

MONUMENTAL WORKS OF THIRUVALLUVAR AND MARCUS AURELIUS - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Forward: Thiruvalluvar, an universal poet wrote Thirukkural which has about 100 translations of which 35 has been done in English alone. About 120 Commentaries have been written so far, for this book. Marcus Aurelius a far-famed thinker, wrote Meditations. The Greek title of his book is not meditation. The meaning of his title is "To himself. But the long usage has prevailed upon. This book has also been translated in many languages.

Encomium on Thiruvalluvar: "The weaver of Mylapore, known now as Tiruvalluvar was undoubtedly one of the great geniuses of the world, but his fame belongs to South India alone and to only one great race there" wrote Dr G.U. Pope who has translated Thirukkural in English. He has also given a quotation of M. Ariel, to substantiate his view point. "Tiruvalluvar's great work is the master piece of Tamil Literature - one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought.". Thus wrote Ayiel.

Eulogy on Marcus Aurelius: Mathew Arnold was a celebrated critic and a poet. He was impressed and inspired by the work of Marcus Aurelius. A single but a significant sentence in the book Meditation has induced him to write a sonnet, beginning as,

"Even in a palace, life may be lived well, So spake the imperial sage, purest of man, Marcus Aurelius."

The erudite scholar and eminent politician, Rujaji was deeply influenced by the book Meditations which bade him to translate it in Tamil under the title "Athma Cinthanai¹ so that the Tamil race may also derive benefit by reading this magnificent monumental book.

Life Sketch of Thiruvalluvar: Very little is known about of Thiruvalluvar. Research scholars have fixed his year of birth as 31 B.C. It is believed that he lived in Mylapore, a part of Chennai, on the basis of a temple bearing his name. There are unbelievable tales about his parents, wife, brothers, sisters and patrons. The name valluvar was not christened by his parents. It was a honarific title given by the public². Many religious sects sincerely claim that he belonged to their clan.

Life Sketch of Marcus Aurelius: Marcus Aurelius Antonius was born in AD, 121. His parents died when he was young. He was adopted by the emperor, Aurelius Antonius who had no sons. He married his daughter to Marcus and after the death of Antonius, Marcus Aurelius became emperor. He made Lucius Verus, another adopted son, as co-emperor. And so these two ruled jointly the Roman empire. Verus died after some years. And Marcus Aurelius ruled his country. There were natural disasters, diseases and Revolts. He consoled himself by writing the book "to himself (Meditations) He died in 180 A.D.

Description of the two dominant books Thirukkural: This book is divided into 3 main parts. 1. Virtue 2. Wealth 3. Love. This book consists of 133 chapters, each containing 10 couplets called kural pa. (The smallest poetical form). The first four chapters form the introduction called Payiram. The sum total of couplets is 1330.

This book has been written for the benefit of the Tamil race and for the welfare of the mankind as well.

Meditations: This work consists 12 divisions called books. The sayings of each book vary in number. All told, there are 484 maxims. As in Thirukkural there are no subject* heading*for the books. The first book mentions the names of persons, who molded his character and thereby the life of Marcus Aurelius.

Views of similarity both in Thirukkural and Meditations: It is a known fact that greatmen think alike. Hence, irrespective of time, distance, language, religion etc. one can perceive similarity in the works of greatmen. This may be discerned in the distinguished books of the dynamic authors.

Friendship: Man is influenced by the environment and friendship is an very important factor in the environment. This friendship is not meant for pleasure see'dng. Whenever necessary friend should correct an erring mate and he has the liberty to rebuke him also.

Thiruvalluvar has said.

"Not for laughter only friendship all the pleasant day.

But for strokes of sharp reproving when from right you stray" (Kural 784) ³

Marcus Aurelius also said: tatulus, the stoic counselled me never to make light of a friends rebuke, even when unreasonable⁴

True friendship will be everlasting. It is permanent as the peaked mountain. The Tamil scholar showed relevant path to stabilize it. He said,

"Not the faces smile of welcome shows the friend sincere But the hearts rejoicing gladness when the friend as near. (Kural 786)

The Roman saint said,

"His friendships were enduring. They were not capricious and they were not extravagant.⁵ The Tamil poet pronounced the perfect duties of the friend. The declared three prime performances of a friend, 1. He should turn aside the friend from the evil ways. 2. He should make him to tread on the good path. 3. In case of loss, he should share his sorrow.

