

APHORISMS OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN TIRUKKURAL OF TAMIL: TRACING THE 2000-YEAR-OLD ROOTS OF THE CONCEPTS OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES.

Prasannanshu

Abstract:

This paper attempts to bring the focus on the origin of the relatively young field of 'Communication Skills' or 'Business Communication' which has come to be an integral part of various professional and management courses around the globe over the past few decades. In the modern day world, communication skills are becoming increasingly important and a lot of academic effort is being put into developing, testing and standardizing the concepts in this field. However, not much effort appears to have gone into tracing the history of this particular branch of learning. Keeping this in view this paper attempts to trace the origin of the concept of Communication Skills in the ancient literature of India. A two thousand year old Tamil text, viz. Tirukkural written by Tiruvalluvar who is also known as Acharya Kundkunda Swami has been surveyed to unravel the thinking of those times regarding the concepts of 'communication'. This has been reviewed in light of the thoughts of modern scholars of the field. Some interesting pieces have been produced here that demonstrate that the field of Communication Skills is not without a history: people in India have for millennia been devoting attention to, and developing concepts for effective communications. Many such concepts and norms of communication have been handed down to us in the form of aphorisms or sayings. It is very likely that such norms must have been based upon earlier works, folk practices and in general must have been in tune with the wisdom of the time.

Keywords: Origin of Communication Skills, Tirukkural, Tamil, Tiruvalluvar, Acharya Kundkunda Swami, speech, verbal and non verbal communication. Listening, Feeling, Barriers.

Given the importance of communication in human life, it is not surprising that the study of communication skills has gained the attention of scholars right from the ancient days. Trenholm (1986) says, "For more than 25 centuries, communication inquiry has been an important part of human knowledge" and Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg xiii) point out that ancient educators held public speaking to be at the center of liberal education. Lucas (2007) also points out "Given the importance of public speaking, it's not surprising that it has been taught and studied around the globe for thousands of years."

Nearly two thousand years ago Kural was written in Tamil, a Dravidian language spoken in the southern part of India. It is prefixed with tiru (equivalent of Hindi shri) as a mark of reverence, as it is cherished by several religious groups as a sacred work.

Tirukkural was written by Tiruvalluvar who is also known as Acharya Kundkunda Swami.

Tirukkural is basically a treatise on good social and moral conduct, though the issues of politics are also taken up by it. The aphorisms have a timeless quality and many of the things said in them are as contemporary as they were two thousand years ago. Many

modern concepts of communication skills can be seen scattered across the Tirukkural. There are concepts which are not fashionable with the modern scholars of communication skills or which have an altogether different connotation in the Tirukkural, as compared to the modern usage.

A pertinent and inadvertent question in this context is: to what extent this traditional wisdom has influenced our modern knowledge and beliefs regarding communication? It is not sought to explore this aspect in detail here, as it would be outside the purview of the present work. It can be hoped that this issue be explored in more detail in future works.

Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that this is written evidence that even two thousand years ago people found the issue of communication skills to be important and serious thought was given to it. Further, norms and guidelines were laid down for communication in general and for communication in specific situations like, for one to one communication, diplomatic communication, and public speaking by specific people, viz. lay people, secret agents, diplomats and kings. It is very likely that such norms must

have been based upon earlier works, folk practices, and in general, must have been in tune with the wisdom of the time.

These aphorisms are an attempt to unite communication skills with good moral conduct and spirituality on the one hand and on the other, they aim at person and personality development. In this aspect, Tirukkural is a representative of ancient Indian thinking and literatures, in general.

Today, we study communication skills in the cold objective manner of science, this approach has its own obvious advantages, but perhaps the poetic and lyrical manner of the Tirukkural makes imbibing these principles much easier.

Modern scholars of communication skills recognize that several principles are the foundation stones upon which successful communication rests. For example Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 8-9) list clarity, completeness, correctness, and a manner of writing that saves readers' time as some of the criteria for good writing. Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg EC63) list clarity, completeness, conciseness, consideration (being considerate), courtesy and correctness as the principles of communication.

Paul Grice's maxims form a modern classical basis of these principles of communication, along with the cooperative principle given by him in 1975. The cooperative principle of Grice (1975) is, "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." The four maxims of Grice are named the Maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

According to the maxim of quantity, one should neither speak more or less, than what is required. The maxim of quality says that one should speak the truth and his or her facts should be verifiable. According to the maxim of relation, the contribution of the speaker should be relevant in the given context. The last maxim of manner means that the contribution of a communicator should be brief, clear, and orderly.

