

## CHANGING SOCIAL VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY TAMIL SOCIETY, INDIA: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Social values in Indian society in general and Tamil society in particular are subject to fluctuation, in accordance with on-going social changes ushered in by various modern forces. Consequently, these values metamorphose and degenerate into counter-cultural practices that pose a threat to traditional culture. Modern people attribute new meanings to the unethical practices that they engage in by emphasizing their immediate relevance and necessity for their changing life styles. They believe that their willingness to follow them instead of social values will help them make a profit that sustains their livelihood in this time of change.*

**KEYWORDS:** *generosity, greediness, hospitality, inhospitality, gratitude, ingratitude, truthfulness and untruthfulness*

### ABOUT SOCIAL VALUES

Social values are beliefs about appropriate behaviors. They are standard measures that guide people's thoughts, speeches, actions, and also judgments. Primarily, they are not innate, but are learnt through people's observations, interactions, and experiences within family, as well as in society, and are passed on through successive generations. They are influenced by the socio-

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cultural environment in terms of family, community, religion and the like. They convey what is important for people to lead a respectable life. According to Bardi et al. (2008), Maio (2010), and Roccas and Sagiv (2009), values guide people's perceptions, goals, attitudes, and behaviors. By and large, they serve as motivators that facilitate these components of people's lives. Therefore, Konty and Dunham (1997) point out that those values are expected to be less amenable to changes than attitudes and needs.

Values have cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Rokeach 1973): (1) a value is a cognitive component, in that it refers to some kind of perception or knowledge about a correct way of behaving, (2) a value is an affective component, in that people can feel emotional about it, and (3) a value is a behavioral component, in that it is an intervening variable that leads to action when activated. The values discussed here are explained from the point of view of normative theories. Pauls (1990) explains that normative theories of value make judgments about what "ought to be" in the realm of values. For instance, they make claims about what constitutes "just," "good," or "moral" behavior for an individual, as well as for society.

Ergil (1984) sees social values as moral beliefs and principles accepted by the majority of people so as to ensure the continuity of their bonds in society. Inkeles (1964) mentions that the social values indicate not what is there, but what *should* be there in a society in terms of moral imperatives. From this point of view, social values are accepted as undisputed facts that are expected by a society. They are social standards that help individuals understand the difference between right and wrong – hence they signify "it is not doing things right, but doing only the right things." They enable individuals to live together in harmony and peace and hence are the foundations of every culture. When they are lacking, all sorts of social problems may arise, eventually resulting in culture degradation followed by social disorganization.

Fichter (1990) specifies some of the functions of values: (1) they show ways of thinking and behaving ideally; (2) they are used as a means of judging; (3) they make people focus on useful and important cultural objects; (4) they play a role as a guide to adhering to and performing social roles; (5) they are the agents of social control; and (6) they provide solidarity. While controlling people's behavior, values maintain social order. Here arises a question: what is the difference between values and norms? Values are general guidelines, whereas norms are specific guidelines. Values are general standards, which help decide what is good and what is bad, whereas norms are like rules that specify how people should and should not behave in various social situations.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Objective*

This review as well as descriptive paper aims to analyze some social values such as generosity, hospitality, gratitude, and truthfulness, which are practiced by the elder generation of people in Tamil society (in Tamil Nadu State of India), and to explain how they are being replaced by a set of unethical practices by the younger generation.

### *Methodological tools*

Primarily, two qualitative methodological tools are used to collect data: case studies, and focus group discussion. Elaborate interviews were conducted with nine knowledgeable persons (four middle-aged men; two middle-aged and an elderly woman; and one male and one female adolescent graduate student) from rural as well as urban areas of Tamil Nadu. All of them were interviewed through video conferencing due to COVID-19. Additionally, a focus group discussion was held with a group of five elderly rural literates (three men and two women) and six urban adolescent graduate students (three boys and three girls) with the help of the same technique. In addition to this, a literature review forms a part of the methodology – in relation to which several reviews of relevant published articles and books were completed in order to prepare the conceptual foundation for the paper. Though a number of works were reviewed, they are not all presented due to limits to space, but some of them are referred to in various appropriate places in the paper.

### *Limitations*

One of the major limitations of the paper is that it confines its discussion to India in general and Tamil Nadu State in particular, due to limitations on space. The other one is that, for the same reason, only four values (generosity, hospitality, gratitude, and truthfulness) are discussed. These values may be universal in the sense that they are common to people who live in all civilized societies in the world, including Indian society as well as Tamil society. The paper also limits its scope to discussing these values in terms of how members of the elder generation continue to follow them on the one hand, and how those

of the younger generation prefer to follow a set of practices that contrast with those values on the other hand.

## GENEROSITY vs. GREED

As mentioned in the Oxford Dictionary, the term “generosity” is derived from the Latin word *generōsus*, which means “nobility of birth.” It is often used to denote charity. The wealth amassed by an individual is meant for not only living a luxurious life, but also for charitable purposes. Ancient literature and religious scriptures in Indian society in general and Tamil society in particular glorify the value of charity (a product of generosity) and encourage people to practice it. For instance, Thiruvalluvar, a Sangam<sup>2</sup> Tamil poet, mentions in his work (*Thirukkural* 1931:385) that an efficient king is able to think of right ways to acquire wealth and safeguard it in order to spend on increasing the welfare of his country. Another Sangam literary work, *Purananuru* (1950:189), stresses that wealth is destined for charity, i.e., for giving generously to the poor. The *Bhagavad Gita* (1971:17:20) declares that “charity given to a worthy person simply because it is right to give, without consideration of anything in return, at the proper time and in the proper place, is stated to be in the mode of goodness.” The gospel of Jesus Christ (*The Holy Bible* 1970: Acts 20:35) states that “[it] is more blessed to give than to receive.” While advocating charity, the *Quran* (*The Holy Quran* 2018: *Surah Baqarah* 2:271) points out that “[if] you do deeds of charity openly, it is well; but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you...” Concern for others is one of the main teachings of Sikhism, which advocates charity, especially giving food to hungry people, because this is considered equivalent to giving food to God (Singh 2001).

