

Ancient Wisdom - Tamil Proverbs

Some Tamil proverbs or ancient wisdom 'பழமொழி' . Though not a written literature of the highly educated, these proverbs very well represent the wisdom of the common people of the Tamil country over the years. Proverbs and presented it along with the English Translations.

பூ மலர்ந்து கெட்டது, வாய் விரிந்து கெட்டது .

Blossoms open and die, your mouth opens and destroys you.

Explanation:

Blossoms fade away after opening fully , when the mouth opens , it blurts out things that should not be said, and brings misery.

எரிகிற விட்டிலே பிடுங்கிறது லாபம்.

Whatever you are able to secure from a burning house is a gain.

Explanation:

This proverb is typically aimed at people who typically take advantage of some thing that's not theirs. A typical example would be the middlemen who loot things which are donated for the disaster victims.

காடுப்பூனைகுச் சிவராத்ரி விரதமா ?

Will a wild cat observe the fast of Sivaratri ?

Explanation:

There is no special occasion for wicked people to strike.

உழக்கு மிளகு கொடுப்பானேன் , ஒளிந்திருந்து மிளகு சாரு குடிப்பானேன் ?

Why should he give a measure of pepper and drink the pepperbroth in secret ?

Explanation:

A cup of black pepper is huge quantity of pepper which is enough to prepare a feast and even after supplying so much pepper u get only pepper water to drink , means after all the hardwork you have done you have not been recognized. This can be typically said when one person

does all the work to organize an event and some one else takes credit for it.

சாதுரியப்பூனை மீன் இருக்க, புளியங்காயத் திங்கிறதாம்.

The artful cat ate tamarind when there was fish.

Explanation:

The cat in the house ate tamarind when there was fish so that the owner would leave the fish exposed without suspicion. This proverb is typically used for people who have some thing in the mind but pretend to do something else.

பங்குனி என்று பருக்கிறதுமில்லை, சித்திரை என்றும் சிறுக்கிறதுமில்லை.

Neither does he expand in March nor does he get lean in April.

Explanation:

Panguni(around March) in Tamil calendar is the month of big harvest. Sithirai(April) is a month where there is little profit. The proverb is used of a man who dont change their behaviour with change in seasons.

“A wise man is he who knows that prosperity and adversity are alike”

“ He swells not in prosperity, and shrinks not in adversity .”

குறையச் சொல்லி , நிறைய அள.

Give more quantity with a lesser price.

Explanation:

Typically people who purchase with street vendors will have this experience. The example I give is of Masala Sundal you get in the beach. You will ask Sundal for Rs.5 and vendor will measure some quantity and put it in the paper cone and after doing that before giving it to you for your satisfaction, he would add very very little quantity of Sundal in paper cone to show that he has given more than the customer asked for. So this proverb is to say that what ever you do, give the quality and quantity right.

“ Cheat me in the price, but not in the goods*”

“It is not a sin to sell dear, but it is to make ill measure.”

அஞ்சும் மூன்றும் உண்டானால் , அறியாப்பெண்ணும் சமைக்கும்.

If the five and the three are at hand, even an ignorant girl can cook.

Explanation:

It is easy to do a thing when one has all the help required.

The 'five' are pepper, salt, mustard, cumin and tamarind. The 'three' are water, fire and fuel.

அறைக்காசை ஆயிரம் பொன்னக்குகிறவளும் பெண்சாதி , ஆயிரம் பொன்னை அறைக்காசு ஆக்கு கிறவளும் பெண்சாதி.

The one who is capable of converting half a coin into a thousand gold coins is a wife, and the one who is capable of reducing a thousand gold coins to half a coin is also a wife.

Explanation:

This why people say marriage is made in heaven. If you have a good wife you have a good fortune, if you have a bad one you are doomed.

" All women are good : good for something or good for nothing."