It is evident that brevity, appropriateness, clarity, and accuracy have a correspondence with the Gricean maxims of manner, relation, manner, quality respectively.

The Importance of Communication Skills

Tirukkural recognized the importance of language in its spoken as well as written forms: it says that the power to speak is a big boon that is independent of other boons (65-1), the use of written language is hailed by it by calling the numerals and alphabet the eyes of humanity (40-2) and Education as the eyesight (40-3).

The art of effective communication is extolled in Tirukkural, one whose speech is refined and whose language is confidence infusing shall control the world (65-8). Tirukkural also says that you may make those your enemy who carry a bow and arrow but never poke at those whose weapon is the tongue (88-2), thus recognizing the power of language.

Modern research in communication shows that a professional spends 70% to 80% of his/her working time communicating. (Mohan and Banerjee, 1990, pg 7); Adler and Elmhurst (2002, pg 6) note that communication skills are important not only for "people-oriented" careers, but for practically every kind of career. Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg EC4) call communication as the lifeblood of business.

It also says that the knowledge of the people who cannot explain well and convey their knowledge to others is useless (65-10), which interprets to mean that just studying specialized fields of knowledge like management, technology, medicine, etc. is not sufficient. It is very important that a student learns well the art and the science of communicating with others in order to achieve success. This goes well with the present day educational philosophy: students of fields like management and technology are taught communication skills as a part of the curriculum. Although, it remains a mystery to the author why students of medicine are kept bereft of such training in most of the institutions worldwide. It is needless to say how important it is for doctors to be an expert in all forms of communication, viz. language communication, nonverbal communication and paralinguistic communication as they have to deal with people, who are as much if not more, in need of understanding and sympathy as medical treatment.

Sweetness, Politeness, and Kindness

The importance of sweetness, politeness, and kindness in communicating is generally overlooked or they find a rather indirect reference in modern texts. This may be so because of the fact that defining con-

cepts like “sweetness” is a challenging task. Oxford Talking Dictionary defines “sweet” as “That which is pleasant to the mind or feelings”, Sweetness may be characterized indirectly as the speech which is not harsh, or which is courteous, pleasant, and positive. Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 8) say: “It is believed that a charming person has a pleasant voice.”

Kindness. (10-8) calls kind words as givers of happiness to the speaker. Kindness is quite similar to the concept of empathy and sympathy in communication as highlighted by many modern scholars. Trenholm (1986, pg 112) says, “The empathic communicator must be able to infer the feelings and needs of others.” Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 24) prescribe empathy to communicators as a way for understanding their audience. Bovee and Thill (1995, Pg 41) list empathizing with speakers as a method of overcoming listening barriers.

“Sweetness” of speech is emphasized repeatedly in Tirkkural e.g. in (10-2) and (10-5). It says that your speech should delight the listeners’ hearts (10-4), you should shun harsh words in favor of sweet ones (10-9) and (10-10).

In the matters of statecraft, too, communication skills are very important: A king who speaks harsh words, and who is unforgiving perishes soon (57-6), harsh words destroy a king’s authority (57-7). Sweetness of speech is one of the important attributes of an ambassador (69-5).

Politeness, according to Yule (1997) may “Involve ideas like being tactful, modest and nice to other people” it is defined by him as showing awareness of another person’s public self-image (or “face”).

Politeness in speech wins friends (10-7) and humbleness is one of the hallmarks of a true well-bred gentleman (96-3). Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 298) note that good listeners are generous. It is further said that meritorious men do not speak even to their enemies without civility (100-5). A fool utters censured and harsh words (84-3). The king who has no control over his speech shall eat the humble pie (87-4). If the well-born (noble) say clumsy and useless things then people will doubt even their birth (in a good family) (96-8). Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 109) very aptly say, “No one likes to deal with people who seem condescending or rude.”

Accuracy

A fool who shows his knowledge about unknown subjects creates doubt even about the known subjects (85-5).

Context and Appropriateness:

Before interacting with a king it is important to judge the mental state of the king and understand the context and then to speak pleasing words in front of him (70-6). This sensitivity to context is, of course, applicable to all forms of communication. People who do not understand the importance of talking diplomatically and sweetly are denounced (A fool utters censured and harsh words, 84-3). At the same time, a true well-bred gentleman is supposed to have the attribute of sweet speech (96-3). Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 22) point out that “People exist in a context.” They say that the context influences people’s response to a message. Dimpleby and Burton (1985) say, “...context always affects the act of communication”.