Charity is one of the predominant social values practiced by the elder generation of people in Tamil society, as elsewhere in other societies in India, out of their concern for the well-being of humanity. It involves selfless service helping the poor in terms of providing money, food, clothing, or shelter. Like philanthropists elsewhere in India, some of their counterparts in Tamil society run charitable organizations that support the well-being of the poor. For example, a well-known philanthropist in Tamil Nadu, Chengalvaraya Naicker (1829–1874), made a munificent contribution for relief work during the worst

2 During the Sangam Age (the period applicable to ancient parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala and parts of Sri Lanka spanning from c. 6th-century BCE to c. 3rd-century CE), varieties of Tamil literature were contributed by poets as well as poetesses. This period was named after the term “Sangam” (which means organization). The Sangam poets and scholars used to gather at Madurai, the second largest city in Tamil Nadu State of India.

famine in Orissa in 1866, and later on wrote a will donating his entire assets (amounting to a huge sum of money) to trusts, particularly the Pachaiyappa Trust – named after its donor, Pachaiyappa Mudaliar (1754–1794) – for charitable and religious purposes.<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, Nawab C. Abdul Hakeem Saheb (1863–1938) founded the Muslim Educational Society<sup>4</sup> in 1918 at Melvisharam in Tamil Nadu (a business center in northern Tamil Nadu), which became a great educational hub for catering to the educational needs of rural students (C. Abdul Hakeem College Committee 1990). Likewise, some other state-level as well as national-level religious organizations are engaged in charitable activities for the destitute and orphans.

Thus, a person's generosity is understood as his selfless charitable service to the poor. In ancient Tamil society, some philanthropists donated valuable things to needy persons. They believed that the purpose of accumulating wealth is to help the poor and perform righteous obligations. For instance, in the Sangam period, seven great philanthropists (Pari, Valviloori, Malayaman Thirumudi Kaari, Paeghan, Adhiyamaan Neduman Anji, Nallaai and Aykandhiran.) were very well known for their selfless charitable service (Jagannathan 2014). Nevertheless, others who were not rich were also engaged in charitable activities according to their capacity to donate. Additionally, in India including Tamil Nadu State, certain religious mutts<sup>5</sup> and several religious institutions have been engaged in charitable activities. However, at the present, most of them have given up those activities and some others have confined themselves only to providing religious services for various reasons. However, a religious organization established by a Tamil Saint, Swami Ramalinga (1823–1874), at Vadalur (a town situated almost in the middle of coastal Tamil Nadu) still continues to serve food to thousands of hungry people every day. Of all forms of charity, feeding the hungry (*annadhanam* – etymologically *anna* means food; *dhanam* means charity) is the best, because the Tamil poets, Kudapulaviyanar (*Purananuru* 1950:18) and Chathanar (*Manimekalai* 1989:11:92) emphasize that “the giver of food is the giver of life.” This is perhaps the reason why in big temples in Tamil Nadu the poor and destitute are provided with food every day in the afternoon. Some of the charitable trusts also perform a similar service. During an interview undertaken through video conferencing on March 27,

3 Pachaiyappa Mudaliar (1754–1794) and Chengalvaraya Naicker (1829–1874) were known philanthropists in Tamil Nadu who donated huge sum for establishing educational institutions. Extract from Pachayyappa College Centenary Commemoration Book (Tiruvankataswami 1942).

4 <https://cahc.edu.in/about/management> [Last access: 06 10 2020]

5 Mutt refers to a Hindu religious institution with properties that is presided over by a religious person whose duty it is to impart religious dogmas or render spiritual service to a body of disciples (Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, 1951– Madras Act XIX, 1951, p. 10).

2020, a middle-aged follower of Swami Ramalinga who frequents Vadalur town explained this form of service as follows:

*According to Swami, there is no better prayer or ritual than annadhanam. It is, by all means, the greatest contribution and an essential element of Sanatan Dharma.<sup>6</sup> Swami was unable to bear the sufferings of starving people. To him, kindness or love of a person is no use if it fails to satisfy the hunger of a fellow human being. Therefore, he initiated the selfless service of feeding hungry people on May 23, 1867. With the support of his friends and well-wishers, land was acquired in Vadalur town and a modest building was constructed to house a mega kitchen. Donations of food grains and vegetables were accepted from generous people to keep the kitchen always engaged. Since day one, food has been served thrice a day to the hungry without caste or religious discrimination. Every day about 1,000 people in and around the town are fed. I used to dine there twice a month, as I am living in a neighboring township.*

Similarly, Kunjarathammal, a wealthy *devadasi*<sup>7</sup> fed thousands of people in Madurai (the second largest city in Tamil Nadu State) during the most horrible famine of 1876–1878.<sup>8</sup> During the initial period of famine, she was moved by the sight of hundreds of people starving and dying. Consequently, she started serving porridge prepared at her home to a small group of hungry people. After sometime, a large crowd of people started lining up in front of her house to get food. Prompted by this, the then District Collector of Madurai (an Englishman) started serving food in a similar manner with the help of district administration. However, Kunjarathammal continued to feed hundreds of people over a period of thirteen months by selling her properties one after another, including her jewels and two bungalows. Consequently, she was forced to live in a small tiled house and died after the famine (Narayani 2020). Her willingness to feed

6 In Hinduism, *Sanatanadharma* denotes a set of duties or religiously ordained practices obligatory for all Hindus regardless of caste, class, or sect. These duties and practices are considered timeless values.

7 In the past, in south India, *devadasis* were women who were dedicated to rendering certain specific religious services in temples throughout their lives. In addition to this, they used to perform classical Indian music and dance during temple ceremonies. Hence, they enjoyed a significant social status. But later, by exigencies of circumstances, they ended up as concubines of wealthy persons and were held in low esteem. At the present, the *devadasi* system is not in existence.

8 This began in 1876 after an intense drought that resulted in crop failure in the Deccan Plateau. It affected south and south-western India (the British presidencies of Madras and Bombay, and the princely states of Mysore and Hyderabad) for a period of two years.

these hungry people came from her genuine concern for the poor, who were living in despair. This is perhaps why she was able to sustain her charity until the end of the famine. This shows that charity of any kind, if it is performed wholeheartedly, motivates the giver and sustains them.

