Chapter V

BUSINESS ETHICS AND VALUES

"Some day the ethics of business will be universally recognized, and in that day business will be seen to be the oldest and most useful of all the professions"

- Henry Ford
BUSINESS ETHICS AND VALUES

Business ethics is nothing but the behaviour of a businessman in a particular situation, which concerns actions based on commonly accepted ethical values. There are certain unethical practices which mar the whole of business system and also the society.

A person with a social responsibility will not indulge in adulteration; he will not produce spurious goods; he will not go for deceptive advertisements misleading gullible people; these and many other activities which harm the society are highly immoral and certainly unethical as far as business is concerned.

Exploitation of poor labourers who sweat out in rain and shine for the higher-ups is also condemnable. Paying low wages whether in kind or in cash is not only poor management but also unethical on the part of the producers and manufacturers.

As far as the consumers are concerned, they have to get the produces and articles worth their money; they always expect good quality in their purchase; again they should be satisfied with the quantity given for their money; sub-standard and shortage in measurements will drive away the customers from the merchants.
The traders should be soft-spoken, kind and self-content with their profits. They should not be greedy; they should avoid adulteration and cheating in the cost and measurement.

In ancient Tamilnadu, the business community was subjected to certain moral ethics and superior values.

**BUSINESS PEOPLE**

Excepting the local people in the five regions the merchant community in big cities and towns who carried on the commercial activities were simply called vanikar. In the hierarchy of the division amongst the people viz. aracar, antaŋaŋ, vanikar, vēḻaŋ (kings, sages and saints, merchants and farmers), they are ranked third.

The merchants in Tamilnadu usually bore the name vanikar and the business was called vāṇikam or vāṇipam. Since they were the people who provided all the essential commodities for the human beings to live (vāḻtal) they were called vāṇikar and their profession vāṇikam. These words occur in Sangam literature, the twin epics and Tirukkural. The Sanskrit word baniga or baniya might have come from the Tamil equivalent vaṇikar.

"Much ingenuity has been displayed in determining the etymology of the word vaṇigam and vaṇigar. It has been attempted to be shown that they emerged from the Sanskrit word Panis who were the Dasyu or Tamil traders of the Vedic times, and it is concluded that the word
from the South; hence Tamil vaniga became Baniga and Pani. But the hypotheses on which this view has been advanced are not provable".\(^1\)

Kandiah Pillai is of the view that the word paniyar must be from the Tamil vanikar. For denying the Sanskrit origin of this word and also for some other important words, he quotes P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar which runs as follows:

"Sanskrit scholars suffer from a superiority complex and believe that Sanskrit, the language of the gods being a perfect language, could not stoop so low as to borrow words from the languages of men. Hence they are fond of inventing derivations, ingenious and plausible but absurd from a historical point of view."\(^2\)

Tamil scholars are of the opinion, and rightly too, that paniya was originated from the Tamil word vanikar. It is interesting to note that a Tamil scholar has come to the conclusion that the word banyan has also come from the same word vanikar:

"In those days, the Tamil merchants used to meet under a big tree, which was supposed to be the place of Lord Siva, to take certain decisions of importance on their trade. The tree was called ‘āl’ and the Lord ālamar celvan. Since the merchants met under that tree it was

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\(^1\) K.K. Pillay, p.247.

\(^2\) P.T.S. Aiyangar, Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture, quoted from N.S.K. Pillai Tamil India, P.75.
also called as vanikar maram and later it became banyan (vaniga > baniga > baniya > banyan)."³

**PAŅITA VAŅIKAR**

A closely related word paṇita is found in an inscription inside the cave of a Jain monk near Kitarippatti in the Alakar malai mountain range. This Brahmi inscription belonging to 2nd century B.C. mentions the name of the donor of the resting place as paṇita vaṇikan netumālan which means Netumālan a merchant who did business in sugar and jaggery.⁴

Whereas the word paṇitar means a jaggery merchant, the word paṇiayar meant those Tamils who during the Vedic Ages went to North India to sell pearls, corals, sandalwood, pepper, etc.⁵

**TOLKĀPPIYAM ON MERCHANTS**

The four-fold order of Vedic Age is brahmins, kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras. Of these, the third one denotes the people of the business community. The Tamil division consists of aracar (kings), antaṉar (scholars), vaṇikar (merchants) and vēḻālar (farmers), mostly based on occupations.

⁴ M.E.R. No.75 of 1910; Venkataswamy, Paḻakkālat Tāmil Vāṇikam, p.119.
⁵ N.S.K.Pillai, Tamil India, p.75.
Tolkāppiyar in one of his sutrams in *Porulatikāram* says, ‘vaiciyan perumē vānika vālkkai’ (*Tol.Poruľ. Marapiyal,72*) which means that vaiciyas are those who lead a life of the merchants.

While writing his treatise, Tolkāppiyar always had the merchant community in his mind. There are information on the activities of the merchants in all the three parts of *Tolkāppiyam*. In *Eluttatikāram*, the first part, he talks of the weights and measurements in several passages (*Tol.Eluttu.170, 171, 165, 240, 364, 474 etc.*).

*Tolkāppiyam* sets certain ethical codes directly and indirectly in its second part. While explaining two kinds of terms takuti and valakkku, it is presumed that words of decency and words other than the original ones should be used in certain cases. According to Cēnāvaraiyar, the people who deal with gold, and the people who examine the genuineness of coins should use kānam instead of coins. This usage of alternate terms will save the life and the property of the concerned people from thieves and robbers (*Tol. Col.17*).

