed to Thiruvalluvar, underscores the foundational role of ethical living, virtue, and familial harmony. It provides timeless insights into the virtues of love, loyalty, and compassion, highlighting the importance of leading a righteous life. In contrast, the *Arthaśāstra*, traditionally attributed to Cāṇakya, offers a comprehensive guide to statecraft and governance, acknowledging the strategic significance of marital alliances for political stability. While the *Tirukkural* advocates for ethical conduct across diverse aspects of life, with a strong focus on family values, the *Arthaśāstra* introduces a broader political dimension, where marriages are considered as diplomatic tools for securing alliances and maintaining order in the state. Polygamy, discussed in the *Arthaśāstra*, is seen as a strategic choice for rulers to strengthen political ties. Despite their differences, both texts converge on the fundamental importance of societal well-being, justice, and ethical conduct. The *Tirukkural* shapes a philosophy that integrates individual conduct with broader societal welfare, emphasizing compassion and charity. Simultaneously, the *Arthaśāstra*, with its realpolitik approach, underscores the role of the ruler in upholding justice, maintaining law and order, and ensuring economic policies that contribute to the prosperity of society. The comparison between *Tirukkural* and *Arthaśāstra* unravels a fascinating interplay of cultural values, ethical considerations, and political pragmatism surrounding the concept of a wife in ancient India. *Tirukkural*, placing emphasis on the moral and ethical dimensions of marital relationships, establishes the foundation for an ethical and virtuous family life, fostering a sense of moral duty and mutual respect. In contrast, *Arthaśāstra* introduces a calculated and strategic approach, acknowledging the political implications of matrimonial alliances. The text adds a layer of political realism, recognizing the instrumental role of marital ties in the broader context of statecraft.

¹⁹Ibid- 6.2.16.

²⁰Ibid- 3.4.9

²¹Ibid- 3.4.14

²²*Thirukkural*-45

²³*Thirukkural*-41

²⁴Ibid-55

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