The service “Food for Life Vrindavan” (FFLV 2007) started in 1991 by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in *Vrindavan*<sup>9</sup> has been providing food on a daily basis to several thousand poor people. Similarly, this society’s temple at Dwarka Township in Delhi has also been feeding millions of poor since the declaration of nationwide lockdown on March 24, 2020 due to COVID-19 (Ghosh 2020). In the same way, the *Gurudwara* (temple of Sikhs) Management Committee in Delhi set up a mega kitchen to feed about 40,000 people daily, who are unable to get food during this time of pandemic (*Times of India* 2020 ). In Tamil Nadu State, a number of voluntary organizations have also put up community kitchens to supply food to pavement dwellers and the poor who have been hit severely by the lockdown. For instance, in Coimbatore (the third largest city in Tamil Nadu State), some volunteers from the Catering Owners Association have been delivering about 2,000 packets of food three times a day to hungry people since the commencement of the lockdown (*The Hindu*, April 6, 2020).

Though a limited number of organizations have served the benefit of the poor and the needy for several years, the charitable activities in Tamil Nadu as well as in other states of India are shrinking significantly. This may be due to the impact of capitalism on people, in terms of how it encourages them to achieve economic power by obtaining access to resources. They feel that nothing may be achieved if their economic condition is weak. Their desire for wealth accumulation seems to have limited their involvement in charitable activities. The profit motive has become a factor underlying their interactions and interrelations and made them selfish and parochial, ultimately making them idiosyncratic and greedy. This greediness may perhaps be a means of coping with the present fast-moving capitalist societies.

Recently, in India, the corporate sector has been instructed by the government to contribute (*Times of India* 2020) to a fund earmarked for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for a COVID-19 Relief Fund (this qualifies the fund as CSR expenditure according to the Companies Act, 2013). Companies have responded probably with the hidden agenda of increasing brand value, for obvious reasons. However, some of them have contributed large sums out of their own free will to charitable activities during this pandemic period. Similarly, wealthy film artists,

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<sup>9</sup> According to ancient Hindu scriptures, Lord Krishna spent most of his childhood days in *Vrindavan*, situated in Uttar Pradesh State of India.

particularly from Chennai (the capital of Tamil Nadu State) and Mumbai (the capital of Maharashtra State) have donated substantial sums of money to the Relief Fund. If such wealthy donors across India often contributed a part of their earnings mainly to feed millions of starving people, the problem of hunger could be significantly resolved, despite the fact of overpopulation. However, the sharp decrease in charitable activities in India may be an important reason for the increasing number of hungry people on pavements and streets, who will be permanent beggars in the course of time.

One virtuous practice insisted on by all religions is giving alms to beggars. For instance, pious Hindus believe that this practice will bring them *punya*.<sup>10</sup> Whenever they come across beggars, they provide them with food or money. In the past, in Tamil society, only fresh food was given to beggars before the givers themselves ate, meaning that it would be the same food that the givers also ate. This tradition was encouraged, promoted, and transmitted through generations by the joint family system. Of late, beggars have usually been provided with leftover food (or food left overnight) because they beg mostly in the morning hours. Especially in some Hindu orthodox families, this tradition is still followed by giving a little portion of freshly cooked food to crows before lunch, and also leaving another portion in folded plantain leaves after lunch to feed dogs. The belief behind their customary practice is that ancestors in the form of crows will visit them, hence they are fed first. Since dogs are loyal to givers, they are fed next. Thus, hospitality is extended to birds and animals.

However, educated young people presently living in nuclear families interpret the act of giving alms to beggars in a more rational way. In an interview with two graduate students (one male and another female) in a town situated in southern Tamil Nadu through video conferencing on May 5, 2020, they expressed the following views:

*We don't mind giving alms to the physically handicapped or blind or aged beggars, but we can't do it for the physically fit who can work and earn their livelihood. Since people here would like to help those begging at their doorsteps, in public places, or pilgrimage centers in order to get puniya, a large number of poor resort to begging throughout their life without toiling. This is why beggars in India have multiplied over years resulting in serious social problem of beggary, a formidable challenge to the government. We don't have any hesitation saying we are all solely responsible for causing yet another social problem in India. We are*

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10 As prescribed in the Hindu religious scriptures, *punya* refers to the good deeds of individuals that bring them benefits in this as well as in next birth. It can be acquired through charitable activities.



*also against those physically fit lazy beggars for the reason that they will lose their self-respect by being beggars. We should not give up self-respect in our lives, because it is an important value that qualifies all of us as dignified individuals.*

Possibly this may also be the view of many followers of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, who led the Self-Respect Movement<sup>11</sup> in Tamil Nadu State against Brahmanism.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that, in Tamil Nadu State, as elsewhere in other states of India, there is a perpetual relationship between pilgrimage centers and temples on the one hand, and swarms of beggars in these places on the other. As mentioned earlier, in order to gain *punniya*, pilgrims give alms to beggars. Moreover, there is an association between begging and Hinduism. Wandering monks and mendicants continue to survive by begging only in times of need. Hinduism encourages people to help beggars because this is, according to the Hindus, the best way to practice charity. Further, it prescribes that *Bhiksha* (begging) is a religious practice for achieving spiritual purity that involves detaching oneself from worldly pleasure. Venkatesan (2016) mentions that *Bhiksha* signifies the Hindu tradition of begging for alms with the purpose of self-effacement or ego-conquering. Therefore, in India, begging has been accepted as a way of life for monks and mendicants who have renounced worldly pleasure. Over centuries, the practice of giving alms to the needy has been built into the social fabric of India.

But the notion of begging is now completely different from what it was in the past. At present, most beggars are no way connected to spirituality, but are after money rather than food. Therefore, begging is not the last resort for them to survive, but has become a way for them to earn money. In fact, population growth in India is not healthy because a sizeable proportion of able people become beggars under the pretext of religion. Consequently, begging has presently assumed huge magnitude in India. Especially in urban areas, it is the only means of earning a livelihood for thousands of destitute. In India, there are more than 400,000 beggars, which shows that human resources remain unutilized. Hence, the alarming number of beggars has become a threat to India.