If one happens to say that he doesn't have anything other than this, he should be specific in telling the article he has in possession. A customer may come and ask a merchant 'whether he has green gram', the answer should be, 'I have none other than chick-pea or horsegram'. Though the merchant does not have the particular item in his shop, he should say the one that he has got, thereby he might have the chance of selling that article (*Tol. Col.35*).
ETHICAL VALUES DURING SANGAM PERIOD

Ever since the dawn of civilization, the Tamils were indeed a people of exemplary character and highly trustworthy. Numerous didactic works and a large number of proverbs and axioms are also proof of this. Cheating was despised by one and all; though people earned money by profitable business, they were not at all greedy. Greed (avā) of all kind was denounced by poets like Tiruvalluvar (cf. Chapter 37 in Tirukkuṟaḷ on avā aruttal). People in mercantile community were expected to maintain integrity and straightforwardness. "The land is one and all are our kith and kin" (Puram.192) was their motto. Hence it is no wonder that ancient Tamils showed a sense of dignity and decorum in all their endeavours connected with business.

The two thousand and odd verses of the Sangam period have stressed the business ethics to be followed by that community. The twin epics, Cilappatikāram and Maṇimekalai which followed them too speak of the high calibre of the merchants. In fact, Cilappatikāram itself is a story of the people belonging to the merchant community.

As far as business ethics is concerned, it is nothing but the behavior of businessman in a particular situation which concerns action based on the commonly accepted ethical values. If anyone violates the norms laid down by the predecessors, the entire system of business will collapse.
Amassing wealth is the first and foremost aim of the businessmen. For achieving this aim they have to work hard and toil day and night. At the same time, the resulting profit should be fair and just. Unless and otherwise the merchants have integrity in their character they could not achieve their aim according to the moral standards.

It is to be borne in mind that the Tamils were very particular about the ways and means of amassing wealth. The ill-gotten money was denounced and deprecated by one and all. Wealth is considered to be one which has to be distributed to the needy. If one fails to give away his money generously, he is looked down by the public as a miser. "Men who are eager to earn but averse to praise, their birth is a burden to the earth" is the opinion of Sage Tiruvalluvar (Kural 1003)\(^6\)

The merchants of Sangam age, some of whom were renowned poets, must have been large-hearted. The munificence of the great seven benefactors (kaṭai elu vallalkal) is to be remembered here. They gave their money, jewels and many articles, sometimes even parts of their kingdom not for any returns but only as their habit. The term, aravilai vānikan āy alan (Puram. 134) i.e. the benefactor, Ay, did not give his wealth - did not sell it in exchange of āram (dharma), fame are anything else is to be noted here.

Apart from the Sanyasis, the others earn money only to distribute them generously in a judicious manner to the State, the rites of the dead, the guests, the gods and to the needy; only the remainder had been used to fulfill the needs of their own family. (Kural.43).

The adjectives given to wealth in many of the Sangam poems are proof enough to assess the views of the people in those days.

i) It is disgraceful to say 'no' to those who wanted money after spending what all they had once by giving;

ii) It is disgraceful to say 'no' to those who wanted money ever since their birth being stricken by poverty;

iii) It is disgraceful to say 'no' to those who wanted money to run family so that they can feed their kith and kin. (Kali. verse 1, Pâlai)

The reasons for earning wealth are given in this verse which are noble and worthy of the character of the hero who wanted to procure it in an alien place leaving his lady-love at home.

The chapters in Tirukkural viz. ikai, iravu, iravacam, nalkuravu, nanriyil celvam, etc. explain the importance of being munificent (Kural ch.23,106,107.210,5,101) and also the disgrace of begging of the needy.
In a chapter entitled *porul ceyal vakai* (Kural: ch.76) Tirukkuṟaḷ insists on amassing wealth and also the proper distribution of the same in a fitting manner.

One who amasses wealth can very easily attain the other two viz. *aram* and *inpam* i.e., the benefits of *dharma* and marital pleasure (Kural.760). If one wanted to win over his opponents, he has to earn money which will be the sharpest weapon to fulfill his goal (Kural.759).

The Tamils, particularly the merchants who had to leave their kith and kin for a pretty long time, just to earn wealth had in fact knew the merits and the shortcomings of the money.

Wealth is like a mirage; it will not last long enough to give permanent pleasure to anyone; It is like a lyre, the strings of which were cut; it is like the Goddess Lakshimi who discards the one whom she embraced once showering money; and, it is like a king who kills his close associates without considering their sincerity and devoutness towards him. Hence, one should not wish to amass wealth. (*Kali*.8).

This is one aspect of wealth according to the ancient Tamils; Though they were very particular in acquiring all sorts of wealth, leaving their own homes, often crossing the rough seas and wild forests, they cherished the love and affection of their wives, children and relatives more than the hard earned wealth.
One should aspire to become rich not at the cost of another’s sufferings, but on his own hard work and perseverance. Even if the ruler goes out of the way to collect taxes etc. the people despised it; in another place the poet says that the king who wishes to get money from the people should not at any cost make them cry and extract money illegally. (Kali.10/5)

Kalittokai also states that the ill-gotten money will ever be unfriendly to the procurer. It says that the wealth earned by unlawful means will be one’s enemy both in this world and also in the subsequent births. (Kali. 14/14-15).