ஒரு நாளும் சிரிக்காதவன் திருநாளில் சிரித்தான் , திருநாளும் வேறு நாளாச்சுது .

When one who had never smiled, smiled on a sacred day, even the sacred day became an ordinary day.

Or better :

ஒரு நாளுமில்லாமல் திருநாளுக்குப் போனால் , திருநாளும் வேறு நாளாச்சுது.

When a man, who never attended a festival, attends one, even the festival day becomes a common day.

Explanation:

This just goes to show how unlucky people are or how last minute events spoils a long awaited day.

வெறும் வாய் மெல்லுகிற அம்மையாருக்கு அவல் அகப்பட்டது போல .

It is like a bowl of Aval(Rice obtained from fried paddy by pestling it) given to a woman who has been chewing her empty mouth.

Explanation:

A proverb which describes sarcastically the joy that a woman finds in a gossip.

“ Arthur could not tame a woman s tongue.”

பந்தியிலே வேண்டாம் வேண்டாம் என்றாலும் , இலை போத்தல் இலை போத்தல் என்கிறான்.

Though I repeatedly refuse to take him to place where food was served, he is constatly saying that there is holes in the Ilai (leaf plate).

Explanation:

This proverb is typically said of people who are not wanted at a particular place, but they still don't care when others give a hint he isn't wanted and go about criticising things around. Especially in joint family there would be person who isn't good at anything but will show of to every one as if he is a big person in the family to other visitors in any function. This trend can be seen in lot of movies esp where the hero's bother in law or heroines mom's brother is a good for nothing character(Most of the times Vadivelu ends up in this role).

உழுகிற நாளில் ஊருக்குப் போய், அறுக்கிற நாளில் அரிவாள் கொண்டு வந்தது போல.

During the ploughing season he goes about visiting places, but returns on time with his sickle for the harvest season.

Explanation:

This experience most of us would have had. Typically when people work in group, say four people work for a project, there will be two who work hard, one though he dosent work hard would always be with the group and help them in any possible way and finally there will be a person who is never present during the project. But that person would be knocking the doors of the group members right before the project submission to learn what he has to present the next day. The people who dont share the hardwork but share the benifit of the hardwork.

கஞ்சி கண்ட இடம் கைலாசம் , சோறு கண்ட இடம் சொர்க்கம் .

Any place which gives him rice-gruel is his Kailash, and whatever place which gives him rice is his Heaven.

Explanation:

This proverb is directed at people who have no aim in their life. Kailash or Siva Logam is place people reach after death. It is a great boon to see Shiva. Heaven or Sorgam is place ruled by Indra and is filled with pleasures. To attain Kailash or Heaven is a life time goal or the highest aim of many people. But the lazy people consider its heaven to get free food and never work hard.

தூடு கண்ட பூனை அடுப்பங்கரையில் சேராது .

The cat that has got fire burns will never go near the kitchen.

Explanation:

When you have any bad experience at all cost you will try to avoid going through it once again.

“A burnt child dreads the fire.”

“Adversity makes a man wise, not rich.”

குமரிக்கு ஒரு பிள்ளை , கோடிக்கு ஒரு வெள்ளை .

One child for a young girl and one white for a clothesline.

Explanation:

It just takes a little time for a change. Young girl is considered young and innocent till the day she bears a child. From that day she becomes a responsible mother. Similarly a clothes line with many clothes will seem to look dull when one white cloth is put on it for drying. The transient nature of all our lives.

வீட்டுக்கு செல்வம் மாடு , தோட்டச் செல்வம் முருங்கை.

The treasure of a house is a cow and treasure of a garden is Murungai tree.

Explanation:

The cow gives milk which is used as milk,curd,ghee. The cow dung is disinfected and used to clean the floor. The cow dung was also used as a combustion material and also for sacred ash. Similarly Murungai gives

Murungakai (drum stick), Murungai Keerai(edible green leaves) and has various other medicinal properties. It is basically used to show utilities of various kinds of a single source. Another very good example is Vaalai maram(banana tree).