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11 The Self-Respect Movement is a South Asian movement that started in 1925 with the aim of achieving a society where backward castes have equal human rights. It encourages them to have self-respect.

12 Brahmanism is an ideology and a way of life that originates from the history of the Vedas, often called a philosophy practiced by the Brahmans (the priestly caste in India) on the basis of specific inferred beliefs.

With reference to the subject of this paper, greediness in contrast to generosity signifies an intense and selfish desire to amass wealth. Presumably, strongly profit-driven people are, in one way or another, greedy. They keep on accumulating wealth for their own comfort and also for the benefit of their children, but they do not want to donate even a small portion of it to the poor. Their selfishness and greediness can be understood through their habitual consumption behavior. The “mass consumption culture” acquired by people in contemporary India makes them attribute new meanings to leading a materialistic life,<sup>13</sup> as well as the habit of greediness in relation to leading a luxurious life. They make all efforts to amass wealth to meet their growing material needs. This consumer behavior is reflected in their day-to-day activity. Milton Friedman, an American economist, during an interview in 1979, expressed his views about greed as follows:

*Is there some society you know that doesn't run on greed? You think Russia doesn't run on greed? You think China doesn't run on greed? ...The world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests. The great achievements of civilization have not come from government bureaus. The world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests. Einstein didn't construct his theory under order from a bureaucrat. Henry Ford didn't revolutionize the automobile industry that way.... (Friedman 1979)*

More precisely, he says, the free market system combines with people's self-interest in such a way as to benefit everyone monetarily, especially the poor.

Here, self-interest refers to individuals' interest in achieving what they want, but they are unmindful of social interests, i.e., of helping the poor to get some benefit. All their activities and decisions are centered on their own interests. However, it is not right to equate the term “self-interest” with the word “selfishness” because the former may facilitate an individual's development and achievements, whereas the latter pushes them into a state of unhealthy competition and retrogression. The free market system promotes self-interest as regards creating wealth. In some extraordinary circumstances, one's self-interest may result in a social interest in helping the poor.

Growing “global consumer culture” makes people greedy, because their unrelenting self-interest forces them to purchase material goods beyond their actual requirements. Their greediness drives their indomitable passion to acquire such goods. It seems reasonable to claim that their greediness and their

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13 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/consumer-behavior>; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-darkness/201203/the-madness-materialism> [Last access: 05 05 2020]

consumption behavior are mutually reinforcing. In other words, their greediness does not allow them to be satisfied with what they possess in relation to having a decent living. On the one hand, they are often unmindful about the unnecessary consumption of goods because it may be that they are proud of it. For instance, when seeing their neighbor's latest-model car, or mobile phone, they would like to buy the same thing to satisfy their ego, despite the fact that they already own a car or mobile. On the other hand, as they become trapped in "global consumer culture," they would like to update their knowledge about the launch of new products on global markets. They are often tempted to buy products that may not be immediate or essential requirements.

As they are under pressure to increase their earning ability so as to purchase more and more goods, they explore different means of accumulating money. Thus, consumer culture pulls them into its fold and changes their attitude in line with consumer behavior. Since material possession is perceived by others as affluence and aristocracy, global companies take advantage of this idiosyncrasy of people and accordingly popularize their products through the media to increase their sales. One of the adverse changes ushered in by consumer culture is that it never lets people become satisfied with what they possess, but makes them suffer from an excessive hunger for the "over-possession" of goods. Eventually, their craving for material possession makes them greedy.

In contemporary India, the charitable activities of trusts are at low ebb because of the government's pressing new regulations. Gangad (2020) says that charitable trusts and institutions are the most over-regulated sector in India. Similarly, Kably (2019) observes that the Indian government makes life more difficult for charity trusts. Therefore, in contemporary India, the charitable activities of trusts are in a depressed state. As regards individuals, the money earned by most of them is not sufficient to meet some of their essential needs. Therefore, in being greedy, they have compulsion to earn more money to boost their family income. Their primary concern is to attain material well-being, rather than to help starving people. Are they like to be generous in terms of helping poor people? As a matter of fact, most of them are unlikely to be generous, except for some who engage in charitable activities. A middle-aged woman respondent from a bank from a northern district in Tamil Nadu State shared the following views about charitable activities during an interview through video conferencing on 29 April, 2020.

*My husband provides security in a bank where I serve as an assistant. The salary we receive is inadequate to meet expenses related to family maintenance, medical items, our children's education, and the payment of loan installments. Because of these commitments, we are unable to*

*save any money to manage unforeseen emergencies in our life. Now our immediate concern is to generate income from other sources to boost our family income. In this situation, unlike a wealthy philanthropist, we can't think of charitable activities. Moreover, we have no money and time to engage in such activities. By all means, self-interest is the only means for us as well as for millions of marginalized people in India to improve our family economy. It serves as a foundation for us to acquire the things required to live a frugal life.*

The opinion of many people in Tamil Nadu as well as in other states of India may perhaps reflect this view because of their similar experiences. The interactions and interrelations of the present generation will tend to be materialistic and parochial. Their latent humanism will be overshadowed by their growing greediness. In this situation, they may not be truthful and trusting of each other. Since their activities are somehow grounded on a commercial basis and the need for personal gain, they will be reluctant to render selfless service to benefit starving people. In contemporary times, this more or less becomes a way of life for a large proportion of Tamil people, as well as their counterparts elsewhere in India.

