The attitudes to sexual behaviour amongst the human beings have greatly varied in various parts of the world and various time of history. The fascinating history of sexuality has been masterly reviewed by Sussman (1980); this covers the earliest periods to the present day, with reference only to Jewish and Christian religions and to the American continent. Murdock (1960) has surveyed the prevalent notions and practices of sexuality in 250 cultures scattered throughout the world.

In the present study, the author tries to highlight the aspects of sexuality as found in one of the great Tamil books on ethics, Thirukural. This work has been translated into almost all Indian and most of the European languages, but very little is known about its author Thiruvalluvar. This work is traditionally timed to the second century A.D., the period of the Last "Sangam" (Academy) age of Tamil literature. Tradition has it that he was a weaver by profession; the name might have some reference to his profession as adviser to the king. It is difficult to guess his religion, whether Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism. But Nilakanta Sastrī, the eminent South Indian Historian (1975) feels that Thiruvalluvar was probably a learned Jaina divine. Contemporary thinking on morality, politi and sexuality in sanskrit is to be found in three major works; Manuṣmrīti, Kautiya's Arthaśāstra and Vatsayana's Kāmasūtra. The erudite Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar has combined all the three aspects of life in his single work Thirukural which consists of 1330 couplets arranged in three major sections: morals, polity and sexuality. There are important differences between the two linguistic works; Manuṣmrīti believes in differences based on birth, the Arthaśāstra believes that end justifies means in politics and the Kāmasūtra pays attention mostly to the physical aspects of love. Thiruvalluvar does not accept caste distinctions; wants purity and cleanliness in politics and as we shall see later, pays attention mostly to emotional aspects and constancy of love.

Thiruvalluvar is a firm believer in monogamous marriages; he would consider the tie between man and woman as permanent and irrevocable. He does not approve of extra marital relationships as could be seen in his denunciation of adultery in the chapter entitled "Against coveting another's wife".

Hatred, sin, fear and shame – these four stain adulterers ever more.......(146)

(The number within the brackets refers to the serial number of the couplet in the original work. The translated couplets are from the English version of Yogi Suddhānanda Bharati (1968). It should be remembered that the translations do not do adequate justice to the erudition of the Tamil author and mostly convey the ideas in a crude way bereft of beauty and depth)

Similarly he does not approve of sexual pleasure with prostitutes; This is once again condemned in strong terms in ano-
SEXUALITY IN THIRUKURAL

ther chapter entitled "Prostitutes": For gold, not love their tongue cajoles men are ruined by bangled belles.............. (911)
The false embrace of whores is like that of a damned corpse in the dark ...... (913)
(Note here is an allusion to necrophilia, a rare sexual deviation)

It should be mentioned here that this view is in variance with that prevalent in an earlier and later period in Tamil Nadu. It is interesting to recall the views of Godwin, the Englishman who considered “monogamous marriage an odious monopoly—couple should not be bound for a life time to feelings and attitudes experienced for a few moments” as quoted by Sussman vide supra. Another comparison could be made to the Oneida community founded by Noyes in the 19th century USA as quoted by Sussman vide supra.

Thiruvalluvar considers sexuality broadly under two headings “Courting in secrecy” and “Chaste married life”. As mentioned earlier, the permanent relationship between the man and the beloved and man and his spouse is treated mostly on the emotional level as union between the hearts rather than the physical union between the bodies. It is not that the importance of the latter union is underestimated. The sexual intercourse is not referred to directly. The role of all the five senses in sexual union is alluded to in the following couplet in the chapter “The blissful union”

On this bangled beauty dwell the joys of sight sound touch taste smell .......... (1101)
Joy is the fast embrace that doth not admit even air between both ............. (1108)

In the fore-play the beauty of the woman is extolled in many places:

“Beauty extolled”
The bamboo shouldered has pearl like smiles
Fragrant breath and lance like eyes (1113)
The soft flower and the swan’s down are like nettles to the feet of the fair... (1120)

A sensuous kiss between the lovers is alluded to here:

Like milk and honey the dew is sweet from her white teeth whose word is soft .......... (1121)

The next section deals with chaste wedded life in 18 chapters. This love, as described in Kural is continuous, constant and steadfast:

Love between me and this lady is like bond between soul and body .......... (1122)

Life with my jewel is existence
Death is is severance ................. (1124)

In Valluvar’s view the entire sexuality has to be enjoyed and learnt in the spouse:

As knowledge reveals past ignorance
So is the belle on love gets close...(1110)

The state of the body and mind when the lovers separate is described in various sections and we get an intricate and intensely emotional depressive state, insomnia, restlessness, wakefulness as mentioned below:

He comes; no sleep; he goes; no sleep;
This is the fate of eyes that weep...(1179)

Nights’ mercy lulls all souls to sleep keeping but me for companionship ............ (1168)

Crueller than that cruel he are midnight hours gliding slowly (1169)

The altered time – perception could be discerned in another couplet:

Mutual yearning
One day seems as sever to those who yearn return of distant spouse (1269)

The dreams that pervade the sleepless
night play a useful role in wish fulfilment:
In wakeful hours who sees me not
I meet in dreams and linger yet... (1213)

In dreams I enjoy his love – bliss
Who in wakeful hours I miss .... (1214)

Emotion of sadness gets expression in
the chapters on (1) Sad memories (2) Soliloquy and (3) Chiding the heart:

Dear life ebbs away by thought
of him who said we are one heart (1209)

Think of, O heart, some remedy
To cure this chronic malady ...... (1241)

Frets to gain and fears loss in gain
O my heart suffers ceaseless pain.. (1295)

Bodily wasting, eyes that see but do not perceive, pallor over the body are further changes.

(Organs waste)

These arms that swelled on nuptial day
Now shrunk proclaim "He is away"

(Body wasting)

Bereft of bracelets and old beauty
Arms tell the cruel's cruelty...... (1235)

(Eyes that see but do not perceive)

My eyes causing lust more than sea
Suffer that torture sleeplessly ..... (1175)

(Wailing over pallor)

He seized my beauty and modesty
Leaving pangs and pallor to me .... (1183)

Restlessness increasing as the dusk approaches is well described below:

(Eventide sigh)

Lover away, comes eventide
like slayer to field of homicide.... (1224)

Thiruvalluvar is not unaware of increasing the conjugal bliss by interrupting it with minor misunderstandings real or

feigned called “Love quarrels”.

Sulking is the salt of love: but
too much of it spoils the taste..... (1302)

(Sulking charm)

Sulking is lover's delight
Its delight grows when they write (1330)

Such are the glimpses into the love life of the Tamils, as pictured by Valluvar with the experience gained by the young lovers at their homes, they raise a family, and live a life rooted in simplicity, honesty and faith in God. The above views and attitudes to sexuality are acceptable to the average Indian. Sensible erotic literature is available in many of the Indian languages: Varaguna Rama Pandya’s Tamil translation of Kokkoba a sanskrit treatise and Chandraraja’s Madanatilaka in Kannada are two good examples.

With more and more acceptance of the Western ways and views of life and the liberalisation of our marital ways by the acceptance of divorce and abortion laws in our country, a certain amount of elasticity in our marriage and sex therapies might be necessary.

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