Thiruvalluvar has stressed upon the need to speak appropriate and necessary words (20-10). Be sure of appropriateness before speaking as life and death are in the control of the tongue (65-2). First, consider and then speak that which is appropriate (65-4). An ambassador must examine his words before speaking (69-7). An ambassador should not utter inappropriate and lowly words (69-9).

Goodwill

The oratory, which brings the friends closer and attracts even the enemies, is true oratory (65-3). This emphasizes developing goodwill as a function or purpose of communication like Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 6) do by listing building goodwill as one of the three basic purposes of messages in organizations.

Adler and Elmhorst (2002) highlight the goodwill function of speaking in a business environment as, “Representatives of organizations frequently speak to audiences to promote interest or support for their organizations.” Kural further lists oratory (69-5 and 69-6), brevity, and sweetness of speech (69-5) amongst the qualities of an ambassador. Sweetness or pleasantness understandably has the role of promoting goodwill. Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg EC4) say, “If there exists effective communication between the management and the employees, it helps to bring about an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.”

Oratory

Thiruvalluvar says that one cannot be a good speaker without a good education (41-2), those who have studied oratory know how to deliver a lecture and they do not make mistakes in front of the audience (73-1), and it is foolish to go to the dais without sufficient knowledge (41-1). The modern scholars echo similar views, too. For example, the concept of “Competence” as used by Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 37) generally reflects the above views when they say, “Competent speakers seem informed, intelligent, and well prepared. You can appear to be competent only if you know what you are talking about.” Watkins (2005) says that “The best way to appear confident in front of an audience is to be prepared” and Williamson (2006) says that you add a lot of energy and commitment to a presentation by simply practicing. Lucas (2007, pg 36) also emphasize, “The better you prepare, the better your speech will be.”

Thiruvalluvar further elaborates that one who has ignored studying will be shamed in speaking in an assembly or meeting (41-5). The theme is continued in (42-9), it is difficult to become a good speaker without listening to wise people. This has to be interpreted keeping in mind the oral tradition of education and learning that prevailed in ancient India. Furthermore, the modern instructor and authors of the art of speech also believe that exposure to experienced and good speakers is needed to learn the skill of public speaking.

It is impossible to defeat a person in debate if he is a good speaker, and who is neither afraid nor does he falter (65-7).

Fear and Anxiety of Speaking:

Kural has several aphorisms devoted to the issue of public speaking anxiety:

There are many who can stand in the battlefield and face the death bravely, but such are few who can stand on the stage in front of the audience without shivering (73-3). A modern author also notes that, “You might be one of the many who would rate your fear of public speaking alongside or ahead of death!” (Yemm, 2006). Adler and Elmhurst (2002, pg 399) quote Wallace and Wallechinsky “book of lists” to inform that a sample of 3,000 Americans report speaking before a group to be a greater fear than the fear of death. According to Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 55) practically all speakers have to face communication anxiety.

Present the knowledge that you have gained in front of the scholars (73-4). Learn logic properly so that you can speak without fear in front of an assembly (73-5). Lucas (2007, pg 444) also tell prospective public speakers to know “how to reason clearly and persuasively.”

Kural, at the same time asks, what is the use of logic to those who are afraid of facing the scholars (73-6). The knowledge of a person who is afraid of coming in front of the audience is as useless as a sword in the hand of a eunuch in the battlefield (73-7). People who cannot sink their principles into the hearts of the audience, their study, howsoever vast it may be, is useless (73-8). People who are learned but are afraid of coming in front of the wise are worse than the ignorant (73-9). Those who are afraid of coming in front of groups of people and are unable to expound their principles are worse than dead (73-10).

Karres (2008) says, “The sad part is that people can go a lifetime of sitting on the back row with a head full of great ideas, and a heart full of stage fright.” Siwolop (1986) says, “The phobia that presents the most practical problems in the workplace is the fear of driving, followed by the fear of public speaking.”