## **HOSPITALITY vs. INHOSPITALITY**

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the term “hospitality” is derived from the Latin *hospitalitas*, which in turn derives from *hospes*, referring to both guest and host. This means that a host offers a friendly and warm reception to their guests, be they visitors or strangers, and entertains them with food and gifts. Later on, this concept was extended to business clients, religious leaders, official visitors, and the like. The term “hospitable” is thus associated with the value of hospitality. A hospitable person is likely to exhibit a spirit of generosity and enduring sincerity and festivity. Although ways of expressing hospitality differ from culture to culture, they uniformly signify the virtue of cordiality shown by hosts to their guests. This often depends on social situations, ethical issues, religious beliefs, and traditional practices. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, a Vedic-era Sanskrit text, states “Atithi Devo Bhava,” which literally means “be one for whom the guest is God.” In other words, “the guest is equivalent to God” (*Taittiriya Upanishad* n.d.). Therefore, hospitality is considered a unique feature of Hindu culture in general and Tamil culture in particular. Specifically, it is interwoven with family life, through which both husband and wife jointly extend hospitality to guests. According to the Hindu way of life, neither husband

nor wife alone should invite guests to visit. For instance, Sita (Kambar, Kamba Ramayanam: Sundara kanda :344), wife of Rama (king of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh State, India) and Kannaki (Elango Adigal, Silappadikaram: Kolaikalla Kaathai :72–73), wife of Kovalan (son of a wealthy merchant in Poompuhar situated in southern Tamil Nadu State), were portrayed as being in a sorrowful state in one place in the great Tamil epics because they were deeply worried about their inability to feed and honor their guests, because somehow they were unexpectedly separated from their husbands. Thiruvalluvar (1931:81) claims that the purpose of leading a domestic life and earning and protecting wealth is to extend hospitality to guests.

Thiyagarajan (2015:16–22) points out that, since Vedic times (c.1500 – c.1100 BCE), hospitality has played an essential role in the social life of people in India. It unites hosts and guests through their mutual understanding, spirit of generosity, expression of love, and renewed openness. It is the way that an individual treats his guests, and in the same way, they would like to be treated. It is a form of constructive social action for the reason that it facilitates the consolidation of human relations, including intra- and inter-family relations through courteous social interaction. Sometimes, it proactively redresses the grievances of rival factions and resolves conflicts within communities through commensality (inter-dining) or community dinners.

A host always has to be conscious of taking care of visiting guests unhesitatingly. In support of this, Thiruvalluvar (1931:83) says that “the domestic life of the man who daily entertains visiting guests shall not be wasted due to poverty.” It is understood from this that the host advocates selfless, unconditional, and unmotivated hospitality in contrast to motivated and benefit-driven hospitality. On the one hand, the former behavior of the host was part of domestic life in ancient Tamil society, but it is rare to see this behavior in present society. On the other hand, the latter behavior of the host is prevalent throughout contemporary Indian society. With the expectation of material or non-material benefits, the Hindus perform hospitality as motivated by their religious leaders and astrologers. For instance, on some religious occasions, devotees, at the end of their fasting, invite their friends and relatives for a religious dinner, hoping to get some benefits through God’s blessings. Sometime they organize with temple priests to distribute *Prasad* (food offered to God) among those visiting the temple in the belief that God will bless them with prosperity. In a real sense, God may perhaps bless them provided they give something to the needy and poor without expecting anything in return. In favor of this approach, Thiruvalluvar (1931:221) states that giving something to the destitute with no ulterior motive is charity, but all other approaches are investments aimed at making a return.

The joint family system in India fostered mainly the first type of hospitality, and made it a way of life of Tamil people. This value, an important component of Hindu as well as Tamil culture, was passed down through generations of joint families. During an in-depth interview with an elderly woman from north-eastern Tamil Nadu State on May 10, 2020, she explained that:

*For a period of 17 years, from 1958 to 1975, I lived in a joint family with my husband, my two grown-up children, my husband's brother's family, with a child, aged in-laws, and their unmarried daughter. All of us were accommodated in a fairly big house in our village. Almost every day, we used to provide food that we prepared to 4-6 persons, including relatives, friends, visitors, and strangers in and around the village, as well as from far-off places. Especially at festival time, a large quantity of food prepared by professional cooks was served to many guests who visited us at our invitation. On several occasions we used to cook food after lunch or dinner to feed belated guests. Every day, my father-in-law was keen on inviting at least one or two local friends to join him for lunch. It was rare to see him taking lunch alone. In the same way, and in the same spirit, on many special occasions we were invited by our relatives and friends for a get-together over lunch. Since our family depended (for its livelihood) on large-scale cultivation, we were able to continue this hospitality as a core value of our family until 1975. After the partitioning of our family property in the same year, my husband shifted me and my children to a big city owing to his employment and my children's education. Since then, we started living in a nuclear family. But now, at the age of 80, I hardly ever see such sort of hospitality in the present generation.*

After the advent of industrialization, increasing commercial relations in Indian society overshadowed the generosity of people, and shifted their focus from social interests to self-interest. This shift in focus was systematically facilitated by the nuclear family system. The state of independence or individuality of a working husband and wife (custodians of hospitality) decreases their social interest, and increases their self-interest regarding seeking more and more financial gain and personal benefit. The tendency of nuclear family members to accumulate wealth is perhaps enhanced by the capitalist culture that flourishes in a globalized era. Goode (1963:10–18) stresses that the nuclear family is more suitable for dealing with modern economic conditions than a joint family is. In support of this claim, Freed and Freed (1982:189–202) claim that the nuclear family is suitable for the present labor market situation. It is inferred from this that expanding business

enterprises associated with labor market situations will determine the type of families that exist. The husband and wife in a nuclear family have complete freedom to enhance their economy through their independent earning and saving, as they plan. Their economic freedom drives them to amass wealth to become prospective buyers in the global market. In contrast, the head of a joint family was an authoritative person and had the responsibility of pooling family income (which flowed in from different sources, including the earnings of all other members). Therefore individual members in a joint family were not given the right to control the family economy.

In some cases, in a nuclear family, the participation of husband and wife in more than one job from dawn to dusk to advance the family economy may be the main cause of aggressiveness. Since both of them are employed, their long working day leaves them with little time to attend to others' needs, including the needs of their children. They are typically away from home for 6-8 hours or more. In their absence, a servant maid may take care of their youngest, as well as school-going children. Moreover, their mobile phones may consume the little time otherwise available for this routine. In this situation, they prefer to deliberately avoid hospitality.

