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**A Comparative Study of Truth, Revenge and Love in  
Thiruvalluvar's *Thirukkural* and Francis Bacon's *Essays***

**M. Murali, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.**

**G. Natanam, M.A., Ph.D.**

# A Comparative Study of Truth, Revenge and Love in Thiruvalluvar's *Thirukkural* and Francis Bacon's *Essays*

M. Murali, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.  
G. Natanam, M.A., Ph.D.

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## Introduction

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is a famous English Essayist who has written about truth, love, friendship, studies, envy, praise, etc. These essays are called as “dispersed meditations” by him. He takes all knowledge for his province and has something pertinent to say on every serious subject.

Thiruvalluvar (Second century A.D.?) is the author of Thirukkural. This work presents ethical and moral instructions 1330 couplets or kural verses. Each kural has two lines, first line has four “words,” and the second line three “words.” Kural has a very compact structure. The couplets are divided into three divisions, namely, ARattuppaal (Virtue), PoruTpaal (Generation and Use of Wealth, world order) and Inpattuppaal (Nature of Love).

Like Bacon, Thiruvalluvar (or Valluvar, in short) has also discussed the ideas such as wisdom, friendship, truth, love, etc. Thirukkural has been translated almost in all languages of the world. And the themes discussed in the couplets have also been recognized to a large extent as universally applicable. Hence, it is called World's Holy Book.

Thiruvalluvar and Bacon stand out as beacon lights. The aim of this research work is to compare the Tamil savant with the English genius. The similarities and contrasts between Thiruvalluvar and Bacon with reference to Love, Truth and Revenge are been taken up here for detailed analysis.

## Comparative Study of 'Truth'

Truth is one of the basic concepts which is extremely difficult to define. What appears to be truth to one individual may appear as untruth to another. People in different times think differently about what constitutes truth. Absolute truth is something beyond our ken and not amenable to verbalization. A wide tolerance and acceptance is necessary in dealing with problems of truth.

Bacon does not go into the question of truth in any depth. He merely observes that truth can be religious or speculative and civil truth, which can be called a mixture of truth and falsehood. But, then God has given us the power of reason and expects us to act upon truth as revealed by reason.

Bacon compares truth to daylight and falsehood to candle light. The first is clear but harsh. The second is vague but delightful. He also compares truth to a poem which shines by daylight.

"Truth may perhaps come to the price  
Of a pearl.....in varied lights" 1

Bacon emphasizes that enquiring into truth is like making love. Knowing the truth is like attaining the presence of the beloved. And believing the truth is like enjoying the beloved.

"certainly it is Heaven...but poles of Truth" 2

Bacon hastens to add that when we take our stand on truth, we must always have charity in our hearts, belief in God and abidance in truth. He further says that falsehood will ultimately meet its punishment, because the Bible tells us that the second coming of Jesus Christ will be necessitated when people give up truth altogether.

"The mixture of falsehood...embaseth it" 3

Bacon says that while admixture of falsehood with truth as in poetry has a certain fascination, truth alone can finally save us and fill us with happiness. This applies not only to religious truth but also to our conduct in everyday life.

### **Thiruvalluvar on Truth**

Bacon, in his essay on Truth, is able to put in proper perspective the value of truth and falsehood in the popular mind. But, the "truth" as defined by Valluvar is different from that of Bacon.

To Valluvar, speech has to be soft (or kind?) without useless or frivolous or empty expressions. It must not be productive of evil. It must avoid back-biting. He goes further and accepts the utterance of the 'false (non-real)' if it should be productive of good. So, in the chapter on 'Vaaymai' (Truthfulness), one does not feel worried about truth-speaking per se (in the sense of fact reporting) but is concerned with defining "proper speech".

Valluvar himself uses three related words 'Vaaymai', 'Mey' and 'Poymai'. Actually the literal meaning of the word 'mey' (truth) is the contrary of 'poy' and 'mey' is equivalent to 'unmai' (truth or real/existential); and 'poy' means 'unmai allaadadu (untruth)' i.e., that which is not a fact. But Valluvar does seem to equate 'Mey' with 'Vaaymai'; and used 'Poymai' as the opposite of 'Vaaymai' to the extent of seeming to attribute 'fact reporting' as a normal 'characteristic of speech (vaymai)'. But the two (i.e. strict and impartial fact reporting and scruples and conscience) are in conflict with each other.