Listening

Thiruvalluvar says, ears are the best wealth (42 -1), thus symbolically underlining the importance of listening. He denounces poor listeners by saying that, people who are bereft of the enjoyment of listening are useless (42-10). He further adds that it is difficult to become a good speaker without listening to wise people (42-9). Exposure to experienced and good speakers is indeed needed to become a good speaker. Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 32) have quite aptly said that “Listening is an act which helps as much at the interview as in social situations.” Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 70) also point out that “Effective listening benefits both listeners and speakers.” Young (2007) puts it in a very interesting way, “Listen with your mouth closed. The words “listen” and “silent” are an anagram. They have the same letters but in a different order. You can’t listen while you’re talking. Gitomer (2007) gives a practical business communication tip, “Your prospect will tell you exactly what they want. But make sure you listen with the intent to understand, and with the intent to respond.”

Hearing v/s Listening

Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 297) differentiate between hearing and listening as, “In interpersonal

communication, hearing denotes perceiving sounds. Listening means decoding and interpreting them correctly.”

Raman and Sharma (2004, pg 71) note that hearing and listening are different things. According to them hearing is a physical act while listening requires conscious effort. The Kural is quite definite in differentiation between listening and hearing. It says, those ears, which can hear but not listen to the words of the wise, are deaf (42-8) and that it is difficult to become a good speaker without listening to wise people (42-9).

Modern authors are more explicit in defining the difference between hearing and listening. For example, according to Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 69) “Listening is a voluntary process that goes beyond the mere physical reaction to sounds.” Ludlow and Panton (1992, pg 20) elaborate that “Active listening requires definite commitment and personal discipline.” Listening requires attention as an important factor in addition to hearing: Andal (1998, pg 186) says, “Attention is the key functional factor in communication.” According to Raman and Sharma (2004), “Listening is a process of receiving, interpreting, and reacting to a message received from the speaker.”

Silence:

Even a fool will be considered intelligent if he can keep silence in front of the wise (41-3). Silence is not only a part of effective listening; it is also a tool of communication in its own right. Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 49) point out that “Silence also has different meanings in different cultures and subcultures.” Thus recognizing silence as a tool of communication. Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg EC34) say, “We do not communicate through words, signs and signals alone, we communicate through silence also.”

Kural gets to the root of the malady when it points out that people who lack the art of expressing themselves succinctly are the ones who speak a lot (65-9). After all wordiness and talking too much is often a sign of inefficient communication skills. Silence may even be taken as an extreme case of brevity!

Brevity

Kural instructs the speakers to leave unnecessary words (20-1) (20-10); talking unnecessarily is bad (20-4) (20-2); Present day authors Leigh and Maynard (1993, pg 19) also have something similar to say, in spoken communication, greater the conciseness, clarity, and specificity, the better it is. Lauer (2007) also

emphasizes the importance of brevity in speaking and writing. This is in confirmation with the Gricean Maxim of quantity also.

Thiruvalluvar goes further to the extent of saying that, using words unnecessarily proclaims a man’s incompetence (20-3) and that, talking unnecessarily leads to a loss of respect and dignity (20-5). According to him, philosophers do not utter words when not needed (20-8) and people with a broad vision do not utter unnecessary words (20-9). A learned and contemplative man will not talk unnecessary things (42-7).

He minces no words in coming down heavily on people who do not respect brevity in speech: one who talks unnecessarily should not be considered a human being (20-6), the next aphorism quite aptly justifies this harsh treatment by saying that harsh words are better in certain circumstances than unnecessary words (20-7). In our own day, Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 334) warn, “Long, drawn-out speeches lose audience interest.” Leigh and Maynard (1992, pg 53) say that, “Brevity is not only the soul of wit, it is also another foundation stone of perfect communications.” Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg EC26) emphasize that a message should be as brief as possible. Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 135) add that redundancy should be avoided and proceed to define redundancy as, “Redundancy is the part of the message that can be eliminated without loss of information.”

Clarity

Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 330) say, “Unless you are clear, your speech will fail from the outset.” We hear an ancient echo of this thought in Kural: An intelligent man speaks in a manner that everyone is able to understand him (43-4). Likewise, Raman and Sharma (2004) say that in a presentation the speakers should make their points clear and easy to understand. Adler and Elmhorst (2002, pg 460) prescribe the use of precise terms, description in detail and quantification of facts as some of the ways to achieve clarity in writing. Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg OC1) say that “Clarity is the first major characteristic of a good speech.”

Naturalness:

Naturalness is the hallmark of the speech of good people (10-1). Pal and Korlahalli (1997, pg EC27) say, “Nothing impresses so much as the natural way of speech.” Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 343) suggest that for making oral presentations, “Build on your natural style for gestures.” According to Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 53) an effective presentation sounds natural and spontaneous.