பெண்ணின் கோணல் , பொன்னிலே நிமிரும்

Unprettiness of a girl will be shielded by her gold ornaments.

Explanation:

Though a dig at most women, the proverb actually means if you dont have substance it still can be adjusted with other things. In most cases money is the other thing which sets most things right. The proverb is set in negative tone meaning that people who have influence have their way.

தேரோட போச்சு திருநாளு , தாயோட போச்சு பிறந்த அகம்

When the procession of Temple car ends the festival ends, the support from home ends with death of the mother.

Explantation:

Its usually addressed to a daughter in law. Usually Mother in laws acts tough towards the young daughter in laws and the girl seeks the solace of her mother often. But this support last nly as long as her mother lives. So its better to adjust with the hardship rather than finding solace else where.

உயிரோடு இருக்கும்போது ஒரு கரண்டி நெய்க்கு வழி இல்லை, ஓமத்துக்கு ஒன்பது கரண்டி நெய் விட்டது போல .

While he was alive they couldn't not afford one spoonful of ghee, now they spend nine spoons of ghee for the cermonial fire.

Explanation:

Addressed to people who cant afford thing but still do it to please others. Here a family which couldnt afford a spoon of ghee now spends nine spoons for the death cermony just to put a show to others and please others who come for the cermony. Most marraiges in India are done this way. When family cant afford much money they get loans and arrange a grand marraige.

செல்லம் செருக்குகிறதா ? வாசல் படி வழக்கிறதா ?

Chellam serukkirathaa ? vaasal padi valukkirathaa?

Was it the unbound affection or the entrance to the house that made you slip?

Explanation:

Addressed to people who usually dont accept their mistake and put the blame on others. Happens typically with everyone, when we try to put blame on some other person so that we can escape from the mistakes we committed.

கடுகு களவும் களவுதான் , கற்புரம் களவும் களவு தான்.

Kadugu kalavum kalavuthaan, Karpooram kalavum kalavu thaan.

Theft is a theft ,be it stealing a mustard or acamphor.

Explanation:

You cannot justify a crime by saying its very small crime.

“ Sin is sin whether big or small.”

இன்றைக்கு இலை அறுத்தவன் நாளைக்கு குலை அறுக்கமாட்டானா?

Indraikku ilai aruthavan naaliku kulai arukkamaattaanaa?

Won't the person who cut the leaves today , would cut the fruits tomorrow?

Explanation:

The idea is to cut down a mistake/crime in the beginning stage itself. One crime leads to another.

“ He who hath done ill once will do it again.”

கூத்தாடி கிழக்கே பார்த்தான் , கூலிக்காரன் மேற்கே பார்த்தான்.

Koothadi kilake parthaan , koolikaran merke parthaan.

The dancer watched the east, the labourer watched the west.

Explanation:

The dancers perform all night long in festivals and wait for the sunrise(east) so that their payments will be made and can return home. The labourer works all day long and see the west all the time since he would get his pay only at the sunset. The whole world works in the direction of money.

பாம்பாடிக்குப் பாம்பிலே சாவு , கள்ளனுக்கு களவிலே சாவு .

Paambatikku pambile saavu, kallarukku kalavile saavu.

Death of snake charmer would be caused by his snake, death of a thief will be caused by his theft.

Explanation:

If you do a sin you cannot escape from it, it will follow you. This theme is explored by so many movies these days like Bheema and Pattiyal.

Retribution follows a person from his own wickedness.

கொள்ளும் வரைக்கும் கொண்டாட்டம் , கொண்ட பிறகு திண்டாட்டம் .

Kollum varaikkum kondatam, konda piragu thindaatam.

It's enjoyment till the marriage and its misery from then.

Explanation:

Relationship with girl will look sweet and attractive till marriage but once that happens, everything changes and you end having nothing but misery. Vice versa too!