Hence it is clear that any one, be a king or a merchant, should not indulge in acquiring wealth improperly. To earn money in a rightful manner is very difficult and one has to work hard for it. So, Kali terms wealth as arumporu[ (Kali.18) i.e. the wealth which is hard to earn. The same verse says that wealth is not scattered or kept in heaps for anyone to grab.

If one thinks that the wealth he got illegally would never be known to anybody else, he is totally mistaken. There is one above all who knows the wrong act and it is nothing other than one’s own conscience, which will always prick and make him uneasy. (Kali.125/1-4). As it is said elsewhere in the same work, one has to toil hard and earn money muna)r cey poru[. (Kali.7/21) and that wealth is appreciated as ma\{iyilan celvam (Kali.31/1) i.e the earnings of an active person. It is also mentioned as vital a\{iyā vil\{pporu[, which means the righteous wealth which will never diminish (Kali-86/21).
In a welfare society, the merchants are expected to be men of integrity and they should be faithful both to the state and the public. If the merchant indulges in wrongful acts he will be despised by the people and punished by the king or destiny. Hence Valluvar’s dictum;

\[ arul\text{ö}tum \ anpo\text{ö}tum \ v\ddot{a}rap \ porul\dddot{a}kkam \]

\[ pull\dddot{a} \ pura\ddot{a}la \ vital \] \hspace{1cm} (Kural.755)

(The wealth which is not earned by affection and compassion will not be touched by the wise, but they will only discard it).

A good person should be like the needle of the measuring scales, without taking any partial view on one side or the other. He should be neutral. (Kural.118). This holds good to the merchants also, and a majority of them, it is supposed, have been men of character and integrity.

**PUNISHMENT**

If any person who indulges in misdeeds during commercial transactions, he was punished without fear or favour. The punishment in those days were too severe which made the crime level to the barest minimum. Fine, imprisonment, amputation of limbs and even death were pronounced by the king or whoever the authority dealing with such cases.
The story of *Manu Niti Cōlan* who trampled his only son under the wheel of his chariot for having killed a calf is one of the earliest instances of capital punishment.

It may be remembered that a Pantiya king cut off his hand for having tapped the door of a house in which a lady lived all alone during night time, and later was called *porkaip pāntiyān* (the pantiya king with golden hand).

When the goldsmith of the *Pantiya king Neṭuṇceliyan* brought to his notice that he had caught the thief. Kōvalan, alleged to have stolen the anklet of the queen, the king ordered immediately to behead Kōvalan and take possession of the anklet. Though the king acted in haste and later lost his life for the same after the accusations of Kaṇṇaki, it is to be noted here that theft of articles deserved capital punishment during those days.

People believed that the king will take into task the wrong-doers and give proper punishment; if he failed to do so, they also believed that the God will ultimately punish them (the criminals). So says the proverb, *aracan anru kollum; teyvam ninru kollum*.

We come to understand from Cilappatikaram that there existed one demon called 'catukkap pūtam' in the market place which devoured anyone who did unlawful acts in the vicinity where the business was brisk (*Cila.5/134*).

One of the five centres lying between day market (*nālāṅkātī*) and night market (*allahkātī*) was called *vellitai manram*. If any foreigner who indulges
in theft or any misdeeds, the demon there used to place heavy burden on his head which will almost break his neck, and make him come around the place. According to the commentator, Aṭiyārkkunallār, the punishment was given only to foreigners and not to the locals, because the residents there were wealthy and they will never think of burglary or cheating. Even if one thinks of stealing in his dream, he will shudder, at the thought of the veṭṭiṭai manram. (Cīla 5/111-117, Aṭi. Commentary, p.163).

The existence of the manram and the demons made the business community to carry on their trade without any difficulty and any fear from either the foreigners or the locals, the rulers or the ruled. This has also helped the customers to purchase whichever articles they wanted with full freedom, not minding any illegal intrusion by any alien factor.

Calmness and peace prevailed in the market place, the natural guards like the manram and demons along with the guards by the king, protecting the area.

A debatable question arises here. Though Aṭiyārkkunallār has given a clean chit to the local people and puts the blame squarely on the foreigners who happened to be in the market place, there is some scope to doubt his claim. Apart from the existence of the demons in the market and the improper accusation of the goldsmith on Kōvalan, there is an elaborate discussion on the ways and means of stealing in Cilappattikāram itself (Cīla 16/162-211). This long description of theft is based on kaṭavu nūl i.e a treatise on stealing. This book was a translation of a Sanskrit work Steya Sastra written by Karni
Sudhar, a guru of Kāsar, according to Dr. U.V. Saminathaiyar (Cila.16, p.433 fn.).

Atiyārkkunallār’s view that the local people were wealthy and so they did not indulge in any sort of theft holds good in the sense that the detailed description of stealing in Cilappatikāram in this kātai was just a summary of what was told in the Sanskrit treatise.

Regarding punishment in olden days, T.R. Sesha Iyengar has this to say:

"The king was the head of society .... He was also the supreme judge in civil and criminal cases .... A thief arrested with stolen property was beheaded. A man caught in the act of adultery was killed. One who had trespassed into another’s dwelling with the intention of committing adultery had his legs cut off."

Because of these severe punishments, crimes were rare and the people doing business had free transactions. The fact that the people avoided stealing is also emphasized by Paṭṭinappālai; ‘kolai kaṭintum kaḻavu nīkkiyum’ Paṭṭina.199) i.e. the people despised murder and the act of stealing Tirukkural also speaks against murder (Kollāmai, ch. 33) and theft (Kallāmai, ch.29) in unequivocal terms.