"Friendship from ruin saves in way of virtue keeps In troublous time it weeps with him who weeps. (Kural 787)

The Roman saint said: "When you would have a cordial for your spifts, think of the good qualities of your friends. This one's capability, that one's self-effacement, another's generosity and so forth.⁶

Veracity (Truth): The sage of Mylapore adored truth. He uttered that he who in his conduct preserves a mind free from deciet will dwell in the minds of men. He had informed that the lamp of truth is the lamp of the wise. He has told amidst all that we have seen and described, as real excellence there is nothing so good as truthfulness

"If all good things we've scanned with studious care

There's nought that can with truthfulness compare (Kural 300)

The sage of Rome also loved truth.

He has said:

"From my brother Severus,

I have learnt to love my relations to love truth and to love justice"⁷

"To what, then, must we aspire?

This and this alone.

The just thought, the unselfish act, the tongue that utters no falsehood etc⁸

Fate: The multifaceted genius of Tamil Nadu had belief in the boundless power of the besieging fate. He has said that perseverance comes from prosperous fate and idleness from adverse fate. He has declared that fate was the supermost power, which none can alter. He said "what is stronger than fate? If we think of an expedient to avert it, it will itself be with us before the thought.

"What powers so great as those of Destiny? Man's skill

Some other thing contrives: but fate's beforehand still (Kural 380)

The magnanimous genius of Rome had also unshakable faith in fate.

He had said in precise term.

"Think of destiny and how puny a part of it you are."⁹

Everything is predestined in this world. And so Thiruvalluvar had said, that even those who gather together millions could not enjoy them, contrary to the already determined disposers plan (i.e) fate.

"Save as the sharer shares to each in due degree To those

who millions store enjoyment scarce can be" (Kural 377)

Marcus Aurelius has stressed this point in more than one place.

He said, "It is time now to realize the nature of universe to which you belong and of that controlling power whose off spring you are"¹⁰

Here it may be noted that he had defined fate as controlling power.

"If the Gods took counsel together about myself and what should befall me, then the counsel was good"

Here, according to him Gods fix up the destiny.

"Whatever may happen to you was prepared for you in advance from the beginning of time". So he believed that whatever befalls to man, has been predestined.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF BENEFITS CONFERRED: (GRATITUDE):

The world renowned Tamilian had expressed his views about the knowledge of benefits conferred in which he has said that it is not good to forget a benefit but it is good to forget an injury even in the very moment in which it is inflicted. He had also shown significant way for effacing an injury equivalent to death. He had said, that though one inflicts an injury great as a murder, it will perish before the thought of one benefit formerly conferred.

The kural is as follows:

"Effaced straight way is deadliest injury

By thought of one kind act in days goneby (Kural 109)

The global renowned Roman had also similar views in this regard.

"Put from you the belief that I have been wronged. And with it will go the feeling. Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears."¹³

He had shown the mode of forgetting injury in his own way.

"When any one offends against you' let your first thought be, under what conception of good and ill was this committed. Once you know that, astonishment and anger will give place to pity."¹⁴

Further he had given nine-point-advice to himself when one had offended him¹⁵

Self Restraint: The great teacher of Tamil nadu, has advised about self restraint. He has said that self-control will place a man among the Gods. He had seen

the tortoise withdrawing its limbs and head into the shell and so had cited it as an example to be followed.

He said, that should one throughout a single birth, keep in his five senses like a tortoise the fruit of it will prove a safeguard to him, throughout the seven fold births.

**"Like tortoise, who the five restrains In one,
through seven worlds bliss obtains" (Kural 126)**

The great teacher of Rome has also recommended self-restraint in these following words.

"In all you do or say or think, recollect that at anytime the power of withdrawal from life is in your own hands".¹⁶

"Men seek for seclusion in the wilderness by the sea shore, or the mountains - a dream you have cherished only to fondly yourself. But such fancies are wholly unworthy. Since at any moment, you choose, you can retire within yourself."¹⁷

"withdraw into yourself, our master-reason asks no more than to act justly and thereby to achieve calm"¹⁸

Instability: The world is ever changing. The time is fleeing. There is metamorphosing among the lives. Even the tall peaks diminish. Nothing is permanent except death.

Hence, the oriental seer, wrote ten verses about instability.

