Thirukkural – Structure (3 Paals, 133 Chapters, 1330 Couplets), Thiruvalluvar, Commentators, Translations, Valluvar Kottam & Kanniyakumari Statue | TNPSC Notes

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The **Thirukkural** is a didactic work by **Thiruvalluvar**, arranged in **three books (paals)** – **Arathuppal** (virtue), **Porutpal** (polity and wealth) and **Kamathuppal / Inbathuppal** (love) – with **133 chapters** of ten couplets each, i.e. **1330 kurals**. Because it names no religion, country or king and speaks to all human beings, it is honoured as **Ulaga Pothumarai** (the universal scripture). One of the Eighteen Minor Works (Pathinen Keezhkanakku), it has been translated into many languages, most famously into English by **G.U. Pope (1886)**. The Tamil Nadu Government commemorates it with **Valluvar Kottam**, Chennai (1976) and the **133-ft Thiruvalluvar statue** at Kanniyakumari (1 January 2000).

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants and are meant to be complete on their own. The TNPSC General Studies syllabus lists **Thirukkural** by name in the unit on **History, Culture, Heritage and Socio-Political Movements of Tamil Nadu**: its significance as secular literature, relevance to everyday life, impact on humanity, universal values such as equality and humanism, relevance to socio-politico-economic affairs, and its philosophical content. Kural questions also appear regularly in Group 4 **General Tamil**.

Thirukkural at a Glance

Feature	Details
Author	Thiruvalluvar
Type	Didactic (ethical) work; one of the **Pathinen Keezhkanakku** (Eighteen Minor Works)
Books (paals)	3 – Arathuppal (38 chapters), Porutpal (70), Kamathuppal / Inbathuppal (25)
Chapters (athikarams)	133, each with 10 couplets
Couplets	1330 (133 × 10)
Metre	**Kural venba** – two lines; 4 feet (seer) in the first line and 3 in the second = 7 seer
First chapter	Kadavul Vazhthu; first kural "Agara mudhala ezhuththellam aadhi bhagavan mudhatre ulagu"
Last (133rd) chapter	Oodaluvagai (in Kamathuppal)

First printed edition	1812
Best-known complete English translation	G.U. Pope, 1886
Best-known classical commentary	Parimelazhagar (one of the ten medieval commentators)
TN Government memorials	Valluvar Kottam, Chennai (1976); Thiruvalluvar statue, Kanniyakumari (2000)

About Thiruvalluvar

- **Date:** scholars do not agree on Thiruvalluvar's date. The **Thiruvalluvar Year** used by the Tamil Nadu Government is obtained by adding **31** to the Common Era year (e.g. 2026 + 31 = Thiruvalluvar Year 2057).
- **Life:** stories about his birthplace, religion and family are late traditions without reliable historical evidence – be careful with options that claim a "definite" birthplace.
- **Other names of Thiruvalluvar:** Nayanar, Devar, Mudharpavalar, Poyyil Pulavar, Sennapothar, Perunavalar, Mathanubhangi, Nanmugan.
- **Thiruvalluvar Day:** the 2nd day of the Tamil month Thai (the day after Pongal), observed by the Tamil Nadu Government; the State's **Thiruvalluvar Award** is presented on this day.

Other Names of the Thirukkural

Name	Meaning / reason
Ulaga Pothumarai / Pothumarai	A code of conduct common to all people and all times
Muppal	Has three books – Aram, Porul, Inbam
Poyyamozhi	The word that never fails (always true)
Deiva Nool	The divine book
Vayurai Vazhthu	Counsel like bitter medicine (neem, kadukkai) – hard to take but healing
Tamil Marai, Uththara Vedam	Revered on a par with the Vedas
Thiruvalluvam	Named after its author

Structure: Books, Sections (Iyal) and Chapters

Following the classical commentator **Parimelazhagar**, the three books are divided into **nine sections (iyals)**. These numbers are asked directly in the exam.