Every customer has right to know the cost price of the article and the margin of profit for the seller. Hence the trader had the duty of openly declaring the cost price, the selling price and the profit he obtained.

\[
\text{kolvatūum mikaikoṭātu} \\
\text{koṭuppattūum kuraikoṭātu} \\
\text{palpaṇṭam pakaṛntuvīci} \quad (\text{Paṭṭina. 210-211}).
\]

The above lines mean that the trader did not receive more than the amount due to him and also did not give lesser quantity to the customer. To maintain this, he frankly told the details of the commodities.

Since the merchants were righteous and not greedy, they were compared to the pin in the middle of the yoke used by the tiller, for their straightforwardness. (\text{Paṭṭina 207-208}). Their character and integrity were praised by the poets. They did not differentiate their own articles from those of the customer. Hence the poet says:

\[
\text{neṭunukattup pakalpola} \\
\text{naṭuvuninra nanneṅcinār} \\
\text{vaṭuvaṅci vāyomolintu} \\
\text{tamavum piravum oppa nāti (Paṭṭina. 206-209)}
\]
The merchants were honest and always aimed at improving their trade by delivering quality goods with less profit. They had their own ideal code of conducts which they practiced in the true spirit.

"It was believed that honest trade led to increased trade which meant increased wealth. Integrity in trade was generally appreciated"\textsuperscript{18}

Here we may note the advice given in the Bible to the merchants: they should have correct weighing machines, proper measuring vessels i.e marakkāl (Levi 19:35-36).\textsuperscript{9}

**CUSTOMS**

The merchants had their own customs and beliefs which they adhered to sincerely. One of them was not to take ladies while they went to overseas for any purpose.

Men who travelled by sea for trade abroad were called nāvikar, a derivative of nāvāy which means boat. The corrupted form of nāvikar is nāykar by which name the merchants were mentioned in Cilappatikāram and other works.

It was the practice of the merchants to learn as many languages as possible. In Maṇimēkalai, we come across a merchant by name, Cātuvaṇ, who


\textsuperscript{9} Quoted by Murukan, p.22.
was stranded in a little island after a shipwreck, escaped the wrath of the local aborigines, by speaking in their own language i.e the nagā language. (Maṇi, Ātirai Piccaiyyita Kātai).

Sometimes the merchants had to face unexpected attacks by robbers on land and pirates in the sea. In order to protect themselves they always used to go in large numbers. Sometimes the rulers had helped them by sending armed guards along with them. Pirates on the West viz. katar kurumpar gave lot of trouble by frequent attacks on the sailors. However they were subdued by the Cera King Kaṭal Pirakōṭṭiya Ceṅkuṭṭuvan. (Patir. 10/2-5).

**COMMERCE AND AGRICULTURE**

Though it is necessary to improve trade and commerce in a country, one should never neglect the first and foremost occupation i.e. agriculture. The success in one field should help the other and thereby enrich the revenue of the state. Neither should ever be neglected.

If commerce brings revenue to a country, it is agriculture that feeds people and makes them happy. Man lives first and foremost by bread, and it is necessary to feed all. Because of this the great Valluvar had put agriculture first when he says.

\[\text{taḷḷa vilaiyulum takkārum tāḻvilar} \]
\[\text{celvarum cērvatu nāṭu} \]

(Kuraḷ. 731)
While Valluvar gives pride of place to agriculturists, he ranks the merchants as the third one.

At one time the people of Rome became greedy and tried to earn enormous wealth by way of trade for their luxurious way of living; they forgot to patronize the peasants, with the result the country soon had to face food scarcity.

The development in the two fields therefore should be complementary. One should not be neglected for the sake of another. And it is unethical to destroy one occupation to improve some other. The continuous rise in the population chart should be an eye-opener for all generations.

If commerce lifts a country to a high pedestal, it is agriculture that makes its people happy with a square meal whenever they wanted it. Hence the two fields have to go hand in hand for the welfare of the nation. The rivers which is one of the main sources of irrigating fertile fields is also the important source of transportation for commercial purposes as well.

The rivers which water, the fields which provide food and the business which fetches all the needs of society along with the best of administration makes a country rich and take it to the pinnacle of glory. Where all these co-existed, there arose many a civilization. The Egyptian civilization was the result of River Nile, the Roman civilization was the gift of River PO, the Mesopotamian civilization flourished on the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, the Indus civilization was made possible by the River Indus and in the same way
the Dravidian civilization was made glorious by the Rivers Kāvēri, Vaikai and Tāmparaparani. This civilization of the Tamils survived till date only because of the ethical code of conduct and strict values propounded by scholars and followed by the kings, merchants and others through the ages.

Land, work, capital and administration were the four pillars on which rests all developments in a civilized country. The first one provides food; the second one produces all other needs; the third one is the fulcrum for commercial activities and the last one takes care of the management at all levels.

If, in all these fields, ethical codes were flouted it need not be said that the values of life will make a nosedive and the entire system of a welfare state will collapse. Hence it is imminent that all people, the peasants, the merchants, labourers and so on, should co-exist and make every move of the head of the state a success. This strategy worked to the entire satisfaction of the kings in Sangam age and so it proved to be a golden era.

**MORAL VALUES**

The merchant community which dealt with all sorts of commercial activities had in fact known every point mentioned above and hence never failed to uphold the moral values in life.