Audience Analysis

First, know your audience, and, then, speak (72-1). Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 101) say, “The more you know about your audience and speaking situation, the more effective your speech should be.” Kural says, first understand the mental state of the audience and, then, speak according to it (72-2); Those who speak without knowing the mental state of the audience do not know the art of oratory and neither are they fit for any other work (72-3); Discuss knowledge and wisdom only in the assembly of scholars but keep in mind the foolishness of the fools before replying to them (72-4); The wisdom of the scholars shines to its glory only in the assembly of the wise (72-7); It is inappropriate to speak didactically (instructively) in front of the wise (72-8). Watkins (2005) says, “Any audience—from audit committees to colleagues to volunteer boards to your local parent-teacher organization—includes different types of people who need to know different types (and, amounts) of information.” Similarly, Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 335) emphasize, “The more you know about your audience, the better you can adapt your message to the audience.”

Antagonistic Audience

Thiruvalluvar warns that speaking to an audience that is antagonistic to you will be futile (72-10). Osborn and Osborn (2002, pg 108) also point out that “Audiences that have negative attitudes towards your position may distort your message, discredit you as a communicator, or even refuse to listen to you.” Although these authors do not go to the extent of prohibiting speaking in front of such audiences, rather they suggest some measures while speaking in such a situation. Similarly, Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 335) say, “If your audience is indifferent, skeptical, or hostile, focus on the part of your message the audience will find most interesting and easiest to accept.” These authors also suggest that, “Only after the audience is receptive should you try to persuade the audience to hire your agency rather than a competitor.”

Nonverbal Communication

Facial expressions

According to Kural, qualities of an ambassador include impressive facial expressions (69-4). The secret agent should be able to control his facial expressions so that no one doubts him, he should not get mixed up in front of any one and he should be the one who does not let his secrets out (59-5). Facial expressions of a man change with his thoughts and express what is in his heart (71-6), and there is nothing more expres-

sive than the facial expressions because the first to disclose whether the interior is pleased or angry is the facial expression (71-7).

This emphasis on facial expressions is, generally speaking, valid for all communication situations. Smith and Taylor (2002, pg 71) say, “Most of all, body language and facial gestures are powerful communicators. An understanding of body language allows an individual to learn more about what another person is really feeling.” Bovee and Thill (1995, pg 31) point out that “Nonverbal cues are especially important in conveying feelings.” However, Raman and Sharma (2004, pg 98) warn, “Facial expression is difficult to interpret.” According to Andal (1998, pg 87), “The face functions primarily as an affect display system. No other communication system serves this function so effectively or efficiently.” Sethi and Michigan (2001) hold that the human face expresses many feelings visually. Likewise, Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 11) claim, “Of all the parts of the body the face is the most expressive.” Raman and Sharma (2004, pg 98) also note, “The face is the most expressive part of our body.” Elmhorst (2002, pg 95) say, “A person’s face communicates emotions clearly.”

A true well-bred gentleman has a happy face, generosity, sweet speech and humbleness (96-3). Perhaps the simplest interpretation of a happy face is a smiling face. Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 26) also say that, in a conversation “Be always courteous and cheerful.”

Eyes:

Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 11) say, “The eye contact with the listener is perhaps the most important aspect of the body language.” In the Kural it was noted that the eyes convey character (58-5); Eyes should show appropriate respect (58-4); Hate or love can be read from the eyes (71-9), and the eyes tell whether a man is decent or is a crook (71-10). According to Raman and Sharma (2004), “Eye contact is a direct and powerful form of nonverbal communication.” Adler and Elmhorst (2002, pg 95) claim, “The eyes themselves communicate a great deal.”

Posture:

People who can read the intentions of a man by his figure/posture will prove to be good advisors to you (71-3). Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 9) say, “Posture also conveys a wealth of meaning in an economical way.”

Reading the mind

One who understands others without their speaking is a jewel (71-1). One who can read others' mind is like a god (71-2). People whose eyes are not able to read what is on someone else's mind in a glance have nothing special in their eyes (71-5). All your desires can be fulfilled by casting a glance at a man who can read your mind (71-8). People who can read other's thoughts belong to another category though their facial expressions and figure/posture may be like that of anyone else (71-4).

Reading the mind may be put as understanding the underlying feelings of a verbal or nonverbal exchange.

Feeling

In the tenth chapter of Kural it is said that one should talk straight from the heart (10-3), and in a later chapter, it tells that, an intelligent man speaks in a manner that everyone is able to understand him, and he understands others' feelings behind their words (43-4). This emphasis on the importance of emotions and feelings in communication is quite contemporary if we cast a glance at the literature. This is an indication for avoiding emotional barriers in communication and for becoming effective listeners.

