Exploring Thirukkural's Perspective on Gambling: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract: Thirukkural, a timeless classic in ancient Tamil literature authored by Thiruvalluvar, encompasses various aspects of human life and offers profound insights into moral and ethical conduct. In this paper, we attempt to explore the themes within the couplets in the gambling chapter of Thirukural through an inductive thematic analysis approach. The themes that emerged were the negative consequences of gambling, the addictive nature of gambling, and the prescription against gambling, offering timeless guidance for navigating the complexities of gambling behaviors, disorders, and treatments. Additionally, this research examines the applicability of Thirukkural's teachings to modern-day gambling scenarios, considering the evolving nature of gambling practices and the ethical challenges they present.

Keywords: Thirukural, Gambling, Ethics, Moral, Tamil Literature

Introduction

Gambling is a ubiquitous phenomenon found in all cultures worldwide. In the Indian context, gambling traces its roots back to the Rig Vedas (Khanna & Adhikari, 2018; George, Velleman & Weobong, 2021) and Mahabharata, an ancient and revered Hindu epic, vividly illustrates the loss of one's entire kingdom and the ensuing sufferings and distress due to the rolling of dice (Bhide, 2007; Benegal, 2013; Khanna & Adhikari, 2018; Gohn, 2012; Fleming, 2021). During ancient times, gambling was common among the upper classes in India, including kings and emperors. Evidence of gambling practices were found in various literatures, such as the Mahabharata, Arthashastra, Kathasarithsagar, Atharva Veda, and Thirukural (Bhide, 2007; Benegal, 2013; Bandyopadhyay, 2017; Singh & Roy, 2011) and the evidence of gambling instruments dates back to 2300 B.C. at Harappan sites, where cubical and oblong dice were discovered, and the Rig Veda documents the use of five-sided nuts from the vibhitaka tree for dice games (Brown, 1964; Benegal, 2013). The Arthashastra, an ancient text on governance, recommends the establishment of regulated gambling houses overseen by Gambling Commissioners, who would provide certified dice and collect a 5% fee from profits, exemplifying the structured and widespread nature of gambling (Benegal, 2013). While gambling has always existed, its diverse forms are more apparent today than ever before. Recently, the widespread availability and accessibility of technological advancements (Raylu & Oei, 2002; Reith, 2013), coupled with the legalization or relaxed restrictions on gambling, have led to an unprecedented surge in new participants globally.

Gambling was first officially recognized as a psychiatric condition in DSM III. In the current DSM-5 TR and ICD-11, it is termed a gambling disorder (GD), which is defined as a persistent, recurrent pattern of gambling that is associated with substantial distress and impairment in functions (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; World Health Organization, 2021). Numerous studies have delved into the intricacies of gambling, exploring the reasons contributing to its development and persistence, which helps in understanding and planning treatments for gambling (Potenza et al., 2019). The gambling disorder is addressed through promising treatment modalities such as cognitive-behavioral approaches, motivational interviewing, Gamblers Anonymous, and family therapies (Rash & Petry, 2014; Petry, Ginley, & Rash, 2017; Cowlishaw et al., 2012).

Amid the array of approaches, it is imperative to recognize the fundamental role that individual ethics, moral values, self-regulation, and discipline play in identifying and preventing oneself from succumbing to addiction traps. While laws and evidence-based treatment modalities provide a structure, the individual's commitment to ethical principles, moral values, and self-regulation is vital for overcoming such temptations.

In exploring ethical principles and moral values, the Thirukkural, an ancient Indian Tamil literature, serves as a guiding light, shedding insight into individual ethics and life principles, including gambling. Unlike many other texts, the Thirukkural is not a narrative or story but rather a collection of moral aphorisms composed by the great saint Thiruvalluvar, offering timeless ethical and moral wisdom on virtue, wealth, and love. It consists of 1330 short couplets or Kurals under 133 chapters and is broadly divided into three divisions, namely aram (Virtue/Dharma),porul (Wealth), and inbam (Love/desire) (Baskar, 2016; Gautam, 2020). It is also called ulagapodhumarai "Universal code of conduct," such as tamilmarai ("Tamil Veda"), poyyamoli ("speech that does not lie"), and teyva nul ("divine text") (Sharma, 2017; Kalaiselvi & Saravanakumar, 2019; Kavinkumar & Adithya, 2019; Aravamudha & Supkar, 2022) and inspired all the renowned scholar and noble thinkers including Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Schweitzer, Ramalinga Swamigal, and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (Murthy & Ringer, 1987; Purohit, 2018). This study aims to delve into the themes within the gambling chapter of Thirukkural and to compare and discuss its relevance with contemporary diagnosis and treatment management. Through this exploration, we seek to draw connections between the insights provided by Thirukkural and the complexities of addressing gambling addiction in the present era, examining psychological, societal, and ethical dimensions.

Research Methodology

This study employs thematic analysis, a qualitative research methodology recommended by Clark and Braun, to scrutinize the thematic elements within the "Gambling" chapter of Thirukural, which Thiruvalluvar authored. The investigation scrutinizes the specific textual content, with primary data derived directly from the verses and secondary data from explanations by well-known Tamil authors. Two subject experts evaluated the emerging themes (one Tamil literature expert and one mental health professional) for a consensus on the evolved themes.