Of course, all the merchants wanted to amass wealth, but it had to be acquired only by fair means. An individual, a king or a merchant should not in any context go beyond the set code of rules in acquiring wealth, even if any
of them happened to see his own mother suffering from hunger; if anyone violates the moral values in such circumstances, then the act will be derided by sages, saints and scholars (Kural 656). Here we may think of Kovalan, after losing everything he had, walked all the way from Pukar to Maturai to sell the anklet of his beloved Kannagi, by fair means.

If at all one earns money by some sort of unethical means, the end effect will be self-defeating. For such money will go waste as the water in an unbaked clay pot oozes through the pores; both the container and the water go waste and perish; similarly, both the person and his ill-gotten money would be nowhere. (Kural 660).

Wealth is only a means and not the end. Hence a merchant, and for that matter any person, acquiring wealth should not only see whether it is legally right, but also should see whether it is morally proper.

Even in such cases as the one unable to feed his mother a meal a day, one has to work and toil hard to earn instead of getting money by unfair means. In a study on Tiruvalluvar, Dr. B. Natarajan says the following on this point:

"Even as it struggles its way through the ups and downs of the rugged terrain, so do you pull through thick and thin, come hail, come storm. Smile scornfully at the frowns of fortune. That is the only way to chase leaden-eyed despair. Against the shores of iron will and unflagging courage, the never-ending waves beat in vain." 10

10 B.Natarajan, Economic and Political Philosophies of Tiruvalluvar, ITES publications, Madras 1980, p.36. (hereafter cited as B.Natarajan)
The moral value and the business ethics involved in such cases are worthy of a highly cultured Tamil society. The rules set forth by Sage Valluvar, as above, are meant for one and all; there is no discrimination; it holds good both for the king and the trader; both for the urban and rural; both for the rich and poor. Just comparing this with those of Artha Sastra, the Tamils can be proud of their society. Artha Sastra’s views, as placed before us by Dr. Natarajan:

"The king’s spies under disguise of they are traders are to deceive the real traders by striking a partnership first, and after decamping with the proceeds of gold and silver; nor are to they hesitate to burgle the house of those traders who refused. Some tax officials were trained to collect money from gullible public, by frightening them in the name of devils and horror deities, while others are to capitalize on the superstitious belief of the people, by raising bogies of snakes and ghosts in trees and temples. Nor is the king to flinch from framing the rich on trumped up charges and mulct them of their wealth. Spies in the garb of holy men are to exploit the gullible people on the promise of wealth and women. Not even open prostitution was to be frowned upon to fill the coffers of the king."\(^{11}\)

While we speak of business ethics and moral values of the merchant community, here is Artha Sastra propounding the ideology of exploitation against the same merchants and traders. The aim of Artha Sastra, as seen in

\(^{11}\) B. Natarajan, p. 98.
this passage, was one of survival of the fittest and exploitation of the weak by the strong. This kind of life is anathema to the Tamils who gave pride of place to the moral values of an individual.

What then is the method of earning tax and other revenues from the public? The collection of money by way of taxes should be like the collection of honey by the buzzing bees from the soft flowers which do not wither or spoil the silky petals in its endeavour (Palamoli.244).

**CAPITAL AND PROFIT (INVESTMENTS AND RETURNS)**

Capital is one of the three essentials for commercial activities, the other two being Land and Labour. What a businessman invests in order to gain profit is capital. The wealth one has obtained by continuous labour becomes the capital for that person. By tilling the god-given fertile land and working hard day and night he gets good returns with which he procures what all he needs. He later invests the remaining money in some enterprise as his capital.

Such hard-earned capital should not be squandered away. Tiruvalluvar stresses the importance of money, the necessity of earning it through honourable ways and means and the way to spend the same in a responsible way.

If a person proposes to invest his money as capital in one of his endeavours, he should think twice before doing so. Unless he gets a certain margin of profit what is the use of spending the money.
If a merchant does not raise a capital, he cannot expect any profit. No capital, no profit. Valluvar says *Mutal illárkkku útiyam ilai* (*Kural*. 449) which means that there is no profit for those merchants who have no capital. Having said that it is essential to put his capital on some business. Valluvar emphasizes that he should see everything goes well in his attempt to earn him some profit.

Improper administration, poor management, squandering money on unproductive issues, defective planning and lack of technical skill along with laziness make the investment run into loss. Hence the entrepreneur or the trader should see that everything goes on smoothly towards the goal of gaining profit. On this scope *Kural* proposes the following code:

\[ \text{ākkam karuti mutaliḷakkum ceyvinai} \]
\[ \text{ākkār arivuṭai yār} \]

(*Kural* 463)

The English rendering for this couplet; "The wise venture not on business which loses the capital in quest of the profit. (*Kural* 463, Tr. by M.R.R., Kasi Math edn.) Poor investment not only deprives the profit, but also snatches away the initial deposit too. This could be avoided by proper planning taking into account the type of business, the place, the time and the personnel. In another context Valluvar says, one who does not appreciate the merits of wealth will never gain it. He says *Porulāṭci porrāṭarKKu illai* (*Kural*. 252) i.e. one should have the interest and aspiration in making money.
If the person succeeds in his efforts and gains a reasonable profit for the amount that he has invested, then he should think of the nature of money and spend it in a proper way. Invest capital; gain profit; improve the product; share with others; feed as many people and try to remove unemployment. Valluvar seems to say so in (Kural 333).