Their individual preferences, coupled with self-interest fostered by the nuclear family system, steer them to acquire personal gain and comfort by enhancing their family economy. If a householder and his wife would like to host their friends or relatives on certain special occasions, such as birthdays or on the event of a marriage, they often like to take them to a hotel for dinner instead of cooking food for them in their home itself due to the lack of time. Presently, many dual-earning couples in nuclear families would prefer to host such events conveniently within their homes by placing online orders with Zomato<sup>14</sup> to entertain their guests. For instance, a middle-aged husband and wife employed in different private companies in Chennai city (the capital of Tamil Nadu) jointly shared their experience of hospitality during an interview through video conferencing on May 21, 2020.

*We are busy on all working days. When we find some leisure time at the weekend amidst our household work, we invite guests once in a while for a dinner. Our easy way to provide them with a variety of tasty food is to take them to a local luxury hotel. Sometimes, for a change, we place online orders with Zomato to supply food to our home to entertain our guests. However, this could not happen while living in a*

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14 Zomato is a comprehensive “restaurant search and discovery app” available in several countries, including India.



*joint family for a decade, since it was in fact a habitual practice in most joint families. The food was prepared jointly by women and served to guests. After we started living in a nuclear family, we restricted this practice for obvious reasons. To our surprise, we hosted only one guest during the whole of last year. In the current year, COVID-19 has prevented us from hosting guests. Presently, due to the intensity of the pandemic, the Tamil Nadu government again imposed restrictions on people in several districts, banning them from moving around for some more weeks by extending the curfew. Presumably, a nationwide curfew may perhaps be reintroduced sooner or later, as the pandemic is not under control in many other states. If this happens, we need not think of hospitality until the restoration of normalcy at the national level.*

Probably, in days to come, people may go a step further by directing food suppliers Zomato to deliver food directly to guests' homes in order to save time by avoiding getting together in this situation. However, of late, people in Tamil Nadu State and elsewhere in India have hazily kept up the practice of hospitality as a formality, without real involvement. Like other degrading values, the value of hospitality is not a matter of regret to people because of their changing attitude to the value system. Their attitudinal changes are influenced by the rapid changes taking place in their lives in contemporary Tamil, as well as in Indian society.

## **GRATITUDE vs. INGRATITUDE**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term "gratitude" is derived from Latin word *gratus*, which means pleasing or thankful. It is also known as thankfulness or gratefulness. These three words are used synonymously in the following discussion. According to several researchers, gratitude is an emotional reaction shown by a recipient to someone in response to receipt of a gift or benefit (Roberts 2004). It is the moral obligation of a recipient to show gratitude to the benefactor, who may be God or anyone else. Thiruvalluvar (1931:102) points out that the timely help of someone, even if small, means much more than the world. He further specifies that the benefit of help rendered by someone affectionately without expecting any return is larger than the sea (Thiruvalluvar 1931:103). He also stresses that there may be redemption for those who have killed any kind of virtue, but there is no salvation for a person who has killed gratitude (Thiruvalluvar 1931:110). *Purananuru* (1950:34) proclaims that anyone who cuts the udders of a cow, kills a woman's fetus, or abuses teachers, is able to get



relief from these sins through atonement, whereas there is no relief for someone who has killed gratitude. This shows the fact that there is a close relationship between thankfulness (gratefulness) and truthfulness (honest), hence they are inseparable. In other words, being thankful to a giver depends on being truthful to everyone.

While expressing gratitude to the benefactor, a recipient not only feels happy, but also likes to reciprocate in the same way. Further, this may prompt them to help others. Likewise, any two individuals can express gratitude to each other for mutual help. This facilitates them to keep on helping others, besides reciprocating their benefactors. This is a positive chain reaction to be encouraged in the family, neighborhood, community, workplace and the like. Algoe et al. (2010) state that individual expressions of gratitude by individuals to others who have helped them strengthen and promote their relationships with others.

The value of gratitude is undergoing phenomenal changes in contemporary times. In ancient Indian society, including Tamil society, parents were highly respected and even worshiped by their children. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* (n.d.) says: “Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava,” which literally means “be one for whom the Mother is God, be one for whom the Father is God.” Further, it adds that this is a cultural value of Hindus. Touching the feet of parents with utmost respect is an integral part of the life of Hindus. Avvaiyar<sup>15</sup> glorifies parents (mother and father) by saying they are the first known Gods.

In changing times, the gratitude of sons and daughters to their parents is subject to change. In thousands of families, parents are treated humiliatingly and are left to fend for themselves or sent to old-age homes by their sons, who are insensitive to their plight. In a personal interview with a 57-year-old construction worker from Vellore city in north Tamil Nadu on May 10, 2020, the latter explained how his son has ill-treated him.

*My wife and I have been jobless for about a couple of months due to the nationwide lockdown for the pandemic. Now we have no resources to sustain our livelihood. My only son, who is married and employed in a private hospital, is in no way helpful to us in this critical situation. We educated him and secured a job for him through a known source. Last year, we spent a lot of money on his marriage and also for setting up his home after the marriage. He knows that we have no money at the present to buy essential things to prepare food. Recently, I approached him three times to get some money, but in vain. He shouted at me, perhaps due to his wife's instigation, and asked me to borrow from a*

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15 Avvaiyar, a Sangam Tamil poetess, glorified parents in her work, *Kondraivendan* (Avvaiyar n.d.).

*lender, with interest. He is ungrateful to us and not concerned about our plight. Before marriage, he was not so. But now his attitude is different and his relationship with us is not cordial.*

In some lower-class and lower-middle-class families, aged parents seek shelter in old-age homes because their sons shirk the responsibility of caring for them. Their son's keen interest is to settle down in a nuclear family. Akbar and Kumar (2014:55–61) and Lalan (2014:21–23) hold more or less a similar view. Moreover, the uncompromising lifestyles of parents and sons seem to be an important cause of the latter's preference for living in a nuclear family. Though this sort of family preference of sons is prevalent in middle- and upper-class families, parents may not be serious about their sons' priorities regarding family preference, besides professional ones. But one point to be stressed here is that helpless daughters may sympathize with their parents, as they move to their husbands' residences after marriage.