Book	Sections (number of chapters)	Chapter numbers	Total
Arathuppal (Virtue)	Payiraviyal (4), Illaraviyal (20), Thuravaraviyal (13), Oozhiyal (1)	1–38	38

Porutpal (Polity/Wealth)	Arasiyal (25), Angaviyal (32), Ozhibiyal (13)	39–108	70
Kamathuppal / Inbathuppal (Love)	Kalaviyal (7), Karpiyal (18)	109–133	25
Total	9 sections	133 chapters	1330 couplets

- **Porutpal** is the largest book (70 chapters, 700 couplets) – on the king, ministers, army, friendship, economy and agriculture.
- **Kamathuppal** is the smallest (25 chapters, 250 couplets) and follows the Sangam akam tradition of kalavu (pre-marital love) and karpu (married love).
- The 38-ft pedestal of the Kanniyakumari statue stands for the 38 chapters of Arathuppal.

Values of the Kural – the Syllabus Angle

Memorise one example couplet for each element of the TNPSC syllabus; it lifts descriptive answers.

Syllabus element	Idea	Example kural (number)
Secular character	Names no religion or deity; speaks generally of "Aadhi Bhagavan"	Agara mudhala ezhuththellam aadhi / bhagavan mudhatre ulagu (1)
Equality	All lives are equal by birth; distinction comes only from one's work	Pirappokkum ella uyirkkum sirappovva / seithozhil vetrumai yaan (972)
Humanism, forgiveness	The best punishment for a wrongdoer is to shame him by doing good	Innasei thaarai oruththal avarnaana / nannayam seithu vidal (314)
Education	Learn flawlessly, then live by what you learnt	Karka kasadarak karpavai katrapin / nirka atharkuth thaga (391)
Scientific temper	Whoever says it, finding the truth is wisdom	Epporul yaaryaarvaaik ketpinum apporul / meipporul kaanbathu arivu (423)
Economy – agriculture	The world may turn to many trades, yet it depends on the plough	Suzhandrum erppinnathu ulagam athanaal / uzhanthum uzhave thalai (1031)
Marks of a good country	Freedom from disease, wealth, harvest, happiness, security	Piniyinmai selvam vilaivinbam emam / aniyenba naattirku ivvaindhu (738)
Imperishable wealth	Learning is the only wealth that never decays	Kedil vizhuchelvam kalvi oruvarku / maadalla matraiyavai (400)

- **Governance:** chapters such as Sengonmai (just rule), Kodungonmai (tyranny), Otraadal (espionage), Thoothu (envoys) and Amaichu (ministers) set out norms that compare well with today's ideas of good governance, accountability and welfare.
- **Philosophy:** earn wealth (porul) through virtue (aram) and then enjoy life (inbam); liberation (veedu) is not treated as a separate book.

- **Family:** Illaraviyal chapters on the life partner, children and hospitality describe household virtue.

Commentators

- **The ten medieval commentators (Pathinmar):** Dharmar, Manakkudavar, Thamaththar, Nachar, Parithi, Thirumalaiyar, Mallar, Parip-perumal, Kalingar and Parimelazhagar.
- **Parimelazhagar** is the most celebrated; his chapter order and division into sections are the ones generally followed today.
- **Modern commentaries:** M. Varadarajanar (Thelivurai), M. Karunanidhi (Kuraloviyam and a commentary), Devaneya Pavanar, Namakkal poet V. Ramalingam and others.

Important Translations

Year	Translator	Language / note
c. 1730	Constantius Joseph Beschi (Veeramamunivar)	Latin – Arathuppal and Porutpal
1794	N.E. Kindersley	English – selections only
1812	F.W. Ellis	English – partial
1840	W.H. Drew	English – first 63 chapters
1856	Karl Graul	German
1885	John Lazarus	Completed Drew's English translation
1886	**G.U. Pope**	Complete English translation – "The Sacred Kurral of Tiruvalluva-Nayanar"
1916	V.V.S. Aiyar	English – complete

The Kural has been translated into many Indian and world languages and is regarded as one of the most widely translated Indian works.

