**Thiruvalluvar**

A picture containing text, person

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**Thiruvalluvar** , commonly known as **Valluvar**, was a celebrated [Tamil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people) poet and [philosopher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosopher). He is best known as the author of the *[Tirukkuṟaḷ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tirukku%E1%B9%9Fa%E1%B8%B7" \o "Tirukkuṟaḷ)*, a collection of couplets on ethics, political and economical matters, and love. The text is considered an exceptional and widely cherished work of the [Tamil literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_literature).

Almost no authentic information is available about Valluvar, states [Kamil Zvelebil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamil_Zvelebil) – a scholar of Tamil literature. His life and likely background are variously inferred from his literary works by different biographers. There are unauthentic hagiographic and legendary accounts of Valluvar's life, and all major Indian religions, as well as Christian missionaries of the 19th century, have tried to claim him as secretly inspired (*crypto-*) or originally belonging to their tradition. Little is known with certainty about his family background, religious affiliation, or birthplace. He is believed to have lived at least in the town of [Mylapore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mylapore" \o "Mylapore) (a neighbourhood of the present-day [Chennai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chennai)), and his [floruit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floruit) is dated variously from 4th century BCE to early 5th century CE, based on the traditional accounts and the linguistic analyses of his writings. [Maraimalai Adigal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maraimalai_Adigal" \o "Maraimalai Adigal) gives 31 BCE as the birth year of Valluvar, while Kamil Zvelebil infers the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and Valluvar are best dated to around 500 CE.

Valluvar has influenced a wide range of scholars down the ages since his time across the ethical, social, political, economical, religious, philosophical, and spiritual spheres. He has long been venerated as a great sage, and his literary works a classic of Tamil culture.

**Birth**

As with most other details about Valluvar, the exact place of his birth remains uncertain. Valluvar is believed to have lived in [Madurai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madurai) and later in the town of Mayilapuram or Thirumayilai (present-day [Mylapore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mylapore" \o ") in [Chennai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chennai)). There are also accounts that say he was born in Mayilapuram and later moved to Madurai in order to publish his work at the royal court. The poem *Kapilar Akaval* states that Valluvar was born on the top of an oil-nut or *iluppai* tree (*Madhuca indica*) in Mayilapuram, while verse 21 of the *Tiruvalluva Maalai* claims that he was born in [Madurai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madurai).

In 2005, a three-member research team from the [Kanyakumari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanyakumari_(town)) Historical and Cultural Research Centre (KHCRC) claimed that Valluvar was born in Thirunayanarkurichi, a village in present-day [Kanyakumari district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanyakumari_district). Their claim was based on an old [Kani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kani_tribe) tribal leader who told them that Valluvar was a king who ruled the "Valluvanadu" territory in the hilly tracts of the Kanyakumari district.

**Early Life**

There is negligible authentic information available about Valluvar's life. In fact, neither his actual name nor the original title of his work can be determined with certainty. *Tirukkuṟaḷ* itself does not name its author. [Monsieur Ariel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsieur_Ariel), a [French](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_people) translator of his work in the 19th century, famously said it is "the book without a name by an author without a name". The name *Thiruvalluvar* (*lit.* Saint Valluvar) was first mentioned in the later text *[Tiruvalluva Maalai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruvalluva_Maalai" \o "Chennai)*.

The speculations about Valluvar's life are largely inferred from his work *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and other Tamil literature that quote him. According to Zvelebil, Valluvar was "probably a learned Jain with eclectic leanings and intimate acquaintance with the early works of Tamil classical period and some knowledge of the Sanskrit legal and didactic texts (*[subhashita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subhashita" \o "Subhashita)*)".

### Traditional biographies

The Shaivite Tamil Hindu text *[Tiruvalluva Maalai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruvalluva_Maalai" \o "Tiruvalluva Maalai)* contains the earliest known textual reference to the legend of Valluvar, but it remains undated. This text attracted attention in the colonial era because an early 19th-century commentary referred to him as "Valluvan" (Valluvar) whose text presented the "esoteric wisdom of the Vedas to the world". The original text relates the Kural in the context of Sanskrit literature. The commentary includes the gloss that Valluvan was "born in a low caste", but the original text does not. According to Stuart Blackburn, this comment appears to be extra-textual and possibly based on the [oral tradition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition). No other pre-colonial textual sources have been found to support any legends about the life of Valluvar. Starting around the early 19th century, numerous legends on Valluvar in Indian languages and English were published.