துட்டு வந்து போட்டியிலே விழுந்ததோ , திட்டு வந்து பொடியிலே விழுந்ததோ?

Thuttu vanthu potiyile vilunthatho, thitu vanthu potiyile vilunthatho.

Is it the money or the scoldings , that go into the savings box?

Explanation:

At the end of the day the money earned is more important than the pains you go through to secure the money.

" Account not that work-slavery that brings in penny savory."

திருவாக்குக்கு எதிர்வாக்குக்கு உண்டா?

Thiruvaakkuku ethirvaakku unda?

Are there any words which can go against God's words.

Explanation:

You cant stand against gods wish. This proverb is usually used to address powerful and influential men, whose word are usually the final one. No body would dare to go against it.

ஓட்டை பாணையிலும் சர்க்கரை இருக்கும்.

Ottai pannaiyilum sakarai erukkum.

Even a broken pot might contain sugar.

Explanation:

Dont ignore anything without thoroughly understanding it. Even the worst possible thing might have something good in it. Don't under estimate any one or any thing.

அறுப்புக்காலத்தில் எலிக்கு ஐந்து பெண்சாதி .

Arupukalathil elikku aainthu pensathi.

During the harvest time a rat keeps five wives.

Explanation:

When a person who lives in poverty for most of his life , gets money he doesn't know how to handle it and would extravagantly spend it. In Tamil people usually say 'Parambarai Panakaran'- man who is wealthy for generations, just say he is born rich and not made rich. So there seems to be a difference between born rich and other rich people! On the other hand this proverb can also be used against people who uses others property. Typically watchmen in guest/holiday house , use the house like their own when the owner is not there.

கைய பிடித்து கள்ளை வார்த்து , மயிரை பிடித்து பணம் வாங்குறதா ?

Kai pidithu kallai varthu, maiyirai pidithu panam vanguratha?

Is it right to offer toddy first in a friendly way and then hold the hair and take away all the money?

Explanation:

When help comes out of way be aware of it, it might end up in trouble. Typically like the Nigerian scam where people get mails sayings you have won lottery please send your bank account so that we can deposit money. When people give the account number each and every penny from their bank account is taken away. So if you get tempting offer out of the way, refuse it!

ஆம்புடையான் செத்து அவதி படும் போது, அண்டை வீட்டுக்காரன் அக்குளிலே பாய்ச்சுகிறான் !

Aambudayan sethu avathi padum ppthu, andai veetykkaran akkulile paaichukiraan!

While the wife was sorrowing seeing her husband in deathbed, her neighbour thrust his hand into her armpit arm-pit.

Explanation:

The man tries to took advantage of a women in an unprotected state. Said about persons who take a mean advantage of another's misfortunes.

சீலை இல்லை என்று சித்தி வீட்டுக்கு போனாளாம் , அவள் இச்சம் பாயை கட்டிகொண்டு எதிரே வந்தாளாம் .

Seelai illai endru sithi veetuku ponalaam, aval icham paaiyai kattikondum vanthalam.

She went to her aunt's house since she had no saree but her aunt came out wearing a rug!

Explanation:

From bad to worse, when you think you are in a bad state and wish to live from mercy of some other person, you face the harsh reality that every one is living in a bad state!

பள்ளத்திலே இருந்தா பொண்டாட்டி , மேட்டிலே இருந்தா அக்கா !

Palathilae eruntha pondati, metile iruntha akka!

While they are in the valley he treats her as his wife, while on the hill he treats her as his sister.

Explanation:

Said of People who have no moral values and take advantage of every situation they can be undetected.

“Do in the hole as thou wouldn’t do in the hall.”

ஊரார் வீட்டு நெய்யே , என் பொண்சாதி கையே.

Urar veetu neiye, en pondati kaiye.

Though the ghee belonged to the village, it is my wife’s hand that is serving the ghee.