He had said that wealth is perishable. The acquired wealth will vanish like the dispersing audience at the end of the drama. So, he admonished the mankind to do good - nothing but good -in the present life.

The accidental seer had also stressed the importance and indelibility of this supreme factor.

"Our mental powers should enable us to perceive the swiftness with which all things vanish away."¹⁹

"Keep before your eyes the swift onset of oblivion"²⁰

"How many whose praises used once to be sung so loudly are now relegated to oblivion."²¹

"Soon you will have forgotten the world and soon the world will have forgotten you"²²

Death: The immortal bard of Tamil Nadu had sarcastically remarked that this world possesses the greatness that one who was yesterday, is not this day.

"Existing yesterday today to nothing hurled

Such greatness owns this transitory world" (Kural 336)

The ever living sage of Rome had also the very same view about death.

"As one already on the threshold of death think nothing of the frist - of its viscid blood its bones, its web of nerves, and veins and arteries. The breath - too - what is the PA whiff of wind."²³

"The mortal life is a little thing lived in a little corner of the earth."²⁴

"Live not as though there were a thousand years ahead of you. Fate is at your elbow. Make yourself good, while life and power are still yours."²⁵

Very soon you will be dead but even yet you are not single minded"²⁶

"Ponder the lives of the men who have set no bounds to their passions, the men who have reached the very summits of glory, disaster odium or any other of the peaks of chance and then consider where are they all now? vapour, ashes, a tale."²⁷

To authenticate his view point he had recalled to his mind the great personalities known to the world and to the history.

"Hippocrates cured the ills of many, but himself took ill and died. The Chaldeans foretold the deaths of many but fate caught up with them also. Alexander, Pompey, Julius Caesar laid waste cities time and again... but the hour came when they too passed away."²⁸

"In death, Alexander of Macedon's end differed no whit from his stable boys.... both alike were dispersed into atoms."²⁹

"Think of the court of Augustus; wife, daughter, children... an entire court. All vanished"³⁰ The seer of B.C. has said, that day is a saw, which cuts down life.

"As day it vaunts itself well understood, his knife

That daily cuts away a portion from thy life" (Kural 334)

The seer of A.D. has said,

"Every hour brings us nearer to death"³¹

The eastern scholar, has compared death to the sleep; and birth to the awakening

"Death is sinking into slumbers deep

Birth again is waking out of sleep" (Kural 339)

The western scholar has said,

"Death like birth is one of nature's secrets."³²

True knowledge: Thiruvalluvar has spoken about true knowledge. True knowledge is the perception concerning everything of whatever kind, that that thing is the true thing.

"Whatever thing of whatsoever kind it be,

Is wisdom's part in each the very thing to see (Kural 355)

Marcus Aurglius has said; "It was his (father's) habit to analyse and weigh every incident taking his time about it, calmly methodically, decisively and consistently"³³

Dutiful wife: The creator of Thirukural, has depicted the dutiful wife, who guards herself in the first instance, takes care of her husband and preserves unsullied fame, by means of careful speech and untiring work.

"Who guards herself for husband's comfort cares, her household

fame In perfect wise with sleepless soul preserves-give her

a woman's name" (Kural 56)

The writer of the Meditations had adored his dutiful and endearing wife thus*.:

"And I must thank heaven for such a wife as mine, so submissive, so living and so artless; for an unfailling supply of competent tutors for my children and for remedies prescribed for me in dreams etc."³⁴

Destruction of an enemy: In the chapter of knowing the quality of hate (enmity) the Tamil Savant has showed the way for nipping in the bud the opposing and obstructing factors. He has said that a thorny tree should be felled while young, for when it is grown, it will destroy the hand of the feller.

"Destroy the thorn while tender point can work thee no offence

Nurtured by time, it will pierce the hand that plucks it thence" (Kural 879)

The Roman savants concept has toed the line. He has said, It (hindrance) is like a bonfire mastering a heap of rubbish which would have quenched a feeble glow but its fiery blaze quickly assimilates the load, consumes it and flames the higher for it.³⁵

Patience: Animals will always be impatient and intolerant whereas humankind should be model of forbearance.

The ancient author of Tamil Vedas, has said one should be patient, like the earth which supports even the man who digs it.