Results

The thematic analysis of the "Gambling" chapter identifies three prominent themes:

- The negative consequences of gambling
- The addictive nature of gambling
- The prescription against gambling

Negative Consequences of Gambling

Thiruvalluvar strongly underscores the potential consequences of gambling, warning that an individual may experience initial gains. Still, the continuous pursuit of gambling activities will likely result in the eventual loss of both personal and ancestral wealth to others(Opponents).

"உருளாயம் ஓவாது கூறின் பொருளாயம்

போஒய்ப் புறமே படும்."

"If prince unceasing speak of nought but play,
Treasure and revenue will pass from him away"

Furthermore, he warns that if a man plans his day to begin with gambling, it will lead to a downfall of one's grace, good deeds, and character and eventually put into a lifelong cycle of suffering and distress. It portrays gambling as a force that not only undermines self and interpersonal relationships but also ruins one's social identity and diminishes one's social status. Thiruvalluvar advocates that developing a desire to gamble will lead to loss of clothing, wealth, food, fame, and learning.

"பழகிய செல்வமும் பண்பும் கெடுக்கும்
கழகத்துக் காலை புகின்."

"Ancestral wealth and noble fame to ruin haste,
If men in gambler's halls their precious moments waste."

"உடைசெல்வம் ஊண்ஒளி கல்விஎன்று ஐந்தும்
அடையாவாம் ஆயங் கொளின்"

"Clothes, wealth, food, praise, and learning, all depart
From him on gambler's gain who sets his heart"

The addictive nature of gambling

Along with the evident adverse consequences of gambling, Thiruvalluvar also propagates the captivating allure nature of gambling. He aptly compares winning in gambling to bait, suggesting that while gambling may appear appealing initially and acts as a reinforcement for future gambling behavior, fostering confidence and a false sense of control over the game, it is ultimately a honey trap leading to inevitable failure and complete loss.

"வேண்டற்க வென்றிடினும் சூதினை வென்றதூஉம்
தூண்டிற்பொன் மீன்விழுங்கி அற்று."

"Seek not the gamester's play; though you should win,
Your gain is as the baited hook the fish takes in."

Thiruvalluvar draws a compelling parallel between the attachment to life despite suffering and the love for gambling despite losses, underlining the irresistible temptation that keeps individuals preoccupied and salient towards the vicious game, often leading individuals to prioritize short-term gratification over long-term well-being.

"இழத்தொறூஉம் காதலிக்கும் சூதேபோல் துன்பம்
உழத்தொறூஉம் காதற்று உயிர்."

"Howe'er he lose, the gambler's heart is ever in the play;
E'en so the soul, despite its griefs, would live on earth alway."

Additionally, the risky game has the potential to induce lying and put an end to one's goodwill or generosity, resulting in the loss of wealth, poverty, sorrow, disgrace, and pervasive distress in all aspects of life.

"பொருள்கெடுத்துப் பொய்மேற் கொளீஇ அருள்கெடுத்து

அல்லல் உழப்பிக்கும் சூது."

"Gambling wastes wealth, to falsehood bends the soul: it drives away All grace, and leaves the man to utter misery a prey."

Prescription against Gambling

As mentioned earlier, under the second theme, Thiruvalluvar explains that initial wins can lure players into continued gambling behaviour. This statement also illustrates his counsel to refrain from developing a desire for gambling, even when the chance to win is present. He emphasizes the necessity of self-awareness, self-regulation, and discipline in adhering to one's values and ethics

"வேண்டற்க வென்றிடினும் சூதினை வென்றதூஉம்
தூண்டிற்பொன் மீன்விழுங்கி அற்று."

"Seek not the gamester's play; though you should win,
Your gain is as the baited hook the fish takes in."

Thiruvalluvar employs insightful questioning to prompt reflections on their gambling fallacy, asking whether an individual who gains one and loses a hundred in gambling can truly aspire to lead a good and prosperous life.

"ஒன்றெய்தி நூறிழக்கும் சூதர்க்கும்
உண்டாங்கொல்
நன்றெய்தி வாழ்வதோர் ஆறு."

"Is there for gamblers, too, that gaining one a hundred lose, some way that they may good obtain, and see a prosperous day?."

He emphasizes an individual to recognize the addictive power of gambling and its potential for severe consequences. He urges individuals to give up gambling's desire and habit abruptly. Additionally, he advises

avoiding gambling paraphernalia, including dice and gambling venues altogether.

"சிறுமை பலசெய்து சீரழக்கும் சூதின்
வறுமை தருவதொான்று இல்."

"Gaming brings many woes, and ruins fair renown;
Nothing to want brings men so surely down"

"கவறும் கழகமும் கையும் தருக்கி
இவறியார் இல்லாகி யார்"

"The dice, and gaming-hall, and gamester's art, they eager sought,
 Thirsting for gain- the men in other days who came to nought"

Discussion

This paper utilizes inductive thematic analysis to delve into the intricacies of Thirukkural's gambling chapter, uncovering three key themes: the negative consequences of gambling, the addictive nature of gambling, and the prescription against gambling.