The Tamil Nadu Government and the Kural – Memorials

Memorial	Place	Key facts
Valluvar Kottam	Kodambakkam–Nungambakkam area, Chennai	Opened on 15 April 1976 by President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed; a stone chariot modelled on the Thiruvarur temple car; **all 1330 kurals** are inscribed in the Kural Manimandapam. Renovated at about Rs 80 crore and reopened on 21 June 2025.
Thiruvalluvar statue	Kanniyakumari – rock islet next to the Vivekananda Rock	Total height **133 ft** (133 chapters) = 95-ft statue + 38-ft pedestal (38 chapters of Arathuppal); unveiled on **1 January 2000** by then Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi; sculptor V. Ganapati Sthapati.

Silver jubilee and glass bridge	Kanniyakumari	For the statue's 25th anniversary a 77-m glass bridge linking the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the statue was opened on 30 December 2024, and the statue was named the "Statue of Wisdom".

Writing Mains Answers (Group 1 / Group 2)

Since the syllabus names the Thirukkural, expect descriptive questions. Use these outlines and add the example couplets above.

Thirukkural – a secular, universal scripture (about 150–250 words)

- **Introduction:** Thiruvalluvar's Muppal; 133 chapters, 1330 couplets; one of the Eighteen Minor Works.
- **Secular character:** no religion, deity, country or king is named; people of every faith claim it as their own.
- **Universal values:** equality (972), humanism (314), scientific temper (423), education (391, 400).
- **Relevance to life:** family, friendship, effort, agriculture (1031), good governance (738).
- **Global impact:** translations by Beschi (Latin), Pope (1886, English), Graul (German) and many others.
- **Conclusion:** Valluvar Kottam and the Kanniyakumari statue show its place in Tamil society; it still guides today's ethical questions.

Relevance of the Kural to modern governance (about 150 words)

- Arasiyal (25 chapters) and Angaviyal (32 chapters) of Porutpal – norms for the king, ministers, army, intelligence and envoys.
- Sengonmai (just rule) versus Kodungonmai (tyranny) – a warning that oppressive rule perishes.
- Five ornaments of a nation (738) – compare with today's goals in health, economy, agriculture and security.
- Otraadal – intelligence gathering; Thoothu – diplomacy; Amaichu – expert advice.
- Conclusion: only rule based on aram (ethics) endures.

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
G.U. Pope	Complete English translation, 1886
Veeramamunivar (Beschi)	Latin translation
Parimelazhagar	Best-known of the ten commentators
38-ft pedestal	Chapters of Arathuppal
Kural 972	"Pirappokkum ella uyirkkum" – equality
Valluvar Kottam	Opened 15 April 1976, Chennai

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Common Mistakes to Avoid

- The Kural is **not** one of the Pathinen **Melkanakku** (Sangam) works – it belongs to the **Keezhkanakku** (Minor Works).
- Porutpal has 70 chapters, Arathuppal 38, Kamathuppal 25 – do not swap them.
- The Kanniyakumari statue is 133 ft in **total**; the statue alone is 95 ft.
- A kural venba has 7 seer (4 + 3) in only two lines – not "seven lines".
- Thiruvalluvar Year = CE year + 31 (add, not subtract).
- 1886 (Pope) is the well-known complete English translation; 1812 is the year of the first printed edition.

Key Terms – Tamil / English (for the bilingual paper)

தமிழ்	English
முப்பால்	The three divisions (Aram, Porul, Inbam)
அறத்துப்பால்	Book of Virtue (Aram)
பொருட்பால்	Book of Polity / Wealth (Porul)
காமத்துப்பால் / இன்பத்துப்பால்	Book of Love (Inbam / Kamam)
அதிகாரம்	Chapter
குறள் வெண்பா	Kural venba – two-line couplet metre
பதினெண் கீழ்க்கணக்கு	Eighteen Minor Works (post-Sangam didactic works)
உலகப் பொதுமறை	Universal Veda / Universal scripture
உரையாசிரியர்	Commentator
செங்கோன்மை	Just rule