**"As earth bears up with those who delve into her breast,
To bear with scornful men of virtues is the best (Kural 151).**

The good old author of Rome has said,

Toleration is a part of justice and that men are not intentional evil doers'

(Book IV: 3: P.63)

Utterance of pleasant words: Man is gifted with the art of speaking. And wise men speak only pleasant words. This mode of practice should be followed by each and every one since this costs nothing to him. On the other hand it gives pleasure, to the sayer as well as one who receives it. The first revolutionary of Tamil Nadu has said, that humility and sweatness of speech are the ornaments of man; all the others are not.

"Humility with pleasant speech to man on earth Is choice adornment
all besides is nothing worth" (Kural ')

The foremost thinker of Rome, has also said,

"Avoid grumbling; be frugal considerate and frank; be temperate in manner
and speech"³⁶

"Never a harsh word never an injustice to a single person"³⁷

Almost identical thoughts of these two greatmen may be seen in the following subjects.

Power in Action (Kural 661-Meditations Book V: 1 :p77) (Kural 663-Book VII-55-P114)

Purity in Action (Kural 657-Book VI : 2: P91)

Selection and confidence (Kural 509-Book V:36 P.89)

Courtesy (Kural 997-Book-VII 15-P 107)

Possession of love (Kural 73-Book VII: 31 P. 110) .

Learning (Kural 396-Book VII : 59-P 115)

Baseness (Kural 1078-Book VII: 65 : P 116)

Hopefulness in trouble (Kural 621-Book IX : 3: P. 138)

Absence of Terrorism (Kural 562-Book X : 4 : P. 152)

The excellence of Rain (Kural 20-Book X : 21-P.158) etc.

Similes used: The extra-ordinary person of incomparable abilities of Tamilnadu has used number of new similes based on the objects seen, in day-to-day life.

He has compared the mighty man who is waiting for a suitable opportunity, to drawing back of a fighting ram³⁸

The fall of a person from the his exalted position is likened to the falling of the hair from the highly regarded head³⁹

The brilliant personnel of Rome has compared time with river⁴⁰ and a man of annoyance and resentment with kicking and squealing pig⁴¹

Respect for Socrates: Both Thiruvalluvar and Marcus Aurelius had great respect for Socrates. The former has indirectly said about the death of Greek Philosopher in the following verse.

"They drink with smiling grace, though poison interfused
they see who seek the praise of all esteemed courtesy" (Kural 580)

The latter has said,
" Socrates died a finer death"⁴²

Few Contrasting Features: In Thirukkural a specific subject is dealt with in one chapter only. But in Meditations, maxims on particular subject occur in several parts of the text.⁴³

Thirukkural has been written for all the people (general public) where-as Meditations is meant for himself. It is more or less an introspection and advise to himself alone.

In Thirukkural the third part deals about love. It has no place in Meditations.

A- In Thirukkural, there is no mention about Tamil, Tamilian or Tamil Nadu. But Marcus Aurelius had proudly pinpointed his countrymen, i.e., Romans

Hour by hour, resolve firmly like a Roman⁴⁴

"The God within you should preside over being who is visible and nature, a statesman, a Roman and a ruler"⁴⁵

"you will never read these note books again now, nor the animals of bygone Romans and Greeks."⁴⁶

In Thirukkural, one can't find a quotation of another greatmen. Where as Greek scholars' wise sayings had been quoted by the author of Meditations in his book

"So he won't think death anything to be afraid of - no -" (From plato)⁴⁷

"It is the fate of princes to be ill spoken of for well doing" (From Antitheses).⁴⁸

"when I was sick" says Epicurus, I never used to talk about my bodily ailments."⁴⁹

Though Thiruvalluvar admits the supremacy of fate, he insists the confidence, that the power of the fate may be overthrown with unstinting efforts and unfaltering mind. Perhaps he is the only sage in the world who had said that one can conquer one's fate. On the other hand, in the work of Marcus Aurelius melancholy note could be visibly noticed.

"The poet of Tamil Nadu had praised the God in the first chapter alone. Where as the scholar of Home mentions God at about 20 places in his book. Likewise he refers the various aspects of the nature throughout his book. He has said that he had been advised to avoid poetry which is quite strange."⁵⁰

So also, he had an aversion for fame.

The following passages bear testimony for the same.

"Or does the bubble reputation distract you"⁵¹

"Of Fame, Take a look at the minds of her suitors, their ambitions and their aversions. Further more, reflect how speedily in this life the things of today are buried under those of tomorrow as one layer of drifting and is quickly covered by the next"⁵²

Books are the source of knowledge. That is why library exists in all major languages and all parts of the world. It is a treasure house of wisdom bequeathed to the nation.

