

MAXIMS BY FRANCIS BACON AND TIRUVALLUVAR

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Abstract: A maxim is an expression of a general truth or principle, especially an aphoristic or sententious one. In other words, it is a short, pithy statement expressing a general truth or rule of conduct. In every literature, we find different genres of writing. Every piece of writing primarily focuses on its theme or subject. In the portrayal of its theme or subject, every piece of writing consciously or unconsciously brings up maxims that are loaded with meanings for our specific and general conduct in lives. The maxims used in these writings serve as an embellishment to them. However, there are writers whose writings are predominantly maxim-oriented! Francis Bacon, the English essayist and Thiruvalluvar the great Indian sage, have indeed been the most prolific in terms of the maxims they have contributed to the world literature. Hence a comparative study of their contributions has been attempted below.

Keywords: Maxims, FrancisBacon, Thiruvalluvar, Thirukkural, Couplets, Fortune, Truth, Wealth, Anger, Revenge, Virtue, Boldness.

I. AN OVERVIEW

Francis Bacon is arguably the most analytical of all English essayists. His essays have succinct and pithy sayings that have become the best maxims in the history of English literature. These maxims are undoubtedly comparable to the maxims in the book of Psalms and The Bible.

However, of all the sayings comparable to those of Bacon, Tiruvalluvar's sayings reflect the most distinct similarity. Thiruvalluvar, the ancient saint, scholar and philosopher believed to have lived in the Southern part of India, wrote THIRUKKURAL, the most monumental piece of work in Tamil literature, today!

Thiruvalluvar wrote in Dravidian language which is older than the Aryan languages of Northern India. He expressed his philosophy in the KURAL, a collection of 1330 short, pithy couplets, basically in the form of maxims.

Tiruvalluvar's maxims are categorized into three main sections; virtue, wealth and love. However, it will simply be a fallacy in logic to confine his maxims merely to the above categories! Needless to say his maxims cover every topic worthy of mention under the sun.

The word KURAL applies to something that is short or abridged. To be more precise, it describes a poetic couplet in which the two lines have fourteen syllables. In the KURAL the couplets are arranged in groups of 10 in 133 chapters. Each chapter deals with a specific subject and gives Tiruvalluvar's views on the different facets of it. In short Tiruvalluvar's monumental work is a guide to men and matters.

As mentioned earlier, Tiruvalluvar's maxims have the greatest similarity to those of Bacon. Bacon's maxims predominantly appear in his essays. While he has not placed his maxims in the form of a couplet or 'organized verses', once taken out as short or pithy sayings, they appear to be maxims on men and matters!

II. THE COMPARISON

Tiruvalluvar's maxims are basically on:

Virtue; Love; Family; Goodness; Harmony; Sin; Truth; Wisdom; Opportunity; Justice; Speech; Friendship; Folly; Fortune; Wealth; Poverty;

Bacon's maxims are basically from his essays on various topics under the titles:

Of Truth; Of Death; Of Unity In religion; Of Revenge; Of Adversity; Of Simulations and dissimulations; Of Parents and Children; Of Marriage and single life; Of Envy; Of Love; Of Great places; Of Boldness; Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature; Of Nobility; Of Seditions and Troubles; Of Atheism; Of Superstition; Of Travel; Of Empire; Of Counsel; Of Delays; Of Ceremony; Of Wisdom for a man's self; Of Innovations; Of Seeming Wise; Of Friendship; Of Expense; Of True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates; Of Suspicions; Of Discourse; Of Plantations; Of Riches; Of Prophecies; Of Ambitions; Of Masques and Triumphs; Of Nature and Men; Of Custom and Education; Of Fortune; Of Usury; Of Youth and Age; Of Beauty; Of Deformity; Of Buildings; Of Gardens; Of Negotiating; Of Followers and Friends; Of Studies; Of Faction; Of Ceremonies and Respects; Of Praise; Of Vain glory; Of Honor and Reputation; Of Judicature; Of Anger; Of Vicissitude of Things.

Looking at the numbers one might be tempted to assume Tiruvalluvar's maxims are substantially on lesser number of subjects. This is indeed is a fallacious temptation. We need to look beyond the categories and sub categories of the KURAL here. This would easily throw light on the fact that there are millions of maxims in the KURAL.

Attempting a comparative study on all the maxims of these two greats would rather be a subject of research than merely a piece of article. Therefore, a few maxims on a few subjects by these two luminaries have been chosen for the comparative study here.

