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Dr. S. Anitha Devi MBA, Ph.D, Head and Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, TJPS College, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

T.Mallikarjuna Rao MBA, M.Phil.,(Ph.D), Department of Commerce and Business Administration, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

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Ancient Ethical Proverbs - Ten Superior Acts

*Dr. V. Kulandaiswamy, Secretary, Vivekananda Institute of Management Studies,
Coimbatore*

REVISITING NATIVE WISDOM

TEN SUPERIOR ACTS

Tamil Sangam literature fall under three broad categories: Ten songs, Eight Anthologies and Eighteen Minor Works. Love, War and philanthropy dominate the first two categories; while the third category mainly deals with ethics, human values and behavioral norms. Tirukkural is one among those ethical literatures which is most outstanding.

Ancient Ethical Proverbs (*Muthumozhikkanchi*) is a fine piece of poetry which codifies the desired modes of human behavior under ten themes. Under each theme there is a battery of ten condensed statement each a single line in poetry form. These are categorical statements which guide the human conduct and priorities the behavioral alternatives from ethical point of view, and points to clear direction when there is ethical dilemma in decision making.

The first theme in the Ancient Ethical Proverbs (*Muthumozhikkanchi*) deal with Ten Superior Acts (*cirantha pathu*). These original Tamil statements are rendered in simple English.

TEN SUPERIOR ACTS (Translated from Tamil - *Cirantha Pathu*)

1. For people living on earth surrounded by oceans, possessing *character* is superior to pursuing *learning*.
2. Being *admired* by others is superior to being *loved* by others.
3. The *ability to retain* what is learnt is superior to *possessing intelligence*.
4. Being *truthful* is superior to being *resourceful*.
5. Being *free from disease* is superior to *being young*.
6. Being *modest* is superior to being *beautiful*.
7. Being *educated* is superior to being a person of *high birth*.
8. *Adoring the learned* is superior to assiduous *learning*.
9. *Empowering the self* is superior to *overpowering the enemy*.
10. *Consolidation of wealth in later days* is superior to *depletion of wealth acquired in early age*.

All these statements reflect certain life oriented higher order values, which are imperatives for successful as well as peaceful living.