It is a politician's duty to speak in a manner that the hearts of the audience are touched and to understand the meaning of others' words soon (65-6). Judge the mental state of the king and understand the context, then talk pleasing words in front of the king (70-6). The message is, avoid psychological and contextual barriers. Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 200) claim, "People don't make decisions-even business decisions-based on logic alone." Locker and Kaczmarek (2007, pg 299) further list listening consciously for feelings as one of the ways of avoiding listening errors that may be caused by focusing exclusively on facts. Lucas (2007) says, "When you have to talk with someone about a touchy issue, you usually wait until the situation is just right."

Truth in Speech

Gricean Maxim of quality recognizes the value of truthfulness in speech, but it does not attempt to define truth or characterize it. Kural does all this and a bit more.

Tirukkural veritably states the Gricean Maxim of quality as, do not say something which you know to be false, in (30 -3). It attempts to define truth when it says, truth is that speech which harms none (30 -1); and that lie which does good has the quality of

truth (30 -2). It declares truth to be a virtue when it says, Truthfulness is a big virtue (30-6); Truth is the brightest virtue (30-10); Purity of mind is proven by truthfulness (30-8); and, Love for truth is one of the five supporting pillars of good conduct (99-3); The well-bred (noble) never go astray from speaking the truth (96-2). This way a link between communication and etiquettes was recognized. Tirukkural praises truthfulness and lists its benefits, something that is generally not discussed in modern communication literature: Truth is the true light (30-9); Truth gives you the power to rule hearts (30-4); Truthfulness makes a man great (30-5). Finally, truth is linked with religion in (30-7) by declaring truthfulness as the essences of religion.

Barriers, Problem Participants

Do not talk to people in low tones or secretly and do not even smile or laugh with others in front of the king (70-4). In the terminology of Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 47) don't be a commentator! Mohan and Banerjee (1990, pg 47) give this concept a contemporary treatment when they say, "the whispered side-conversations in which a commentator indulges can distract and split the group."

Socioeconomic Aspects of Communication:

Tirukkural recognizes a link between the economic status of a person and his/her communication by saying, poverty even kills sweetness of speech (105-3). Sweetness is most probably taken as a paralinguistic component of the verbal communication here. Tirukkural talks about communication with respect to different socioeconomic classes in a society like the well-bred, lay people, diplomats, and kings.

Conclusion:

This paper attempted to trace the origin of the field of 'Communication Skills' in a two thousand year old Tamil text, viz. Tirukkural (also known as Kural) written by Tiruvalluvar who is also known as Acharya Kundkunda Swami. The concepts of communication discussed in the Kural have been viewed in the context of the modern literature of communication.

Communication issues like politeness, context, appropriateness, goodwill, oratory, fear and anxiety of speaking, listening, silence, brevity, clarity, naturalness, nonverbal communication, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, reading the mind, feeling, barriers and problem participants have been examined. A general correspondence is observed with the treatment of these issues in the modern literature.

It stands out that there is a remarkable similarity in

the modern concepts and the concepts propounded in the Kural.

We also see that norms and guidelines were laid down for communication in general and for communication in specific situations like, for one to one communication, diplomatic communication, and public speaking by specific people, viz. lay people, secret agents, diplomats and kings. This tailor-made approach to communication is indeed not generally found in the contemporary works.

By virtue of the antiquity of Kural it can be one of the valid assumptions to believe that many modern concepts of communication might have been influenced by the wisdom propounded in the Kural. This wisdom or knowledge could very well have permeated into the world cultures over this vast amount of intervening time of two millennia since the writing of the Kural. Modern scientific approach to communication could of course not have been in a vacuum, culture must have acted as a substrate for this field of social sciences.

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Note: The figures separated by a hyphen, in brackets represent, respectively the chapter number and the aphorism number of the Tirukkural. Moreover, the quotations from the Tirukkural are based on its Hindi translation by Govind Rai Jain Shastri, (undated) published by Shri Kundkund Bharati, Delhi.

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Dedicated to Acharya Vidyanand Ji who presented me with a copy of the Tirukkural many years ago; this became the genesis of this work.

Dr. Prasannanshu
Assistant Professor
Skyline University College
Sharjah, UAE
Email: prasannanshu@hotmail.com