'UNmai (fact reporting)' is objective, while 'Vaaymai' is subjective. It is not permissible within the secular limits of earthly life to blur the distinction between the objective and the subjective and take shelter behind it to equate 'Vaaymai' with 'Unmai'. In the couplet 291,

It's speech from every evil free" 4

Valluvar says that truthfulness is the speaking of that which is free from even the slightest taint of evil. Nobody is always bound to tell the truth. To a patient who has been infected with cancer and to a mother who has just given birth to a deformed baby and to one who is concerned only with ungentlemanly conduct; it seems the answer in all these cases will be 'No'.

"If it will yield pure, unmixed good  
Truth may be replaced by falsehood" 5

The above Kural means that falsehood is replaced by truth if it brings forth unmixed good. Bacon says that truth alone can save us and fill us with happiness. But, Valluvar's opinion is that falsehood gives 'rise to the significance of truth'.

"Do not lie about what your heart does know  
Such guilt will burn your heart aglow" 6

Thiruvalluvar advises us that we should not lie about what our heart does know as it will burn our heart.

"If he lives true to his inner mind,  
He lives in the hearts of all mankind" 7

Valluvar says that we should live true to our inner mind that guides us. If we live thus, then we will be praised and remembered by all.

"Greater is he who speaks the truth with all his mind.  
Than those who do penance and charity combined" 8

The above Kural says that if a man speaks the truth with all his mind, he will become more famous and reputable than the saints, philosophers and scholars.

"No greater fame than words from falsehood free  
Other virtues come very easily" 9

If we speak words avoiding falsehood, it will bring great fame. By speaking the truth we can get other virtues without labour.

"If truth, and only truth, you speak,  
Other virtuous acts you need not seek" 10

The above couplet tells us that if a man can live without ever uttering a falsehood, all other virtues turn superfluous for him.

"Outward cleanliness, the water will bestow,  
Inner purity from truth will flow" 11

Valluvar assures us that the water may clean the outward form but the purity of the heart can only be given by truthfulness.

"All lamps are not lamps in wise men's sight  
Truth is the only lamp with radiant light" 12

Valluvar says that truth is the only lamp with radiant light for the wise men and scholars. All the lamps that give the light in darkness are not real lamps.

In the last couplet of this topic, 'Vaaymei' (Truthfulness),

"Of all good things that we have learnt with care  
Nothing can with truth compare" 13

Valluvar underlines the greatness of truth as the supreme most virtue.

Thus the saint gives the advantages of truth by citing various situations. While Bacon discusses civil and religious truth, Thiruvalluvar speaks of all truths applicable in our everyday life. He gives the reason for falsehood and urges us to follow those ways of life that reflect truthfulness. Bacon's truth has no deep and underlying importance as Thiruvalluvar's. Bacon and Valluvar have taken up the universal doctrine of truth and applied their minds in bringing out the contrast between truth and falsehood. Both have made use of analogy from active life and obvious examples. They, in fact, guide the people to become truthful luminaries.

### **Comparative Study of 'Revenge'**

Revenge is the deliberate infliction of injury upon another person from whom injury has been received. All of us smart under an injury and try to get even with the one who hurt us by retaliating and injuring him/her.

As Bacon is judicious, he treats the problem of revenge from the legal angle. But, he is a statesman who could realize that the masses may rise against a despot and indulge in violent vengeance.

"Revenge is a kind of wild justice" 14

Bacon starts his essay on revenge with this epigram. Revenge means a violent retaliation for an injury done to one. In law, a crime is punished. This is called justice. Bacon further says that some may argue that revenge is also a form of justice. It is normal justice but wild justice.

Bacon assures us that by taking revenge we only keep the wound green. Revenge will produce counter-revenge and there will be no end to this process of violence. Bacon advises us that we must understand that when a person hurts us, it is often to gain some advantage or status or honour. Revenge is permissible only where there is no law to protect us from that particular hurt. If we take to revenge we shall have to face

not only our enemy but also the law which does not permit us to take vengeance. Bacon tells us that if we take revenge it should not be done secretly. The enemy should know from whom the revenge comes.

"It is the glory.....an offence" 15

Bacon points out that forgiving a wrong is superior to taking vengeance. A king can pardon a wrong. So forgiveness is princely. Therefore, when somebody does us a wrong, nobility requires that we should ignore it. After all, what has happened is past. We should turn our attention to the future by not dwelling on the past.

Further, Bacon makes a distinction between public revenge and private revenge. To strengthen his idea of revenge, he gives examples from the past. He reminds us that Julius Caesar was assassinated by Brutus and Cassius who were in turn killed. Again Pertinax, the Roman Emperor, was assassinated by the Praetorian Guards who were in turn put to death by his successors.

Bacon advises us that we should not keep on brooding about the wrong done to us.