Even if the income is meagre it will not matter much if the expenditure is less than the profit, says Valluvar in one of his couplets. This point is stressed to impress upon the investor so that he does not lose heart and warns to be careful on the side of liabilities. (Kural 478).

But if the expenses exceed the amount of profit or even the capital, then that person will find himself in the soup; he will become a wreck, lose his self-respect, turn mad, thief, scoundrel and what not.

These are some of the ideas set forth by the ancient Tamil literature regarding the capital, the profit and the expenditure.

While dealing with the modern theory of Public Expenditure (according to Valluvar it is distribution of Finance, kāṭta vakuttaḷ). Dr. B. Natarajan elaborates the meaning of this Kural (478):

"What was Valluvar's idea in this? Valluvar had for his ideal a society that generated current surplus and had built up a sizeable reserve. If such a surplus were not possible let income and expenditure at least level. It is not a great misfortune for a State if its revenues are
limited, provided the expenditure is kept within bounds. He seems to accord with Dickens: 'Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds and six, result misery'. Again, he warns, 'Behold the monarch who lavishes his wealth beyond his resources; he appears prosperous, but he only treads the downward path to destruction.' At the end of the discussion, he concludes; "Budget for a surplus, if possible; balance the budget at other times; but never budget for a deficit." \(^\text{12}\)

Whether to submit a budget as propounded by Valluvar is feasible in any developing country may be a moot question. However, if one sticks to his ideology he may be assured of peace to the State machinery.

**BUSINESS ETHICS IN COMPARISON**

There are three sectors viz. cultivators, proprietors and the rest consisting of merchants, artificers, etc. Some economists considered the first sector alone as productive and the rest as unproductive. They were called Physiocrats. They contended that the non-agricultural pursuits as 'servile and servants'. Valluvar too in a way accepts this theory when he says, "Whirl as the world will, it must after all rely on the plough" (\textit{Kural} 1031). However there is no suggestive meaning that what others produced had no value. He

\(^{12}\) E.Natarajan, p.87.
only stresses that cultivation is the first and foremost vocation, because it is
the one that feeds one and all, which is the most important for a living being.

But the view of the physiocrats is to deride the other two sectors. Even
Adam Smith says:

"The unproductive class that of merchants, artificers and
manufacturers is maintained and employed altogether at the expenses
of the two other classes, of that of proprietors and cultivators"\textsuperscript{13}

Valluvar never cast aspersion like the Physiocrates. He only stressed
hard work, perseverance and sincerity in any field. According to legend
Valluvar himself had weaving as his vocation, as such he would not have
scorned the third sector.

Only when trade and manufacture was given the pride of place to the
neglect of cultivation, the school of physiocrats reacted sharply and propounded
their own agriculture front against the Industry. No such necessity arose in
Tamilnadu during the period of Valluvar and so he did not differentiate
between the various vocations. Further, Valluvar was not a mere Economist,
but a Philosopher of repute, a Saint among Saints; and hence his views are
crystal clear i.e., all vocations are equal.

In a short thought-provoking essay, Dr. B. Natarajan has discussed a few
points of Plato, Aristotle, Kautilya, and Adam Smith with those of Valluvar,

\textsuperscript{13} B. Natarajan, p. 41.
of course, on ethics connected with commerce and economics. It is pertinent to briefly go through his observations, without which we cannot do full justice to this essay.

Plato in his ‘Republic’ has given his vision of a welfare state. It is a dream state or an Utopian one with a definite population and a fixed wealth. All the views expressed by Plato leads one to describe it as a corporate or fascist state. Says Dr. B.Natarajan: "The ideal States pictured by Plato and Valluvar are as different as chalk is from cheese."\(^\text{14}\) Valluvar’s is a welfare state, known and seen by him during his days, which he wanted to make perfect and ideal with his wise sayings.

Plato’s Republic was criticized by his own pupil Aristotle. Poets and writers do not have a place in Plato’s visionary state, but Aristotle himself was a man of letters and a reputed critic. But his views too do not come closer to that of Valluvar. "For Aristotle slavery was essential. Inequality was nature. Inferiority congenital, democracy only for the Greek born."\(^\text{15}\) No discussion is necessary to dispute the thoughts of Aristotle put against those of Valluvar’s. The Tamil state as viewed by Valluvar had no inequality, no discrimination amongst the people, and nobody was a slave there. Once again Valluvar stands high and above the shoulders of Aristotle.

\(^{14}\) B.Natarajan, p.68.

\(^{15}\) B.Natarajan, p.68.
Artha Sastra of Kautilya when compared with Poruṭpāl of Valluvar's Kural has nothing much to excel over the latter. Tiruvalluvar's work is a treatise on human behavior whose views hold good even after two thousand long years. He speaks of individual’s ethics in Arattuppāl and speaks of lovers in Kāmatuppāl; in between he deals with economics, politics, warfare, friendship and family tradition in Poruṭpāl. Whereas Artha Sastra deals only with economics of the state. Basically these two works do not meet each other on any vital point. Artha Sastra speaks on the system of four castes which is denounced by Kural; it spells out ideas to cheat farmers whom the Kural keeps in high pedestal; it permits a king to go to any extent to collect taxes whereas Kural is magnanimous in requesting the kings to tap resources without a drop of tear from the taxpayer; it sanctions distillations and allows people to drink and be merry, but Kural condemns drinking of toddy in unequivocal terms.