1 a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON FORTUNE:

THE KURAL says, *To be devoid of good fortune is no one's disgrace, but shame belongs to those destitute of knowledge and tenacity.*

1b) BACON ON FORTUNE:

Bacon says, *It cannot be denied, but outward accidents conduce much to fortune, favor, opportunity, death of others, occasion fitting virtue. But chiefly, the mould of a man's fortune is in his own hands. FABER QUISQUE FORTUNAE SUAE. (Every one is the architect of his own fortune)*

2a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON TRUTH:

THE KURAL says, *To those who have dispelled all doubt and perceive truth, heaven is nearer than earth.*

2b) BACON ON TRUTH:

BACON says, *The knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.*

3a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON WEALTH:

THE KURAL says, *Great wealth, like a crowd at a concert, gathers and melts.*

3b) BACON ON WEALTH:

BACON says, *Great riches have sold more men than they have bought out. QUI FESTINAT AD DIVITIAS, NON ERIT INSONS (He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent) Wealth accrued malafide vanisheth like apparitions.*

4a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON ANGER:

THE KURAL says, *Those who give way to great anger are like the dead. To use bitter words, when kind words are at hand, is like picking unripe fruit, when the ripe one is there.*

4b) BACON ON ANGER:

Bacon says, *Anger is certainly a kind of baseness as it appears well in the weakness of those subjects in whom it reigns. Let not the sun go down upon your anger.*

5a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON REVENGE:

THE KURAL says, *Worthless are those who injure others vengefully, while those who stoically endure are like stored gold. The gratification of the vengeful lasts only for a day, but the glory of the fore bearing lasts until the end of time.*

5b) BACON ON REVENGE:

Bacon says, *Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to. Certainly in taking revenge a man is even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior; for it is a prince's part to pardon.*

6a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON VIRTUE:

THE KURAL says, *Virtue alone is happiness; all else is else, and without praise. Do virtuous deeds unceasingly. For your own good practice five virtues; hear good, see good, think good, talk good, do good.*

6b) BACON ON VIRTUE:

Bacon says, *certainly virtue is like precious odors, most fragrant when they are incensed. Virtue is like a rich stone, best plain set; and surely virtue is best, in a body that is comely, though not of delicate features; and that hath rather dignity of presence than beauty of aspect.*

7a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON BOLDNESS:

THE KURAL says, *the learned say that fierceness (in contest with a foe) is indeed great valour. An army which is complete and conquers fearlessly is foremost among all a king's possessions. So what if an army of rats roars like the raging sea? The mere hiss of a cobra will deaden their din.*

7b) BACON ON BOLDNESS:

Bacon says, *you shall see a bold fellow many times to do Mahomet's miracle. Mahomet made the people believe that he would call an hill to him, and from the top of it offer up his prayers, for the observers of his law. Certainly to men of great judgment, bold persons are a sport to behold!*

8a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON SPEECH:

The KURAL SAYS, *The content of worthy speech binds friends more closely. And its eloquence draws even enemies to listen.*

8b) BACON ON SPEECH:

Bacon says, *Discretion in speech is more than eloquence.*

9a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON STUDIES:

THE KURAL says, *Learn from fundamentals to the ultimate and impress upon others as befits your intellectual status.*

9b) BACON ON STUDIES:

Bacon says, *Let men but think over their infinite expenditure of understanding, time and means on matters and pursuits of far less use and value: where of, if but a small part were directed to sound and solid studies, there is no difficulty that might not be overcome.*

10a) THIRUVALLUVAR ON JUSTICE:

THE KURAL says, *Investigate well, show favor to none, maintain impartiality, consult the law, and then give judgment-that is the way of justice.*

10b) BACON ON JUSTICE:

Bacon says, *Judges ought to remember that their office is JUS DICERE and not JUS DARE; to interpret law and not to make law.*

III. CONCLUSION

A close look at the pithy sayings or aphorisms reveals that Bacon and Thiruvalluvar have excellent insight into men and matters. It is quite conspicuous that the maxims chosen for study here deal with many academic disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, law, literature, counseling, clinical psychology human rights and Women's studies!!

Tiruvalluvar's sayings are basically in the form of couplets where as Bacon's sayings are extracted from his essays. That is perhaps the only dissimilarity one might come across in the maxims by these two greats. However, this dissimilarity (perceived or otherwise) is merely technical and has no real significance as far as the contents are concerned.

THE KURAL has been translated into a substantial number of languages. Bacon's essays are a part of the curriculum of most universities in the world. Both Bacon and Thiruvalluvar appear sagacious to the core. I am indeed desirous of engaging myself in a research on the complete works of Bacon and Thiruvalluvar, in future! I am earnestly looking forward to a clinical and comprehensive study on these two immortals who continue to excite my imagination!!