However, in many families, sons and daughters are grateful to their parents. For instance, a known bank manager employed in a city bank situated in northern Tamil Nadu explained over mobile on May 25, 2020 about what his parents had done for him.

*I am grateful to my father and mother for their selfless efforts to make me a successful man. They are still caring, supporting, loving and guiding me even at my age of 54. They have helped me achieve all my goals and rise up to this level with all comforts in life. During my school days, my mother used to be with me often as a moral supporter in times of academic problems, and my father used to provide me with quick remedies for overcoming such problems time and again. In fact, they were the constant motivators and supporters behind all my successes. I am very grateful to them for all their support, encouragement, and hardship, and for making me what I am now.*

In this case, the son's gratitude to his parents depended on his intimate relationship with them. But in the previous case, the son's ungratefulness to his parents depended on his cold relationship with them. Therefore, it is observed that within the family and outside it, a person's feeling of gratitude to others is associated with the kind of relationship they maintain with them.

When a couple cultivates the practice of expressing their gratitude and appreciation to each other for every little thing they do, without ego, they experience a high level of satisfaction in their conjugal life. This makes them faithful and trusting of each other. Consequently, their marital bond becomes

strong and keeps their union in a healthy state throughout their lives. On the other hand, unlike this situation, a vast majority of couples in Tamil community, as well as in other communities elsewhere in India, are not able to be compatible with each other with respect to several issues. In other words, their egos will not let them express their gratitude and appreciation for each other. They think that mutual help among family members is obligatory; hence they feel no need to contribute. Sometimes they become reliant on attending to most of their work on an individual basis, including receiving food through online orders. This situation is mostly prevalent in dual-earner families in towns and cities. Since their working times are typically different, especially the working times of employees of the information technology (IT) sector, their inter-personal interactions are conveniently limited to mobile phone communications.

In a fast-moving materialistic life, working couples want to be independent in their family lives. This is highly pronounced in the families of those employed in the IT sector in Tamil Nadu as well as in other states of India. A known family court judge in Madras High Court, Tamil Nadu explained that about 80 per cent of divorce cases registered in his court are initiated by young couples working in the IT sector. He pointed out that the ego conflict between spouses is the major cause of this problem. Since both of them get a lucrative salary and enjoy equal work status, they want to be independent of each other, particularly with regard to savings and expenditure, besides sharing household work. Conflict between them arises when one questions the other relating to these matters. Despite their desire to be independent, they can find a viable way to continue to live together if they remain simply grateful to each other and recognize each other's talents and contributions. This is perhaps the reason why in Europe the youngsters prefer relations with partners<sup>16</sup> (living in a relationship) as an alternative to legal marriage.

Crafty people seek any help unhesitatingly from others. Until they get it, they visit them repeatedly and falsely flatter them. Soon after getting their help, they forget this in no time. But if someone expresses gratitude to the right person who helped them at the right time, they will be reciprocated by the latter in the same way some other time. A truthful person will remember even a small instance of help throughout their life, because they are always conscious of the value of help.

Thus, it is understood that truthfulness and thankfulness are inseparable and reinforce each other. However, many people are unthankful to those who have

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16 Partner relationship refers to a living arrangement in which an unmarried couple live together. They cohabit, but remain unmarried for a variety of reasons. They may perhaps want to test their compatibility before they get legally married.

helped them because they are, by habit, untruthful to them, as well as unmindful of their help. They have no sense to appreciate the help they have received, but will not hesitate to ask again for another favor. Therefore, parents and teachers have to assume the important role of teaching children to be truthful, along with imparting the value of thankfulness.

## TRUTHFULNESS vs. UNTRUTHFULNESS

The Sanskrit word *Satya* or *Satyam* (truth) is derived from *sat* and *ya*. *Sat* means being or reality, while *ya* and *yam* mean “advancing, supporting, holding up, sustaining, one that moves.” As a composite word, *Satya* and *Satyam* imply that “which supports, sustains and advances reality, being”; it literally means that “which is true, actual, real, genuine, trustworthy, valid” (*Online Encyclopedia of Buddhism*). Truth is often associated with honesty, as both values sprout from the same root. Hence, in the following discussion, both of them are used synonymously. It is relevant here to briefly explain Mahatma Gandhi’s message about truth. In his English weekly newspaper, *Harijan* (Children of God), he wrote: “My prayerful search gave me the revealing dictum Truth is God, instead of the usual one God is Truth” (Gandhi 1942:8–9). His autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* itself is testimony that shows his boundless love for truth. He himself tried to remain truthful through his life (Gandhi 1990 [1948]). He was prepared to sacrifice even that which was dearest to him in pursuit of truth, because this is the essence of all morals in life. According to Gandhi, truth grows in magnitude every day, hence his definition of it also widened. Throughout his political-cum-religious journey, he followed the truth and proved that he was a real messenger of truth in the twentieth century. However, he attached equal importance to *Ahimsa* (non-violence). He wrote in *Harijan* (Gandhi 1940:2–3):

*Ahimsa is my God, and Truth is my God. When I look for Ahimsa, Truth says, ‘Find it through me.’ When I look for Truth, Ahimsa says, ‘Find it out through me’.*

Further, he wrote in a paper in English in *Young India* (Gandhi 1925:4–6):

*My faith in truth and non-violence is ever-growing, and as I am ever trying to follow them in my life... I see them in a newer light every day and read in them a newer meaning.*

Gandhi’s view about truth was irrevocable in different contexts. As a case

in point, while launching the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922) against colonial rule in India, he advised the satyagrahis<sup>17</sup> to follow the path of truth while taking part in nonviolent resistance. In the middle of the movement, to every one's surprise, he withdrew, because the satyagrahis had deviated from what he really wanted them to do, besides indulging in violent activities. He was truthful in thought, in speech, and in action, i.e. whatever he thought about something, he spoke about it honestly, and put it into his action undeviatingly. In other words, he always synchronized the three activities to uphold the supreme value of truth.