Quick Revision Table

Year / date	Event
c. 1730	Beschi (Veeramamunivar) – Latin translation of Aram and Porul
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1840	Drew – first 63 chapters in English
1856	Karl Graul – German
1885	John Lazarus completes Drew's work
1886	G.U. Pope – complete English translation
1916	V.V.S. Aiyar – English translation

15 April 1976	Valluvar Kottam, Chennai, opened
1 January 2000	133-ft Thiruvalluvar statue at Kanniyakumari unveiled
30 December 2024	Statue's silver jubilee; glass bridge opened
21 June 2025	Renovated Valluvar Kottam reopened

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Author: Thiruvalluvar; one of the Eighteen Minor Works (Pathinen Keezhkanakku).
- 3 books – 133 chapters – 1330 couplets; nine sections (Parimelazhagar's division).
- Arathuppal 38, Porutpal 70, Kamathuppal 25 chapters.
- Metre: kural venba; 2 lines, 7 seer.
- First chapter: Kadavul Vazhthu; last chapter: Oodaluvagai.
- Other names: Ulaga Pothumarai, Muppal, Poyyamozhi, Deiva Nool, Vayurai Vazhthu, Tamil Marai, Uththara Vedam.
- Names of Valluvar: Nayanar, Devar, Mudharpavalar, Poyyil Pulavar, Sennapothar, Perunavalar, Mathanubhangi, Nanmugan.
- Most celebrated of the ten commentators: Parimelazhagar.
- Latin: Beschi; complete English: G.U. Pope 1886; German: Karl Graul 1856.
- First printed edition: 1812.
- Thiruvalluvar Year = CE + 31; Thiruvalluvar Day = Thai 2.
- Valluvar Kottam: 15-04-1976; Kanniyakumari statue: 01-01-2000, 133 ft (95 + 38).

Frequently Asked Questions

How many books, chapters and couplets are there in the Thirukkural?

Three books – Arathuppal (38 chapters), Porutpal (70) and Kamathuppal (25) – making 133 chapters of ten couplets each, i.e. 1330 couplets. Parimelazhagar divides them into nine sections (iyals).

Why is the Thirukkural called "Ulaga Pothumarai"?

It names no religion, deity, country, king or community and gives ethical guidance on virtue, wealth and love that applies to all people at all times – hence "the universal scripture".

Who is the best-known translator of the complete Thirukkural into English?

G.U. Pope, whose complete translation "The Sacred Kurral of Tiruvalluva-Nayanar" appeared in 1886. Earlier, Kindersley (1794), Ellis (1812) and Drew (1840) translated parts, and Beschi (Veeramamunivar) translated it into Latin.

What does the 133-ft height of the Kanniyakumari Thiruvalluvar statue signify?

The total height of 133 ft stands for the 133 chapters; the 38-ft pedestal stands for the 38 chapters of Arathuppal and the 95-ft statue for the 95 chapters of Porutpal and Kamathuppal. It was unveiled on 1 January 2000.

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When and by whom was Valluvar Kottam opened?

Valluvar Kottam in Chennai was opened on 15 April 1976 by President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. All 1330 couplets are inscribed in its Kural Manimandapam. The renovated memorial reopened on 21 June 2025.

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Practice questions

1. How many chapters are there in the Thirukkural?

A. 130
B. 133
C. 1330
D. 38

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2. How many chapters are there in Porutpal?

A. 38
B. 25
C. 70
D. 108

3. How many chapters are there in Arathuppal?

A. 38
B. 70
C. 25
D. 40

4. To which collection does the Thirukkural belong?

A. Pathinen Melkanakku
B. Pathuppattu
C. Five Great Epics
D. Pathinen Keezhkanakku

5. How many seer (metrical feet) does a kural venba have?

A. 4
B. 5
C. 7
D. 8

6. Who published a complete English translation of the Kural in 1886?

A. F.W. Ellis
B. G.U. Pope
C. N.E. Kindersley
D. Karl Graul

7. Who translated the Kural into Latin?

A. Robert Caldwell
B. G.U. Pope
C. Veeramamunivar (Beschi)
D. Ziegenbalg

8. Who is the most celebrated of the ten medieval commentators on the Kural?

A. Nachinarkkiniyar
B. Ilampooranar
C. Adiyarkkunallar
D. Parimelazhagar

9. What does the height of the pedestal of the Kanniyakumari statue represent?

A. 38 chapters of Arathuppal
B. 70 chapters of Porutpal
C. 25 chapters of Kamathuppal
D. All 133 chapters

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10. When was the Thiruvalluvar statue at Kanniyakumari unveiled?