The first theme extensively examines the consequences of gambling across various aspects of an individual's life. It initially explores financial losses (Tabri, N., Xuereb, Cringle & Clark, 2022; Koomson, Churchill & Munyanyi, 2022; Potenza et al., 2019), a common issue faced by problematic gamblers, Thiruvalluvar emphasizing the financial impact not only for one's own earnings but also for the inheritance of entire familial wealth. Beyond financial concerns, the theme delves into psycho-social issues, highlighting how engaging in gambling can lead to the erosion of one's fame and grace, destruction in educational/occupational functions (Vitaro et al., 2018; Browne, 2016), disrupt interpersonal relationships (Azemi, Avdyli, & Bytyqi, 2023; Dowling et al., 2016; Holdsworth et al., 2013) which leads to conflicts within family and friends, and foster negative traits like imposing lies (Azemi, Avdyli & Bytyqi, 2023; Holdsworth et al., 2013), which aligning with criteria for gambling disorder outlined in DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

The second theme highlights the addictive nature of gambling by metaphorically likening an individual to a fish. Just as a fish is enticed by bait, individuals in gambling may be attracted by the allure of a smoky gain, only to be trapped in a net of losses followed by severe consequences. This metaphor draws parallels with current marketing strategies employed by the gambling industry, which involve normalizing gambling by cultivating a positive perception of it as a lucrative money-making opportunity and downplaying its potential consequences. The gambling industries, with the use of technological advancements, ensures easy accessibility to the mass population and builds trust by featuring popular personalities in advertisements and leading to high brand awareness and positive

perceptions of gambling as a normal and enjoyable activity, effectively baiting individuals into investing their money (Thomas et al., 2023). Thiruvalluvar also highlights how the initial gains in gambling will create an allure and false sense of control, ultimately leading to inevitable failure and loss. This observation aligns with literature suggesting that early big wins can predict or associate with future problem gambling (Rockloff & Hing, 2013; Turner, Zangeneh & Littman-Sharp, 2006; Young, 2008). This concept also resonates with the illusion of control theory, suggesting that individuals tend to overestimate their ability to control random events, such as gambling outcomes.(Clark & Wohl, 2022; Cowley, Briley, & Farrell, 2015). He also emphasizes that gambling has the potential to encourage individuals to engage in deceptive behavior, whether it involves misrepresenting their level of involvement in gambling or seeking money from others through lies, which aligns with the criteria outlined in DSM-5. (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

The third theme, centered on guidance against gambling, echoes Thiruvalluvar's advocacy against developing a desire for the game, despite the chances to win. He warns against the captivating nature of gambling, emphasizing its potential to ensnare individuals and lead to significant losses in the longer run, which aligns with the negative winning expectancy theory (Zhang & Clark, 2020), suggesting that prolonged gambling habits are more likely to result in losses than gains. He tries to shed light on one's erroneous belief by questioning whether an individual can lead a good, prosperous life by engaging in gambling despite the potential for loss. In his line about "gaining one a hundred lose," Thiruvalluvar highlights the tendency to chase losses and the gambler's fallacy of believing in eventual winnings despite overwhelming odds (Leonard & Williams, 2016; Rockloff & Hing, 2013). Thiruvalluvar underscores the importance of resisting the desire for gambling and reflecting on the gambling fallacy phenomenon, which is a key component in contemporary CBT interventions such as psychoeducation and motivational interviewing. Moreover, he stresses the need to refrain from gambling paraphernalia and environments, reducing triggers and preventing relapse (Ladouceur et al., 2001). This approach aligns with the principles of self-awareness, self-regulation, and prevention measures, mirroring current interventions like Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) methods.

Limitations and future directions

However, The primary limitation of this study lies in the researcher's dependence apart from the couplets, on interpretations of Thirukural by various renowned Tamil authors and English translations, potentially leading to omissions or additions of some information. Future directions involve further investigation into the realms of ethics and moral values within addiction research and developing treatment strategies grounded firmly in ethics, morals, and values, addressing not only gambling but all addictive substances and behaviors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of Thirukkural's "Gambling" chapter reveals an enduring reservoir of timeless wisdom that transcends the ages. Thiruvalluvar's poetic brilliance vividly portrays the addictive tendencies of gambling and its destructive aftermath, shedding light on financial ruin, personal suffering, and societal disgrace. The author, Thiruvalluvar, emphasizes the moral and ethical responsibility of individuals to refrain from gambling, underlining that it goes beyond a mere personal choice.

Research Promotion
In a world where gambling is increasingly normalized, our research explores the moral and ethical dimensions of gambling through Thiruvalluvar's Thirukkural (a classic work of Tamil literature). Our thematic analysis reveals the enduring relevance of his teachings to modern society, emphasizing the moral and ethical responsibility of individuals to refrain from gambling, underlining that it goes beyond a mere personal choice.

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