The ethics and values presented by Valluvar in the field of economics, commerce, politics and farming are different and varied from those of Kautilya. Hence the theory of borrowing from Artha Sastra has no valid grounds. Kautilya being a South Indian brahmin could have gone to North with some of the ideas from Tamil works which he had presented here and there, but the non-Tamil element is more visible as seen above.

We can conclude this section with the words of Dr. B. Natarajan:

"Economics should go hand in hand with Ethics. Only then can a desirable mix of ideology with technicalities be obtained. Aram or Ethics
is the masterful idea in Poruttāl and the ideology it breaths, in the words of Kurāḷ is this:

If begging is the lot allotted to you by the Creator, Let the Creator himself beg and wander about in distress." 15

Valluvar envisaged an affluent society which is free from hunger, disease and enmity with surplus reserves and resources. One day people may attain that goal with dint of hard work, devotion and dedication.

**HOARDING**

One of the evils prevailing in the society even from the days of Sangam Age is hoarding of essentials and money. It is but natural for a man to earn wealth as much as possible and have land, house and valuables in his possession. However, if one indulges in hoarding money and other articles for want of which others suffer, it is to be despised totally.

Wealth is not all; it is only means to attain aram and inpam i.e. virtue and love. The money which does not help to attain these becomes a total waste. Hence hoarding of any valuables or money should be avoided. "A hoarder is a burden to the earth" (Kurāḷ. 1003); he is deprived of the fame which one gets by giving; he neither enjoys nor provides others to enjoy; he is left with misery; He is nothing but a dead one for nothing will be the outcome of his wealth. (Kurāḷ ch.101). In one couplet Valluvar says of the miser or the hoarder as:

"Like woman fair in loneliness who aged grows is wealth of him on needy men who nought bestows". (*Kural*, 1007, Tr. by G.U.Pope).

Valluvar compares the hoarder to a corpse, a ghost, a burden to earth, an infamous one, a wretch, a disease, an aged unmarried lady, a poisonous fruit in the midst of a village (*Kural* 1001-1008). Nowhere in the *Kural* do we have so many comparisons as given to a hoarder. This shows how such a person is despised in the society.

A hoarder who refused to part with his wealth was scolded with contempt by a Sangam poet. Peruncittiranār not only blamed the king Ilaveḷimān for not parting with his wealth, but presented him an elephant which he earned as a gift from Kumaṇan, a benefactor. (*Puram*.162).

While speaking of hoarding, our attention automatically is drawn to the neo-classical economists who propagate modern theories of over-saving and under-investment. These are propounded to unclog the economist mechanism which have no bearing on moral values. According to Valluvar hoarding is a crime and such person is to be hated. Both Valluvar and the new-classical economists lead to the same goal i.e., 'welfare through better consumption and better production.'

"They do not conflict with each other. They inter-mingle like milk and water, difficult to separate. Good Ethics is good Economics. In Valluvar it is so"\(^{17}\)

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\(^{17}\) B.Natarajan, p.46.
There are another type of hoarders who enjoy a part of their wealth for themselves but do not give away for others. Valluvar describes the deed of such men a thing to be despised than begging (Kural 229). Instead of hoarding the wealth in a secret place, "fill the bellies of the poor and the needy; that is the place where one should keep the excess money." (Kural 225).

UNETHICAL PRACTICES

There are some unethical practices that have crept in the business transaction ever since man became avaricious and greedy. Such things happen in various degrees in each sphere of commercial activities. Though the righteous men have preached to the business community as well as others to keep away from such things, they have not been completely removed from the scene; instead they multiply in alarming proportions. During Sangam days, we do not come across many short comings and malpractices in the trade circles; however we cannot rule out that everything was smooth and fine. The unethical activities should have been to the barest minimum since there were strictest vigil everywhere. The demons in the business area which devoured and punished culprits was one of the reasons which made them desist from doing unethical transactions; another reason was the posting of guards in the vulnerable areas in the markets; since the Tamils were generally god-fearing and lead a life of perfection in their behaviour.

Scholars have pointed out some of the unethical practices which take place in the business field. For instance, adulteration, spurious products,
duplicates, injurious products and deceptive advertisements are mentioned with reference to the consumers.  

As far as our knowledge goes we do not find any incidents in the Sangam literature to prove any one of these. Though there was nothing of the sort of ISI or Agmark to certify and give clean chit to the products by the State, the fear of severe punishments abhorred anyone to attempt adulteration.

Mixing of papaya-seeds in black pepper, coloured saw-dust in chilly powder, small pebbles in rice and grains, etc. were unknown in those days; these adulterated commodities make people suffer from various diseases. When Cēnāvaraiyar in his commentary on Tolkāppiyam Collatikāram mentioned ‘noyyum nurunikkum kālaintu arici yākkinārai’ (Tol.Col.Cēnā.Comm.1), it is to be borne in mind (1) he belonged to the thirteenth century A.D. and (2) they were part and parcel of the commodity itself. Hence no question of adulteration arises here.

Production of spurious goods such as contaminated glucose bottles or water-filled injection pials were also not known in those distant days.

Items like soaps, detergents, powder, scents and oils of popular brands have been duplicated and sold at exorbitant prices nowadays. Such kind of producing duplicate articles too did not take place in Sangam days.

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The fourth unethical activity is that of procuring and selling articles such as brown sugar, LSD, etc. Though the government does not permit the selling of these items, they are in the market for mere commercial gains. They spoil the careers of youth. These man-made items were of later origin and hence these too did not affect the smoothness of the business in Sangam period.