A. 15 April 1976
B. 1 January 2000
C. 26 January 2001
D. 30 December 2024

11. Who opened Valluvar Kottam in 1976?

A. V.V. Giri
B. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy
C. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed
D. Zakir Husain

12. Which value does the kural "Pirappokkum ella uyirkkum" stress?

A. Education
B. Hospitality
C. Agriculture
D. Equality

13. Which is the last (133rd) chapter of the Kural?

A. Oodaluvagai
B. Kadavul Vazhthu
C. Uzhavu
D. Naadu

14. What number is added to the CE year to get the Thiruvalluvar Year?

A. 21
B. 31
C. 41
D. 78

15. According to Parimelazhagar, how many sections (iyals) does the Kural have?

A. 3
B. 7
C. 9
D. 13

16. In Parimelazhagar's division, which section of Porutpal has the most chapters?

A. Arasiyal
B. Illaraviyal
C. Ozhibiyal
D. Angaviyal

17. In which year was the Kural first printed?

A. 1709
B. 1812
C. 1886
D. 1916

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18. Which of these is NOT another name of the Thirukkural?

A. Poyyamozhi
B. Muthamizh Kappiyam
C. Muppal
D. Vayurai Vazhthu

19. In which year was the glass bridge linking the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the Thiruvalluvar statue opened?

A. 2000
B. 2019
C. 2024
D. 2025

20. To which chapter does the kural beginning "Karka kasadarak karpavai" belong?

A. Kallamai (Ignorance)
B. Kelvi (Listening)
C. Arivudaimai (Wisdom)
D. Kalvi (Learning)

Answers with explanations

1. B) 133 – The Kural has 133 chapters of ten couplets each, i.e. 1330 couplets.

2. C) 70 – Porutpal, the largest book, has 70 chapters (39–108).

3. A) 38 – Arathuppal has 38 chapters (1–38).

4. D) Pathinen Keezhkanakku – The Kural is one of the Eighteen Minor Works (Pathinen Keezhkanakku).

5. C) 7 – Four seer in the first line and three in the second – seven in all.

6. B) G.U. Pope – G.U. Pope published the complete English translation in 1886.

7. C) Veeramamunivar (Beschi) – Beschi (Veeramamunivar) translated Aram and Porul into Latin.

8. D) Parimelazhagar – Parimelazhagar; the other three are known for commentaries on other works.

9. A) 38 chapters of Arathuppal – The 38-ft pedestal stands for the 38 chapters of Arathuppal.

10. B) 1 January 2000 – Unveiled on 1 January 2000; 1976 is Valluvar Kottam and 2024 the glass bridge.

11. C) Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed – President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed opened it on 15 April 1976.

12. D) Equality – Kural 972 – all are equal by birth; only one's work makes a difference.

13. A) Oodaluvagai – Oodaluvagai, the last chapter of Kamathuppal.

14. B) 31 – Thiruvalluvar Year = CE + 31; 2026 = TY 2057.

15. C) 9 – Aram 4, Porul 3, Inbam 2 – nine sections.

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16. D) Angaviyal – Angaviyal has 32 chapters; Arasiyal 25, Ozhibiyal 13.

17. B) 1812 – The first printed edition appeared in 1812.

18. B) Muthamizh Kappiyam – Muthamizh Kappiyam is a name of the Silappathikaram.

19. C) 2024 – It was opened on 30 December 2024 for the statue's silver jubilee.

20. D) Kalvi (Learning) – It is the first couplet (391) of the chapter Kalvi.

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