"This is certain ..... do well" 16

He says that if we continue thinking of the hurt it will be like probing a wound on our body. The wound will thus remain raw and even turn septic. But, if we let the wound alone, time will heal it. Revenges are not illegal but a private revenge is a sign of lack of civilization.

Bacon concludes his essay by saying that vengeance will only aggravate matters and not remedy them.

### **Thiruvalluvar on Revenge**

While Bacon justifies the crime of revenge from the legal angle, Valluvar describes it from the moral angle. Though a revenge is a common habit of man, it is capable of destroying him and his own relatives and fame. Valluvar gives reasons and remedies for revenge in his ten couplets.

In the first couplet of the topic 'Innaa Ceyyaamai' (Not Doing Evil),

"To wealth a fame, though it may lead,  
Not doing ill is pure men's creed" 17

Valluvar says that the man who is pure in his heart would not injure others even if he could obtain a princely estate thereby.

"To those who anger, malice breed,  
Not doing ill is pure men's creed" 18

The above couplet says that even if another has injured him in his hate, the man who is pure in heart does not return the injury.

"Though unprovoked, your foes should sting,  
Revenge will endless sorrows bring" 19

It means that if we injure another, even though it be only a man who has injured him without any provocation, we simply bring down upon us evils that can never be remedied.

"To punish wrong, by kindness put to shame  
And then, forget the kindness and the blame" 20

Bacon says that forgiving a man who has injured us is the best vengeance. But, Valluvar advocates not only forgiving the person who injures but also advises us to do good things to him.

Thiruvalluvar simply says that punishing a man who has injured us, is doing him a good turn and making him feel ashamed in his heart. We can also find the same point of idea in the Holy Bible where it is said that if a man slaps us on the one side of the chin we must show him the other side also. The Bible also speaks about doing good to those who do evil to us. Valluvar also says that we should do good things.

"If other's grief, as yours you do not treat,  
Of what avail is wisdom great?" 21

The above couplet asks that of what avail is intelligence to a man if he does not feel as his very own the pain suffered by other beings and with that feeling does not abstain from injuring any.

"What you have felt as bitter pain,  
From making others feel, refrain" 22

The above Kural means that when a man has felt a pain for himself, we should take care that he inflicts it not on others.

"To anyone in anyway or day,  
Not doing ill is virtue's greatest way" 23

In the above Kural, Valluvar says that it is a great thing, if we do not injure any man, at any time, and in any degree even by heart.

"Whose soul has felt the bitter smart,  
How can he hurt another heart" 24

The above couplet says that one who has felt what pain means to himself should not bring himself to inflict it on others.

"In the forenoon, evil if you do,  
That same afternoon, it'll visit you" 25

Valluvar assures us that if a man injures his neighbour in the forenoon, evil will come to him in the afternoon of its own accord. i.e. if a man injures others he will not escape from the punishment for his hurt.

"Evils come because, he evil harbours still,  
Who evil shuns, freedom seeks from ill" 26

Valluvar, in the last couplet, says that all evil recoils on the head of the wrong-doer, they abstain therefore from wrong-doing and desire to be immune from ills.

### **Legal Angle of Bacon**

Bacon who has a judicial mind treats the problem of revenge from the legal angle also. And he compels us to forgive the hurt done by others. While Valluvar treats the problem in the most humane manner, Bacon handles it also as a law and order problem.

### **Comparative Study of 'Love'**

Love is common to all living beings. Love has been glorified by all poets and scholars. But, Bacon has not a good word to say of love. According to Bacon love is a weakness which is romantically glorified by poets and dramatists. He maintains that love and wisdom can never go together. A lover makes a clown of himself worshipping an idol of flesh. Very often the person loved does not return the love, but thinks contemptuously of the lover. Love upsets a man's equilibrium and ruins him. Bacon assures us that blind love makes us lose both wisdom and walth.

"The stage ..... like a fury" 27

Bacon advises that love must be avoided by strong men who are serious about life. Love may be fascinating in a poem or in a drama because it only calls for our imagination and does not require us to act upon it. But love in real life is another matter because when we act through love, many unfavorable consequences follow. Bacon compares love to a Siren and Fury. Sirens are sea-nymphs who sat on the shores of an island between Circe's Isle and Scylla. They sang bewitchingly and allured sailors to draw near only to meet with death. So anything that looks sweet but produces evil consequences is a siren. Similar are the Furies and Goddesses of Fate and Vengeance. They were represented in Greek mythology as avenging deities and Goddesses of retribution.