Various claims have been made regarding Valluvar's family background and occupation in the colonial era literature, all inferred from selective sections of his text or hagiographies published since the colonial era started in Tamil Nadu. One traditional version claims that he was a [Paraiyar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraiyar" \o "Paraiyar) weaver. Another theory is that he must have been from the agricultural caste of [Vellalars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vellalar" \o "Vellalar) because he extols agriculture in his work. Another states he was an outcast, born to a Pariah woman and Brahmin father. [Mu Raghava Iyengar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._Raghava_Iyengar) speculated that "valluva" in his name is a variation of "vallabha", the designation of a royal officer. [S. Vaiyapuri Pillai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S._Vaiyapuri_Pillai) suggested Valluvar derived his name from "valluvan" (a Paraiyar caste of royal drummers) and theorized that he was "the chief of the proclaiming boys analogous to a trumpet-major of an army". H. A. Stuart, in his *Census Report of 1891*, claimed that [Valluvans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valluvar" \o "Valluvar) were a priestly class among the Paraiyars and served as priests during [Pallava](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pallava_dynasty) reign, and similarly [Robert Caldwell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Caldwell), [J. H. A. Tremenheere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._H._A._Tremenheere) and [Edward Jewitt Robinson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Jewitt_Robinson), too, claimed that Valluvar was a Paraiyar. Valluvar was likely married to a woman named Vasuki and lived in Mylapore. According to traditional accounts, Valluvar died on the day of [Anusham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anuradha_(nakshatra)" \o "Anuradha (nakshatra)) in the Tamil month of [Vaikasi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaikasi).

The poem *Kapilar Agaval*, purportedly written by [Kapilar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kapilar" \o "Kapilar), describes its author as a brother of Valluvar. It states that they were children of a [Pulaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulaya" \o "Pulaya) mother named Adi and a [Brahmin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmin) father named Bhagwan. The poem claims that the couple had seven children, including three sons (Valluvar, Kapilar, and Atikaman) and four sisters (Avvai, Uppai, Uruvai, and Velli). However, this legendary account is spurious. [Kamil Zvelebil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamil_Zvelebil) dates *Kapilar Agaval* to 15th century CE, based on its language. Various biographies mention the name of Valluvar's wife as [Vasuki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasuki_(wife_of_Valluvar)), but such details are of doubtful historicity.

The traditional biographies are not only inconsistent, they contain claims about Valluvar that are not credible. Along with various versions of his birth circumstances, many state he went to a mountain and met the legendary [Agastya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agastya) and other sages. During his return journey, he sits under a tree whose shadow sits still over Valluvar and does not move the entire day, he kills a demon, performs miracles such as causing floods and making them retreat, he touches a grounded ship which miraculously then floats and sails off, his bride Vasuki cooks sand which comes out as boiled rice, and many more. Scholars consider these and all associated aspects of these hagiographic stories to be fiction and ahistorical, a feature common to "international and Indian folklore". The alleged low birth, high birth, and being a pariah in the traditional accounts are also doubtful.

By 1904, Purnalingam Pillai – an ardent Dravidianist, had analyzed and called these traditional accounts and stories as myths. Pillai's analysis and arguments are robust, according to Blackburn. These fictional accounts of Valluvar's life have become popular because aspects of the traditional accounts were selectively accepted by Christian missionaries such as George Pope and other European writers, were widely published and then became a required reading about Tamil history.

### Temples

Valluvar is traditionally worshiped as a god and saint by various communities across the Southern region of India. Many communities, including those in [Mylapore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mylapore" \o "Mylapore), and [Tiruchuli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruchuli" \o "Tiruchuli), worship Valluvar as the 64th [Nayanmar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nayanars" \o "Nayanars) of the [Saivite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saivite) tradition. There are various temples exclusively dedicated to Valluvar across South India. The most famous of these is the [temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiruvalluvar_Temple) at [Mylapore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mylapore" \o "Mylapore), [Chennai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chennai). Built in the early 16th century, the temple is located within the Ekambareeswara-Kamakshi (Shiva-Parvati) temple complex in Mylapore. The locals believe that this is where Valluvar was born, underneath a tree within the shrines complex.



A Valluvar statue in a seated posture holding a palm leaf manuscript of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* sits under the tree. In the shrine dedicated to him, Valluvar's wife Vasuki is patterned after the Hindu deity Kamakshi inside the sanctum. The temple shikhara (spire) above the sanctum shows scenes of Hindu life and deities, along with Valluvar reading his couplets to his wife. The *sthala vriksham* (holy tree of the temple) is the *iluppai* tree under which Valluvar is believed to have been born. The temple was extensively renovated in the 1970s.

At the Valluvar temple at [Tiruchuli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruchuli" \o "Tiruchuli) near [Aruppukkottai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aruppukkottai" \o "Aruppukkottai) in [Virudhunagar district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virudhunagar_district) of the Indian state of [Tamil Nadu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu), Valluvar is taken in a procession as the 64th Nayanmar on his death anniversary in the Tamil month of *Maasi* (February–March) by the [Valluvar community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valluvar_(caste)" \o "), who are into fortune-telling, chiefly in the Periya Pudupatti village.

Other temples for Valluvar are located at [Periya Kalayamputhur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Periya_Kalayamputhur_(Dindigul_district)" \o "Periya Kalayamputhur (Dindigul district)), [Thondi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thondi" \o "Thondi), [Kanjoor Thattanpady](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanjoor" \o "Kanjoor), [Senapathy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senapathy_village_(Idukki_district)), and [Vilvarani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vilvarani_(Tiruvannamalai_district)" \o "Valluvar (caste)).