Thiruvalluvar has advised all the people to read without giving room to any blemish or flaw and then to follow the way which he has learnt

His kural is,

"So learn that you may be full and faultless learning gain

Then in obedience meet to lessons learnt remain (Kural 391)

But on the contrary. Marcus Aurelius had aversion for the book. He has said, "Forget your thirst for books, so that when your end comes you may not murmur."⁵³

The poet of Tamil Nadu believed the existence of soul and the rebirth. It seems that he had faith in seven births of man. For instance, he has written that the wisemen will remember throughout their seven fold births, the love of those who have wiped away their affliction.

The relevant kural is :

"Through all seven world, in seven fold birth

Remains in mem'ry of the wise, Friendship of those who wiped on earth

The tears of sorrow from their eyes (Kural 107)

The Philosopher of Rome had no faith in this concept. He has remarked,

"If souls survive after death, how has the air above us found room for them all since time began?. Souls transferred to the air exist for a while before under going a change and diffusion and are then transmuted into five and taken back into creative principle of the universe etc."⁵⁴

But, one the whole, both oriental and occidental philosophers had similar sublime thinking and the world literature can boast of the above mentioned bounteous books, which could bestow benevolence and persuade the puny man to become a beacon light and to shed glorious glittering light.

Foot notes

1. Dr.G.U. etc Tirukkural, Introd. P.XVII
2. மலையமான் - குறளின் ஒளியில் ப.12-14
3. Tirukkural Tr. G.U.Pope etc P.211
4. Meditations Book I. 13.P.38
5. Ibid Book I: 16P.40
6. Ibid Book VI: 48: P. 103
7. Ibid Book 1:14. P.38
8. Ibid Book IV: 33. P.71
9. Ibid Book V : 24 P.86
10. Ibid Book II: 4, P.46
11. Ibid Book VI: 44: P. 101
12. IbidBookX:5:P.152
13. Ibid Book IV : 7 : P.65
14. Ibid Book VII: 26: P. 109
15. Ibid Book XI 18: P. 172-174
16. Ibid Book II: 11 : P.48
17. IbidBookIV:3:P.63
18. Ibid Book VII: 28: P. 110
19. Ibid Book II: 12: P.48
20. Ibid Book IV : 3 : P.64

21. Ibid Book VII: 6: P. 106 ^
 22. Ibid Book VII: 21: P. 109
 23. " Book II: 2 : P.45
 24. "Book III: 10 : P.59
 25. "Book IV: 17P.66-67
 26. " Book IV : 37 : P.72
 27. "BookXII: 27P. 185
 28. "BookIII:3:P.54
 29. " Book VI; 24 : P.96
 30. " Book VIII: 31 :P.127
 31. "Book III: 1 :P.53
 32. " Book IV : 5 : P.65
 33. "Book I: 16P.43
 34. "Book I: 17 : P.44
 35. " Book IV : 1 : p.63
 36. "BookV:5:P.78
 37. " do V : 31 : P.88 (Quotation from Homer odyssey IV 690)
 38. Thirukural 486
 39. Ibid 964
 40. Meditations Book IV : 143 : P.73
 41. Ibid Book X: 28 : 160
 42. Ibid Book VII: 66 P. 116
 43. On Fate his views appear in Book II: 4; Book IV : 17; Book V : 24, Book Book VII: 9 : Book X : 5
 44. Meditations Bk II: 5, P.46
 45. IbidBookIII:5P.56-57
 46. Ibid Book III: 15 P.60.
 47. Ibid Book VII: 35 : P.I 11
 48. Ibid Book VII: 35 P.I 11
 49. Ibid Book IX: 41 P. 147
 50. Ibid Book I : 7; P.36
 51. Ibid Book IV :3 ; P.64, IV : 19; P.67, VII: 34 P.III, VII: 73 P. 118
 52. Book VII: 34: P. III
 53. Book II: 3: P.46
 54. Book IV : 22 P.67-68
- VI: 43;

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2. Pope, G.U. etc. Tr. Tirukkural, South India Saiva Siddanta works Tinnevely, 1962.
3. Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Maxwell staniforth, Tr, Penguin, England, 1972.