The last of the unethical means in this list is the displaying of deceptive advertisements. Health drinks, infant foods, face creams which do promise a lot to the public through advertisements in the media are not in any way that much good as promised. People are misled, buy them and at last they have to blame themselves. Such kinds of advertisements did not take place then. The merchants sold only genuine articles and they just kept aloft on their premises some coloured flags to identify the goods they were selling. Advertisements were not necessary in those days because there was not much competition either from foreigners or from the local merchants in a big way.

The three unethical practices against employees pointed out by scholars are (i) low salaries, (ii) poor working conditions, and (iii) exploitation.¹⁰

As far as the first one in concerned, i.e. low salary, producers and manufacturers mostly pay low salary to the staff without minding whether it is sufficient for them to meet both ends; they think it is none of their business to look after the family conditions of the paid employees. Such things did not

¹⁰ Ghosh and Kapoor, p.393.
exist in Sangam days. People used to be generous and paid the employees mostly in kind than by way of cash. The people who were working for the authorities also did not aspire much to revolt against them.

We do come across words like küli (wages) and ãtiyam in Tirukkurâl (619 & 449). The first one is from the word hûlam which means 'grain' of which eighteen varieties were there. The word itself points out that the labourers were content with the grains such as rice and pulses given to them by way of wages for their work. The word ãtiyam which comes from the root ūtu (enjoying) means gain or profit (cf. Kural 449). This also refers to what the employees gain or profit for the labour given by them to the producers or manufacturers, whoever they might be.

The second one is 'poor working conditions'. As far as the employees of the Sangam age were concerned they had their own colonies, mostly out of the city or bordering the city, with necessary facilities. Since there were no big or giant industries and factories as seen now a days, and pollution emanating from them is practically nil, the employees in those days were, it seems, satisfied with living conditions as well as working conditions. Peddlers and hawkers too did not have any complaints to make.

The third point is regarding 'exploitation'. Under this head come bonded labourers, skilled and unskilled workers. Bonded labour existed in Tamilnadu even in the days of Pallava period. The story of the Saiva Saint Sundarar is well-known; while at the time of his marriage (8th century A.D.) an old man appeared there and showed a record which was enough to prove that Sundarar
and his father were bonded labourers to him. But we do not have any evidence for this and we do not come across of any other type of exploitation in Sangam works.

As for the unethical practices against the Government or society, we have (i) tax evasion, (ii) pollution, and (iii) bribes.

Tax evasion did not seem to be a big problem in those days since the rulers had enough officials to collect taxes either at the paddy fields or at the ports and market places. They had a separate variyam (board) to collect land tax, customs, etc. Remission of tax during famine, floods and other calamities has been dealt with at another place in this thesis.

The problem of 'pollution' too did not arise during the Sangam age, for there were no big industries which emanated poisonous gases and other wastes as seen nowadays. Plenty of open spaces, parks, gardens, play fields, seashores and river banks provided the people the much wanted free air and fragrance too.

We do not have any reference to bribe or scandal in Sangam works. If anybody had a complaint to make he can straightaway go to the palace and convey his grievance to the king himself, remedial measures will be taken without anybody's interference. The cases of Kaṇṇagi in the courts of Pāntiyan Neṭṟuṇceliyan and the two elders in the court of Cōḷāṇ Karikālan are examples for this. However what happened at the lower levels has not been recorded. The instance of a goldsmith stealing the anklet of the Queen Kōpperuntēvi and
putting the blame on Kovalan is a scandal. The cases have been referred to here because one is concerned with a quarrel over land and the other with the accusation on a merchant. ‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’ is a maxim; the kings and the officials acted mostly as the servants of the society rather than masters holding enormous power. Whatever may be the case in administration, as far as business is concerned there was no place for bribery in those days.

VALUES

Every human being either consciously or sub-consciously has some basic values, which he would like to follow and would like others to follow. They may be on good manners, habits and customs. The conduct, character and behaviour of others may be judged by those normative views. This is Individual Value. A group, class or clan may join together and form certain ideal norms for human conduct. This system will help in deciding the performance and competence of individuals and groups. This is Social Value. The stability of a society is decided mostly on the basis of the value systems. The Tamil society of the Sangam period had its own individual values and social values which moulded the economic and commercial system. A person should be kind and good; he must speak softly and act swiftly; he must be straight forward and should not indulge in any sort of cheating; he must be lovable in heart and pleasing to look at - these may be a person’s individual values.
The society on the other hand expects everyone to be law-abiding, follow good manners and customs and obey the orders of the State as well as those of elders. These may be considered as the social values of Tamils.

These general values - both individual and social - are the same for all human beings, be they men or women, king or a citizen, buyer or seller.

The business people had their own set of values in the days of Sangam period.

1) They should co-exist;

2) They should not weigh less quantity than what was asked;

3) They should not demand more money than the amount specified;

4) They should tell the customer the cost price, the selling price and the profit openly;

5) They should have quality goods for the people to buy;

6) They should be kind and soft-spoken to attract customers, etc.
As a society of great tradition and culture, the social values of the Tamils in the commercial activities had been of high standard. The reason why the Tamils of the Sangam Age had maritime trade with Greece, Rome, Arabia, China and other Far East countries was the social values they perpetuated rather than the rare commodities which were available in Tamilnadu. The words of Kaniyan Pūṅkunranār 'yāiūm ĉe ē yāvarum keḷir' (Pūṇam.1) which means 'Every country is my country; Every man is my kinsman' are suffice to prove the excellence of social values followed by Tamils.