Bacon maintains that in real life, love works mischief by tempting a man to acts of self-indulgence which ruin him finally. Love also rises in the lover tumultuous passions which also end in ruination. So just as wise men like Ulysses kept themselves beyond the clutches of Sirens and Furies, we should also avoid love. Bacon, thus, tries to argue against love.

"It is a poor saying..... For higher purposes." 28



Bacon condemns love as a trap for wise men. He quotes a saying of Epicurus, the founder of the Epicurean philosophy which is popular in the dictum "drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die". Bacon does not agree with Epicurus who says that the world is a stage for life to play on. He views the sayings of Epicurus as an exhortation to all of us to indulge in as much love as possible. He says "God did not create men to kneel before an idol called girl, and be captivated by her eyes and act like a clown". He further says that eyes were given to us to look at the Heavens and think of all noble things and not waste our intelligence on a toy of flesh and blood.

Bacon has misinterpreted Epicurus. This philosopher never recommended pleasure for pleasure's sake. He recommended only the pleasure that springs from prudent conduct, moral goodness and intellectual contemplation. Unfortunately after the death of Epicurus, his followers gave themselves up to mere enjoyment of the flesh. So in contrasting Epicurus, Bacon is only fighting with the shadow.

"For there was never proud man..... to be wise" 29

Warning us against becoming slaves to love, Bacon maintains that the lover is the greatest flatterer. But, then a greater flattery is done by ourselves. That is, everyone thinks high of himself, even though there is no justification of it. But a lover is an arch-flatterer because he considers the beloved to be superior to himself. He flatters her because he loves her. That means he has bidden good-bye to his intelligence and power of discrimination when he starts loving. By quoting a remark by Plutarch that love and wisdom do not go together, Bacon says that a lover exaggerates the virtues of the beloved without realizing that very often the beloved not only does not return the love but even thinks contemptuously of the lover.

"Nuptial love..... enchaineth it" 30

### **Bacon on Married Love**

While concluding his essay on Love, Bacon has a good word to say on married love and love between friends but condemns outright the concept of love for love's sake.

In married love a social purpose is served, because the race is continued and propagated by the parents. Without married love, the human race will come to a stop.

More precious and noble is the love between friends because it enables a man to enlarge his heart and act nobly. But the love that is so much praised in literature is a degrading thing for it eats into the personality of the lover who becomes corrupt for the sake of his love. Love no doubt, is a natural instinct. Everybody has an urge to love, but this instinctive love functions creatively only in married love and friendly love. In the love between men and women outside the bounds of marriage, there is no advantage either for the lovers or for the society. Bacon is insensitive to the graces of love to an extra ordinary degree.

### **Thiruvalluvar on Love**

While Bacon condemns the love between men and women before marriage, Thiruvalluvar glorifies it with a large discussion. In the ten couplets he speaks of

love, the first five speaks of the love of 'He' who is in love with one lady. The remaining five couplets speak of the love of 'She' who is in love with a man. The love that Valluvar explains is different and a contrast to the love portrayed by Bacon.

"Saliva from soft spoken maiden's teeth that springs  
The mingled taste of milk and honey brings" 31

Thiruvalluvar, in the above couplet, says that even as honey and milk mingled together is the dew on the lips of this fair one with the subdued speech.

"This maid and me are in true friendship bound,  
Like living body with the soul is bound" 32

The above Kural says that the love of a man is like the love between the body and the soul and so great is his love for this artless one.

"To make room for the bright browed lady of my heart  
O image in my eyes, please depart" 33

It says that the lover requests his eyes to leave from his face, because he wants to give room to his lady love in his eye.

"In drawing near, new life she gives to me;  
Fair one departs and only death, I see" 34

He who has love with one lady says that it is as life when she is near but it is as very death when she leaves him.

"If I could once forget, then memory might revive,  
But her charms with dart like glances are for ever alive" 35

The lover says that verily he can recall to mind the virtues of the maiden of the fair and bathing eyes, provided first he can forget them; but how to forget them he does not know.

"In my eyes my eternal lover lives,  
Even if I wink, to him no pain it gives" 36

It means that she who is in love with somebody says that her lover will not go from her eyes, neither will he be hurt when she winks; so subtle is the form of her beloved.

"In my eyes my lover does reside,  
I dare not paint them, lest his form I hide" 37

Here she gives the reason for not painting her eyes. She says that her beloved dwells forever within her eyes; so she does not paint them ever, lest he should leave them even for an instant.

"My lover lives within my heart; I do not eat  
Hot food lest he should feel the heat" 38

She tells us that she does not eat hot food. Valluvar gives the reason in a fantastic way that her beloved is in her heart. So if she eats the hot food he will suffer. Here, the Tamil poet pictures the love of the lady who has within her heart the image of her beloved.