On the contrary, if a person is untruthful, he thinks about one thing, speaks of another thing, and his action reveals some other thing. Undoubtedly, he is a hypocrite, as he does not like to harmonize all three actions with a binding thread of truth. Moreover, it is very difficult for him to get along with relatives, friends and others, as he is untruthful to them and hence unmindful of gaining their confidence. All of the former feel like distancing themselves from this kind of person. In contrast, Thiruvalluvar (1931:294) says, a truthful person lives in the minds of all people.

Unlike the present generation, the people who lived in the Sangam period cherished truth and hence were scared of telling lies. Tamil people believed that some specific village deities whose temples are situated in different parts of Tamil Nadu help with safeguarding the truth. It was particularly rural people who used to bring alleged liars to these temples to make them make vows in front of those deities (Karunanithi 1988:15–27). Since time immemorial, during the engagement ritual, an essential part of the marriage ceremony in Tamil, as well as in some other religious communities elsewhere in India, the bride as well as bridegroom have to enter into mutual agreement, i.e., to make a vow that cannot be violated by both parties. All arranged marriages are solemnized only after the accomplishment of this promise. Here, the truth in the form of a vow unites a man and woman in marital life. But presently, on some occasions, either one of the parties particularly the groom's parents may violate this vow mainly for monetary gain in the form of dowry.<sup>18</sup> These illustrations clearly disclose how the previous generations of people upheld the value of truth in their social life.

Presently, in India, as well as in Tamil Nadu, some people seem to think that the task of learning how to interact with others untruthfully is clearly the way

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17 Satyagrahis are those who hold onto the truth while taking part in any nonviolent resistance against any social injustice.

18 A dowry is an amount of property, mostly jewels and money, given by a bride to her husband on the occasion of their marriage. That is, it is obligatory on the part of the bride's parents to give these things to the groom's parents at the time of marriage.

to live gainfully. If some individuals remain truthful or honest, most people will criticize them as stupid and useless because, from their point of view, this truthfulness or honesty will not earn them wealth quickly. They will be easily exploited by untruthful relatives and friends, whereas some individuals' dishonesty, deceptiveness, exploitation, and other such habits will enable them to gain the support of these corrupted people and live profitably. In a way, these unethical habits have become characteristic features of some of the present generation of people. For instance, in not adhering to business ethics, a grocery shop owner will cheat his customers by adulterating his stock. Likewise, he will be cheated in terms of paying an exorbitant fee for his treatment in a private hospital. When this hospital owner wants to admit his son to a private medical college, he will have to pay a huge sum unlawfully to have him accepted. This college proprietor will pay a very large amount to a higher officer to get approval to introduce new courses at his college. In turn, this officer will bribe the relevant ministerial secretary with millions of Indian rupees to secure a top post in his department. Like this, cheating and corruption percolate down through all areas of life. It is like a double-barreled gun, which keeps hitting the minds of people. Thus, corruption in public life becomes cyclic and endemic.

It may be observed that professionals, corporate leaders, the labor force and the like cheat people unethically to obtain benefits. For instance, mostly in the public sector, a culture of work evasion is prevalent among employees not only in Tamil Nadu, but also in other states of India. In unorganized sectors such as agriculture, cottage industries, and building construction, a sizeable proportion of workers are untruthful to owners in terms of their work output. This practice also finds its way into educational institutions, where teachers shirk their responsibilities. In the same way, reckless students tell lies to their teachers in order to escape their academic dishonesty. Cheating teachers to get some benefits has become a common unethical practice in educational institutions all over India.

In families, members cheat each other to obtain joint properties or plunder commonwealth amassed by their ancestors. Time and again, there are cases of husbands and wives who are untruthful to each other. They unhesitatingly tell lies to each other to get momentary escape from their untruthful activities. Similarly, in many situations, some working people attempt to safeguard themselves from their employers by suppressing the truth. They use lies as a shield to protect them. On the other hand, a section of well-to-do and powerful people use the same as a weapon to suppress the poor. Though their intentions are different, the technique they use is the same.

Generally, in present Tamil society, the passion for work among the people is decreasing, whereas the tendency to evade work is increasing. As a result of this, people become unjust to their work, as well as untruthful to their employers.

This sort of tendency downgrades their working culture by demoralizing them and eventually diminishing productivity. Their deception is like a poisonous plant that spreads widely and sprouts into a wild forest. Probably the dishonesty starts at the top, i.e., if a top leader is dishonest, presumably many of their subordinates or followers will, in one way or another, pursue the same line. For instance, people will accept the ideas of their unscrupulous political or religious leaders without interrogating them. They simply act as in the proverb, “as the king is, so his subjects are.”

## CONCLUSION

The “mass consumption culture” of people in contemporary Indian society, including Tamil society, makes them acquire consumer behavior. This in turn makes them greedy and materialistic in relation to accumulating wealth. Unlike the web of social relations that bound past generations of people and made them generous to others by promoting their social interests, the increasingly commercial relations of the present generation of people limit their generosity by fixing their focus on self-interest. This influences them to choose to live in nuclear families, which in turn gives them large scope to be independent in decision making in connection with all family matters. Now the disappearance of true hospitality is not a matter of regret, because of their changing attitude to value systems in the globalized era. Many individuals have no sense to express their gratitude to those who have helped them, and do not even think of appreciating their help. On the contrary, past generations of people were conscious about the value of help and keen on expressing their gratitude to those who helped them. Unlike the former generations of workers, who were truthful to their employers by undertaking their work effectively, many of their counterparts in the present generation are somewhat untruthful to their employers by evading work. The degradation of values seems to be the main cause of all these adverse changes in the lives of people. Therefore, what is needed at the present is for parents and teachers to impart values to children in order to make them truthful persons in the future. In view of this, the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, India, prepared guidelines entitled the “Inculcation of Human Values and Professional Ethics in Higher Educational Institutions” in 2019 to nurture human values amongst students. The Chairman of UGC has urged upon the vice-chancellors of the universities, directors of institutions, and principals of colleges to take appropriate measures to implement these guidelines to make the young generation adopt such values.

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