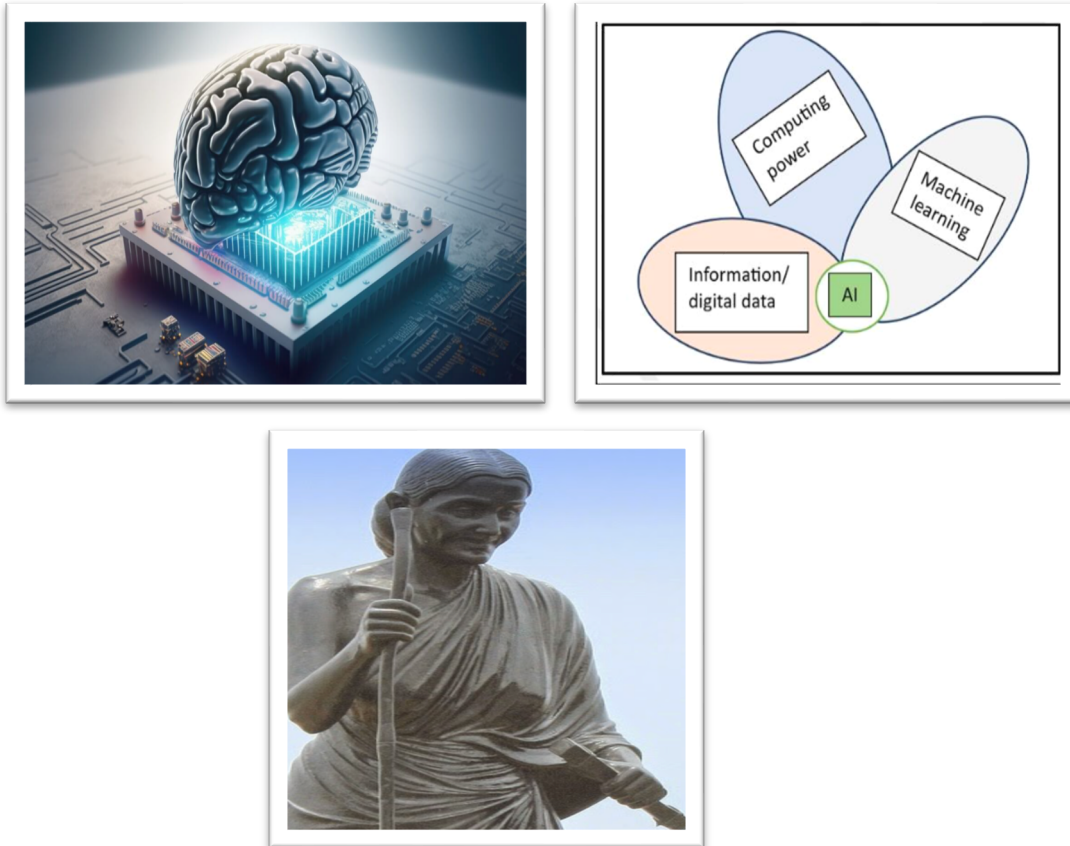


An Ancient Female Tamil Poet Avviyar and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Bob Rajan



As we continue to learn about, use, and live with AI - powered by vast digital data - it reminds me of an ancient Tamil female poet, Avviyar, who lived before the Christian era (BCE). She wrote, **“What one has learnt is a mere handful; what one hasn’t learnt is the size of the world (universe).”** This timeless parable applies to AI as well, since AI depends on data, machine learning knowledge, and computing power. It suggests that AI still has much to learn before it can potentially surpass humanity in many aspects of life.

With her poetic brilliance, Avviyar used the word "atom" in one of her poems describing it as “atom to atom, vast beyond all vastness,” and conveying its profound meaning using the smallest node of a sugarcane. Remarkably, she used the concept of atom long before its scientific discovery in 1808 AD by John Dalton, one of the greatest British scientists .

Avviyar's inspiration for using the word "atom" and expressing its vastness may have come from two possible sources. First, it is known that the early philosophical atomic theory proposed by Democritus around 400 BCE could have influenced her. Since Tamils of that era travelled extensively, including to Greece, Avviyar might have encountered this concept through intellectual exchanges brought back by sailors. Alternatively, from a philosophical standpoint, as a profound thinker, she may have drawn inspiration from observing tiny plant seeds and their growth, using "atom" to symbolise the smallest particles and the immense vastness they represent.

Avviyar's contributions made many moons ago have been recognised by **US NASA** for inspiring cosmologists to continue exploring the vast knowledge of cosmology. NASA has even included the above-mentioned parable in their exhibits addressing fundamental cosmic questions.

(https://web.archive.org/web/20121102092948/http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/informal/features/F_Cosmic_Questions_prt.htm). **The International**

Astronomical Union, named one of the craters in Venus after Avviyar -

<https://planetarynames.wr.usgs.gov/Feature/512>

Avviyar composed 59 powerful didactic poems that convey important life lessons and moral values. Below are 12 examples showcasing the strength of the 12 Tamil vowels, known as the "soul-letters." Avviyar used these vowels to express her moral code. This moral code for decent living remains relevant today, especially in the context of the AI-driven world.

English Translation	12 Soul-letters of Tamil	Avviyar's Moral Code
<i>Intend to do the right deeds.</i>	அ	அறம் செய்ய விரும்பு
<i>Do not take decisions during times of anger (in haste). Anger is momentary.</i>	ஆ	ஆறுவது சினம்
<i>Never stay away from helping others so far as you can (such as sharing knowledge, skills, good wishes and other charitable and moral deeds).</i>	இ	இயல்வது கரவேல்

<i>Do not stop or avoid charitable endeavours.</i>	ஈ	ஈவது விலக்கேல்
<i>Do not brag about your possessions (wealth, skills, knowledge etc.).</i>	உ	உடையது விளம்பேல்
<i>Never lose hope and/or motivation.</i>	ஊ	ஊக்கமது கைவிடேல்
<i>Never degrade learning.</i>	எ	எண் எழுத்து இகழேல்
<i>Begging is shameful.</i>	ஏ	ஏற்பது இகழ்ச்சி
<i>Share what you eat (offer alms).</i>	ஐ	ஐயமிட்டு உண்
<i>Be virtuous.</i>	ஓ	ஓப்புரவு ஒழுகு
<i>Never stop learning.</i>	ஔ	ஔுவது ஒழியேல்
<i>Do not speak ill about others.</i>	ஒள	ஒளவியம் பேசேல்
<i>Do not hamper development or creativity.</i>	ஃ	ஃகஞ் சுருக்கேல்

Foot Note: Although AI's initial developments have occurred only recently, it continues to advance at a pace unimaginable just a few decades ago. In contrast, human intelligence (HI) and knowledge have evolved over thousands of years. Human intelligence inherently includes characteristics essential for the survival and coexistence of society, such morality, codes of conduct, reasoning, adaptability, creativity, consciousness, and the ability to observe, feel emotions, and respond appropriately. AI, however, has not yet achieved all of these human intelligence traits.

Like humans to humans, the immense power and capabilities of AI pose threats to humanity and the natural world, challenging the coexistence and further development of human intelligence and knowledge.

Some major problems with AI today include:

- Highly advanced AI systems are controlled by a few powerful corporations.
- Malicious actors from various societies and countries exploit AI for unethical and inhumane purposes.
- Western democratic governments are often unwilling or unable to regulate the harmful impacts of AI, which threaten the wellbeing of citizens and nations alike.