"Fearing so hide his form, I do not close my eyes,  
'Her love estranged is gone', the village cries" 39

The Kural says that she winks not for fear that she should lose sight of him who is her beloved even for that instant and for this, the village folk charges him with cruelty.

"Full of delight in my heart he stays,  
'Her love estranged is gone, the village says" 40

She says that her lover lives in her heart with happiness. The villagers say that her lover is a cruel man who lives without his lover. They condemn him for abandoning her. Here, the deep love of the lady is shown in a most beautiful way.

Legend has it that Thiruvalluvar was a married person. He also speaks about the spiritual love of the lovers and also the position of the lovers when they separate. The glory of love is adored in Thiruvalluvar's work. But, Bacon has not anything significant to say about love. It may be because it had affected him in his personal life. Bacon himself married for a fortune. His father-in-law settled on him an annuity of 200 pounds which was quite an addition to his income. We do not hear much of his married state.

We read that Bacon had difficult and painful marriage. There may be psychological reasons for his attitude to love. Thiruvalluvar, who wrote in the language of Tamil which claims love and bravery as its two eyes, may have had a sweet married life, to say the least. Moreover, Indian traditions looked at husband-wife relationship as something that is carried into births beyond this life, something sacred and to be dispensed with easily. Love, as a literary theme, is closely linked with righteous family life within Tamil and other Indian traditions. So, the positive approach to love from Thiruvalluvar is on the expected lines befitting the culture of the Tamil people.

### **Bacon's Conception of Friendship**

At the same time, Bacon's conception of the love between friends and the love of married persons is common or same as Valluvar's.

"If love and virtue in a household reign,  
That life has perfect grace and gain" 41

The above couplet says that if love abounds in the home and righteousness doth prevail, the home is perfect and its end is all fulfilled.

Regarding the question that how should the love of friends be, Valluvar states,

From heart's rejoicing does true friendship grow" 42

He says that friendship is not the companionship that smiles to the face; it is rather the love that delights the heart.

"As hand that comes to rescue when one's garment slips,  
Friendship saves one from his misfortune's grips" 43

The hand of the man whose garment has been blown aside, how it hurries to recover his limbs, that is the true symbol of the love of a friend that hastens to succor a man in his misfortune.

### **In Support of Comparative Literature: Lessons**

The aim of Comparative Literature is to provide aesthetic enjoyment. A study of literary work in isolation will give only a limited amount of enjoyment, but when it is placed alongside (by the side of) another work (which is different in language and treatment, but more or less the same in content), it will enhance our appreciation and enjoyment of the works themselves. For example, comparing the treatment of Nature by Wordsworth or Shakespeare with that by a poet in Sangam Literature (Tamil) is a pertinent topic. This kind of study of literatures of the different nations will increase the critical response.

Human beings, no matter, which parts of the earth they inhabit are one as they have common human pathos and sensibilities; hopes and aspirations; feelings of ecstasy and joy; agony and sorrow; justice and injustice. This is because of the fountain-spring of emotion that underlies different human activities. The differences may be noticed in the form and not necessarily in content. Even these differences are taken into account at the appropriate levels so as to fit into the scheme of things. Through limitless and extreme adoration of one's own literature, nationalism may lead to fascism.

Comparative Literature extends its helping hand to neutralize this effect. It is to be taken up in right earnest, as it helps in better understanding of literary genres and creativity par excellence. The universality of man's essential traits will be obvious, if we compare literature belonging to two nations. Comparative Literature helps us to accept the fact that language, race and religion are important but not necessarily exclusively dominant aspects of any one civilization. There is something called the fundamental oneness of humanity. At a time when the entire world is divided by language and religion, this approach to literature helps us to come together.

This broad-based approach to literature is not foreign to Tamil literature. Especially, all ethical works in Tamil literature, begin with the word "Ulagu (World)", emphasizing that such wisdom is applicable to all humanity.

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**M. Murali, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.**  
Department of Science & Humanities  
Sri Ramanujar Engineering College  
Kolapakkam  
Vandalur  
Chennai-600 048  
Tamil Nadu, INDIA  
[mmurali1999@yahoo.com](mailto:mmurali1999@yahoo.com)

**G. Natanam, M.A., PGDTE, Ph.D.**  
Department of English,  
Government College for Men (Autonomous),  
Kumbakonam  
Thanjavur District  
Tamil Nadu, INDIA  
[gnatanamenlgish@yahoo.com](mailto:gnatanamenlgish@yahoo.com)