Explanation:

A couple went to a village feast. The wife was helping out by serving the ghee, when she was serving the ghee to her husband she poured more amount that she has served any one else since its her husband and the ghee is not theirs! Typically said to people who take advantage of the power given to them and make most of it.

கட்டி வைத்த பணத்தைத் தட்டிப் பறித்தார்போல.

Kattivaitha panathai thatti paritharpola.

It is as if the money tied up in the small bag, getting snatched away .

Explanation:

Women usually save the money in small bag called ‘surukku pai’ which has a thread around it in the top to tie a knot . Tight knot is a safe way to keep the money. Even after all this saftey some one sntaches it away. So when bad times come , it hits you badly even if you take safety measures before hand.

ஆற்றிலே போகுது தண்ணீரை , அப்பா குடி , ஆத்தாள் குடி.

Aatrile poguthu thanneeru, appa kudi,aathal kudi.

The water is running in the river, father drink it, mother drink it.

Explanation:

When there is a chance to get some thing free, people try to utilise it shamelessly in a maximum possible way.

மதில் மேல் பூனை போல .

Mathil mel poonai pol.

Like a cat standing on the wall.

Explanation:

It is proverb directed at people who are indecisive or who change the decisions very often. When a cat is on the wall you never know which direction it is going to jump.

பிள்ளை பெறப் பெறப் ஆசை , பணம் சேரச் சேர ஆசை .

Pillai pera pera aasai, panam sera sera aasai.

After every child your desire for children increases, after every penny saved your desire for money increases.

Explanation:

I should confess its an outdate proverb, no one can have more than two children these days due to economy!

Desire never stops , it increases even after satisfaction.

" The more one has, the more one wants."

பூனை கொன்ற பாவம் உன்னோடு , வெல்லம் தின்ற பாவம் என்னோடு.

Poondai kondra pavam unnodu, vellam thindra paavam ennodu.

Let the sin of killing the cat be with you, and let the sin of eating the jaggery stay with me.

Explanation:

A greedy merchant went to a priest after killing a cat, he brought a some jaggery so that the priest using the jaggery can do some remmedy (parigaram) for his sin. The priest ate the jaggery and said the following proverb!

தன் வினை தன்னைச் சுடும் , ஓட்டப்பம் வீட்டை சுடும் .

Than vinai thannais sudum, ottappam veetai sudum.

One's deed will burn him, pan cake with evil intention will burn the house.

Explanation:

Patinathar or Pattina Pillayar is very famous Tamil Shidda poet. One of the legends say he was big merchant in Kaveri Pattinam and his original name was Vekata Chetti and one of the most influential people of his age. Then there are various legends either his ships returned with gold or his son brought cow dung back when questioned it changed to gold. While he was happy to get the gold, a saint visited his house and delivered a package to his wife. When he returned to his house and opened the package he saw a needle without hole and with a message even this needle wont come with you when you are dead. This made him understand he was greedy with material possessions and became a naked saint. He begged for alms. His Sister was so ashamed of him she invited him to his house and gave him appam with poison. Patinathar with his siddic powers understood it and placed it in her roof and went away. The house due to his meditative powers burnt. So the proverb means your deed will burn you and if you do harm to others that will also burn you.

அடி நாக்கிலே நஞ்சும் , நுனி நாக்கிலே அமிர்தமா ?

Adinaakile nanjum, nuni naakile amirthama?

When you have poison in the bottom of your tounge ,can there be elixir at the tip of the tongue ?

Explanation:

Said at people who have bad intentions and yet speak good words to make you believe them.

" A honey tongue, a heart of gall."

ஆடு நனைகிறது என்று ஓநாய் அழுகிறதாம்

Aadu nanikirathenu oonai alugiratham.

The wolf cried when the sheep got drenched in rain.

Explanation:

Said to people who want to destroy but still make you believe they care for you.

" Crocodiles tears."

" Crows bewail the dead sheep and then eat them."

" Beware of the geese when the fox preaches"

கண்டால் காமாச்சி நாயகர் , காணவிட்டால் காமாட்டி நாயகர்.

Kandal kaamachi nayagar, kaanavittal kamaatti nayagar.

In front of you they would praise you like a lord. When you are away they would ridicule you as a fool.

Explanation:

Kamatchi nayagan means the hero of Kamatchi that is lord Shiva. Kamaatti Nayagan means hero of fools.

“ He that speaks me fair and loves me not, Til speak him fair and trust him not.”

“ He that praise publicly will slander privately.”

[காமாட்டி kāmātti](#) : Fool, idiot, dunce; மூடன்.

ஒட்டைக்கூதன் பாட்டைக் கேட்டு இரட்டை தாழ்பாள் போட்டது போல.

Ottaikoothan paatai kettu irattai thalpal pottathu pola.

She Bolted her door twice after hearing Ottaikoothan’s song.

Explanation:

The story that illustrates this proverb is found in “Vinodarasamanjari,” the king’s favorite court poet was Ottaikoothan and queens favorite was another poet. The king there fore put the other poet in the prison. This angered the queen and she bolted the door of her room. The King couldnt enter her room in the night and asked her to open it. The queen replied only if her favorite poet was release she would open her door. The king said okay and asked Ottakoothan to sing a poem in front of the door to make her belive the king had release her favorite poet. But when Ottakoothan sang the song, the queen realised it was not her favorite poet and bolted her door one more time. Thus the effort of the king to soothe her ended as an futile attempt and infuriating her even more. This is said at person who try to soothe some one else but end up infuriating them more.

“ As water in a smith’s forge, that serves rather to kindle than quench.”

ஏறச்சொன்னால் எருதுக்குக் கோபம், இறங்கச்சொன்னால் நோன்டிக்குக் கோபம் .

Eraschonnal eruthukku kobam, eranga chonal nondikku kobam.

The bull gets angry when a physically challenged man is asked to mount on it; if the man is asked to get down then he would get angry.

Explanation:

This typically said to people who get into troubled water if they support either side of the fighting parties.

எருமை வாங்கும் முன் நெய் விலை கூறுகிறதா ?

Erumai vangum mun nei villai koorukiratha?

Can you ask price for you ghee before buying buffalo?

Explanation:

Like student assuming he will get so much marks and starts deciding the colleges and place to stay near the college.

“Don’t count on the chicken before they hatch.”

உட்சுவர் இருக்க, புறச்சுவர் பூசலாமா ?

Utssuvar irukka , velissuvar poosalama?

Can you paint the outer wall neglecting the inner wall.

Explanation:

One has to keep one’s inner self pure. A mock at people who keep themselves clean and neat in their outward behaviour but are not pure in their heart. Outward morality and inward depravity. Also can be said of situation where you need to take care of urself first before helping others.

எழுதுகிறது பெரிதல்ல , இன்னும் அறிந்து சேர்க்கிறது பெரிது

Eluthukirathu perithala, innum arinthu serkirathu perithu.

Its not a big thing to write but its a great thing to understand and accumulate knowledge.

Explanation:

Probably aimed at current day bloggers like me! Its more important that you undertsand what you read and implement that rather than simply write superficial articles. A proverb close to one of my Fav. kural

‘கற்க கசடற கற்றவை கற்ற பின்

நிற்க அதற்கு தக’.

உடல் ஒருவனுக்கு பிறந்தது , நாக்கு பலருக்கு பிறந்தது .

Utal oruvanukku piranthathu, naakku palarukku piranthathu.

One's body is born for himself and his tounge is born for many.

Explanation:

One's body will decide the doom or boon for himself. But one's tounge can change lives of so many other people.

The word uttered by the mouth in anger is too dangerous.

“ Birds are entangled by their feet, and men by their tongues.”